(tē•kün) To mend, repair and transform the world.

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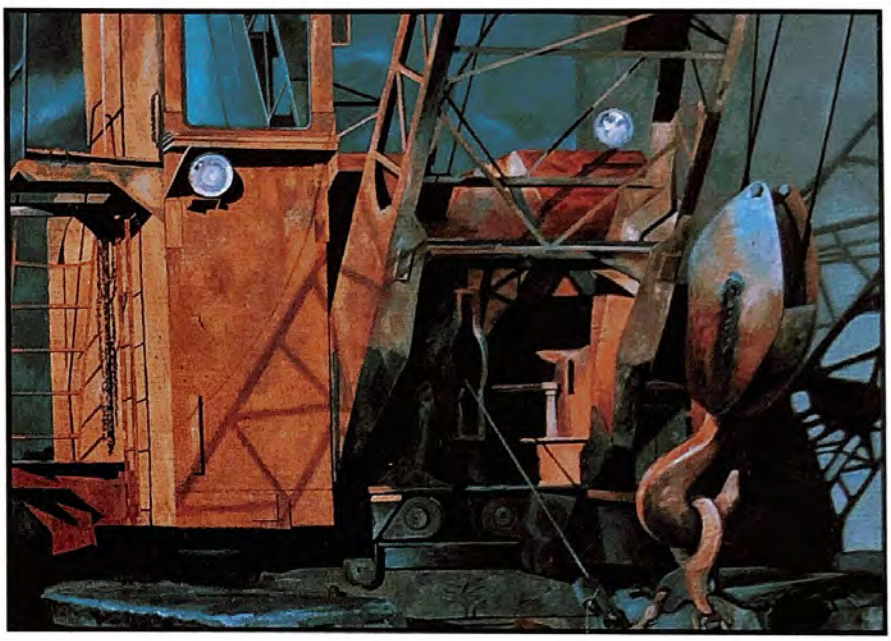
Columns: *Judith Plaskow & Michael Signer*
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A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1990 $5.00

IRAQ

A WAR WORTH FIGHTING?

Michael Lerner, Daniel Ellsberg, Arthur Waskow, Erwin Knoll, David Harris, Peter Gabel, Eric Yoffie, Yaron Ezrahi, David Horowitz, Jerome Segal



THE ISRAELI PEACE MOVEMENT

David Grossman, Dedi Zucker, Shulamith Aloni, Daniel Ben-Simon, Yossi Sarid, Ziad Abu Ziad

Intellectual Evolution
Norman O. Brown

East European Women
Ruth Rosen

Twin Peaks
Jonathan Rosenbaum

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America's Politics
J. Peter Euben

Tough Jews
Paul Breines

On Writing
Michael Blumenthal

Berkeley in the 60's
Barbara Garson

PLUS

Martin Jay on Emmanuel Levinas; Miles Orvell on Photography; David Stern on Midrash; Tamar Frankiel on Sex and the Spirit; Lore Dickstein on Jewish Identity; Margo Peller Feeley on Women and Sacred Learning.

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On Muranowska Street

Myra Sklarew

I have always loved particulars: the angels
bearing a martyr's palm, the way the hair
of the worshipers forms waves or
filaments, the flowers embroidered
on your sleeve. Even my sleep
contains them: the pointed teeth
of mice, a black camera aimed
at my grief. Yet when you ask for the truth
I summon words empty
as air as if I were guarding a sorrow,
encapsulating it that nothing
might come into its vicinity, letting it
ripen. Like the foot of this woman swollen
with calluses, bearing
bits of earth and tar, thorns, remnants
salvaged in it like the map
of the world, pebbles filled with carbon
when the earth was young, fern still
coiled in sandstone. Never mind that he draws
this foot to his lips and kisses the world
that lies embedded in it, or that beneath
the bellies rolling down to her knees
he sees only the loveliest bones hidden
there, caverns and wetlands he traverses
easily, moving from opening
to opening like a bird metabolizing at a rate
too high to measure. He does not hear
the rifle fire behind her nor the fleeting
sound of hooves. He does not see
twenty men standing on Muranowska
Street, their hands raised in the air.

Myra Sklarew's most recent book is Altamira *(Washington Writers Publishing House, 1987).*

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Letters

Tikkun *reserves the right to select, edit, and shorten all submissions to the Letters section.*

PALESTINIANS

To the Editor:

Congratulations on saying words that I never thought I'd see in a "progressive magazine"—that you are proud of the U.S. for its actions in standing up to Saddam Hussein. One reason I love *Tikkun* is that it doesn't always take the predictable left line on every issue. I only wish you'd see that the Palestinians have discredited themselves for their playing along with Hussein.

Joel Katz
New York, New York

To the Editor:

I can only imagine the political and financial risk you took to listen to what makes sense in the Palestinian side after their support for Saddam Hussein! To realize that you wrote this while simultaneously making a financial appeal for support from your readers deepens my respect for you. This is one Jew who feels that reading *Tikkun* makes me proud to be a Jew.

Everywhere else I look in the Jewish world all I hear is the predictable anti-Palestinian sentiments that have dominated debate for the past many years. And that sickens me, because I believe that we have as much responsibility for respecting Palestinian rights as we have legitimacy in fighting for our own rights. It's wonderful to read *Tikkun* and find out that this sentiment is not just a personal belief, or a reflection of Western humanism, but is also rooted in the Jewish tradition, in the laws concerning Jewish responsibility to the stranger (the *ger*), and in your whole understanding of Torah and the Prophetic Tradition.

I totally agree with you in thinking that Saddam Hussein is a criminal. I also agree with you that Palestinians have good reason to be very angry at the Israeli government, and that out of desparation they could easily be attracted to *anyone* who offers them some hope of standing up to the Israeli government. In fact, this is just what

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you had been predicting all along—that the Palestinians would be radicalized and become more extreme if their demand for self-determination wasn't met. It seems hard to believe that this radicalization, instead of being seen as confirmation of the predictions of the peace movement, is now being used as a further reason to deny Palestinian rights.

Shoshana Waldman
Miami, Florida

To the Editor:

I don't think you can imagine how wonderful it is for us in the peace movement here to have *Tikkun* refusing to give up on the humanistic ideals that many Israelis hoped would be the foundation of our Jewish state. You showed that once again when you reminded us that Palestinians who support Saddam Hussein do not thereby automatically lose their right to be treated as human beings.

Yet the minute some small group of Palestinians does something terrible—and I admit being appalled by some of what they do, like the burning alive of an Israeli reservist who drove by mistake into a Palestinian refugee camp and then, in haste to leave, accidentally hit two Palestinians with his car—large numbers of Israelis forget everything they know about fairness and become enraged members of a mob dominated by a lynch mentality. After each incident, instead of restricting punishment to those specific Palestinians who actually did something bad, these Israeli mobs roam the streets looking for Palestinians to beat up, or stone random cars of Palestinian workers. These Israelis act on the same principle that underlie the anti-Jewish pogroms of Europe—that somehow for an alleged or real offense of one person or a small group of persons, everyone who belongs to the relevant national or religious community deserves to be punished. Come to think of it, that same attitude is what leads us to think it justified to punish entire cities or refugee camps when a few of its teenagers throw stones.

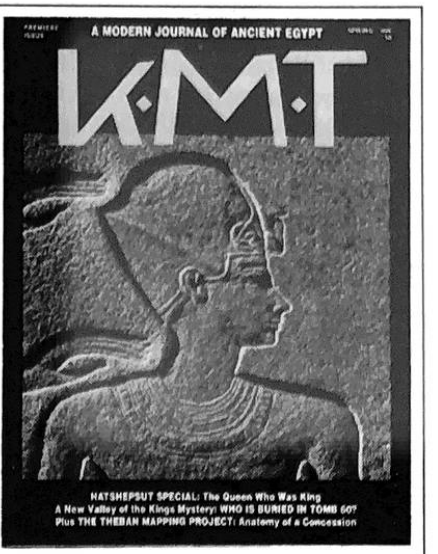
For me, this is hateful behavior. Yet few people stand up against it here—it's almost as if our Jewish history had been forgotten and all we can hold on to is anger and power. So what a relief to get *Tikkun* in the mail, to be able to show my friends that there are still Jews who take seriously a Jewish ethics and a Jewish religiosity based on loving your neighbor, respecting the rights of the stranger, and even having compassion for your enemy. All the better that *Tikkun* isn't wimpy, is willing to stand up against Saddam Hussein, and insists that any Palestinian state must be demilitarized. I hope that you folks succeed in convincing your readers to come to the conference you are planning to hold in Jerusalem next June—because now that the Israeli peace movement is in deep crisis, we certainly need your kind of moral and political clarity, not to mention the support that we would feel if people from around the world came to Jerusalem to support the embattled peace forces!

Rachel Bat Kol
Tel Aviv, Israel

To the Editor:

Even if you are right that Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein is understandable in light of their perceptions of Israeli intransigence, their behavior is nevertheless incredibly stupid. You yourself have argued that the only solution will depend upon both sides transcending the pain and paranoia of the past so that they can begin to trust each other. But surely this action has set back any possibilities for Israelis to trust Palestinians. What was to be gained by this? Arafat and the PLO have become international pariahs, isolated even at the Zionist-baiting United Nations! The Palestinian people are further than ever from getting their national rights established! Why are these people so self-destructive?

And this very self-destructiveness leads me to question other parts of your analysis. You continually reason as though the Palestinian state will live in peace with Israel because it can be counted on to act in accord with its self-interest. But doesn't this latest action show the deep problem: that the Palestinians cannot be counted on to act in their own self-interest, that they are driven by irrational hatreds and angers that lead them to act irrationally, and that Israel will be endangered if it allows that irrationality to gain political power?



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I know that your traditional answer here is that since the Palestinian state you advocate will be demilitarized and surrounded by an Israeli army, it doesn't really matter how irrational they are. But at the very least doesn't their recent behavior make it necessary for you to be a bit less critical of Shamir and others who are not yet convinced that the demilitarization could hold and be sustained in a Palestinian state?

Chaya Kepner
Los Angeles, California

To the Editor:

It's amazing to me that people in the Israeli peace movement seem to think that Palestinian rights are dependent on their good behavior. What if American liberals had suddenly given up all support for civil rights after the black riots in 1968 when blacks burned down their own ghettoes? Would we have thought it reasonable to argue that since blacks are acting in ways that are hostile and even threatening that therefore we can't trust them and that they no longer had a moral claim on us? The moral claim comes first—based

on the underlying notion that people have the right to their own freedom and self-determination. If, in the process of struggling for their rights, they do stupid or silly things, we don't thereby gain the legitimacy to forget about the underlying reasons that led them into the struggle in the first place. Shamir and the Israeli Right may now try to hide behind the Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein—but anyone who has been reading *Tikkun* should know that Shamir was proudly and publicly boasting *all along* that he would *never* support any trade of land for peace. We heard this—and the Palestinians certainly heard it. I don't like Saddam Hussein, but I sure don't blame the Palestinians for siding with the enemy of their enemy.

Sally White
Chicago, Illinois

Nicaragua

To the Editor:

In *Tikkun*'s analysis of the Nicaraguan elections ("Who Lost Nicaragua?" *Tikkun*, May/June 1990) both Mr. LeoGrande and Mr. Berman miss the essential nature of U.S. involvement. It is a sad example of how the Republicans and the mainstream U.S. media have set the agenda for debate on issues such as Nicaragua. Supposed (fictional) Sandinista violations of human rights are the center of debate. The real issue, U.S./CIA strangulation of a free country, is treated as irrelevant.

One glaring example of this failure is Mr. Berman's reference to the incident at Masatepe. At a December 10 rally in Masatepe violence broke out, and one man was indeed hacked to death. Members of the conservative Center for Democracy were there and reported that a Sandinista mob attacked and killed an UNO worker. This interpretation of events was universally reported in the U.S. mainstream media and was the cause of an urgent U.S. dispatch to Costa Rica where the five Central American presidents were meeting. A U.S. delegation urged that talks between the five presidents be broken off because the violence sponsored by Ortega's followers showed that the upcoming Nicaraguan elections would be a sham. The OAS investigated the Masatepe incident and (in a report called *Apreciación de los hechos en Masatepe*) determined that the facts had been reversed. It was a Sandinista who was killed in Masatepe, and it was the UNO party leader of Masatepe who was forced to resign his post after protests over his connections with the killing of this young man and the bombing of the FSLN headquarters in Masatepe which took place the same day. That Mr. Berman can maintain a version of events that is known to be the opposite of the truth is fascinating: either it means that the solidarity movement has not done enough work in countering the mainstream media, or perhaps it means that Mr. Berman feels his version of Masatepe will simply pass without notice as it has in the past.

This factual error is a symptom of a more serious and basic problem that runs through both Mr. Berman's and Mr. LeoGrande's analyses: the confusion of the victim and the criminal. While the richest nation on earth struggled to crush one of the poorest and tiniest, Mr. Berman and Mr. LeoGrande were scrutinizing the government of this tiny country for signs of insincerity. They both looked in the wrong place. True, the Sandinistas fulfilled their commitment to hold free and fair elections and moved them up from the fall of 1990 to February of 1990 as part of their compliance with the five-nation Central American peace process. This peace process also declared that the contras should be demobilized by December 8, 1989, with assistance from the UN and the OAS. The U.S. government blocked this part of the agreement, and in fact continued to fund the contras under the bipartisan agreement with the condition that the contras carry out no offensive strikes ("No funds will be used to support offensive military operations and we will continue our policy of cutting off funds for any member of the resistance judged to be a violator of human rights." —Secretary Baker). Of course, the contras redoubled their offensives, and the Nicaraguan elections took place under a cloud of contra violence. In region five, where I visited in the days before the election, the ministers of the UN reported that about three people a day (often Sandinista party activists or family members) were killed by the contras. No killings had been attributed to the Sandinista armed forces, although there had been one or two threatening phone calls.

A few days before election day both Bush and Baker announced that even if the Sandinistas were to win a free and fair election there would have to be "a period of good behavior" before sanctions were lifted and the contras were demobilized. I suppose the irony of this is lost on Mr. LeoGrande and Mr. Berman. The implied threat was not lost on the Nicaraguans. In the same spirit of blackmail, Bush had promised Violetta de Chamorro that, if she won the elections, sanctions and the contras would simply disappear. Many Sandinista sympathizers voted for UNO because there was no other way to end the war and the embargo.

Mr. Berman notes that the Sandinistas brought in many foreigners to Nicaragua (mostly to help in building schools, picking coffee, etc.) Now under UNO there are also gringos, but a different kind: We see USAID bringing history textbooks in which the word Nicaragua does not appear. We see Bernard Aronson, from the Department of State, giving Chamorro an ultimatum the day after her inauguration.

Tikkun's analysis of the Nicaraguan elections shows clearly where the Left has gone astray. The Left has failed to inform itself, and thus has no factual basis on which to build a new agenda.

Michael Rosenfeld
Nicaragua Solidarity Committee
Chicago, Illinois

William LeoGrande responds:

Nicaraguan politics during the years of the Sandinista government was more complex than the Washington debate over U.S. policy toward Nicaragua ever allowed. That was the main point of my article. In his response, Paul Berman echoed the judgment of U.S. conservatives that the Sandinistas lost the February 1990 elections because the Nicaraguan people rejected their Leninism. In his letter, Michael Rosenfeld voices the view of many on the U.S. Left that the Sandinista defeat is explicable solely in terms of the economic hardships forced on Nicaragua by U.S. policy. Both are oversimplifications.

The erosion of Sandinista support that led to their electoral defeat had many origins. Unquestionably, one was the FSLN's conception of itself as a vanguard party, which led to conflicts with small farmers, the Church, and

the Miskito Indian community. But those conflicts did not prevent the Sandinistas from winning the 1984 election handily. The difference between 1984 and 1990 was the economy, which suffered total collapse in 1988–1989. The economy was Chamorro's number-one campaign issue and the Sandinistas recognized it as their worst vulnerability. Opinion polls, despite widely divergent predictions of who would win the election, all agreed that the economy topped the list of people's concerns. Journalists interviewing in the barrios before and after the election confirmed it.

But who was responsible for the economic crisis? Certainly, Washington must bear a heavy share of responsibility. The contra war, which after 1983 explicitly targeted the economy, did hundreds of millions of dollars damage and ended up absorbing 60 percent of the government's budget.

Washington also had a strategy to deprive Nicaragua of badly needed international aid. The United States cut bilateral aid, imposed a full trade embargo, pressured U.S. allies to reduce their aid, and successfully blocked virtually all lending to Nicaragua through both private commercial banks and international financial institutions. The Reagan administration consciously sought to "make the economy scream," as Richard Nixon said of Chile in the early 1970s, on the theory that ordinary people's economic hardship would translate into political disaffection.

The strategy worked, but not without some help from the Sandinistas themselves. Senior Sandinista officials have never denied that deficiencies in their own economic policies and management contributed to the crisis. Reasonable people might disagree about the relative weight that ought to be ascribed to external pressure and internal policy in explaining Nicaragua's economic collapse, but no one can reasonably argue that both were not important.

Berman demands that the Left in the United States not be blind to the Sandinistas' faults, or those of other Leninist revolutionaries; Rosenfeld demands that the American mainstream face up to the imperial arrogance with which Washington waged a brutal war against a small, poor country because it made a revolution in our own backyard. Our own political discourse would be a good deal more civil, not to mention enlightening, if they would both acknowledge the elements of truth in each other's viewpoint.

Paul Berman responds:

When Michael Rosenfeld condemns the United States for supporting the contras in open violation of the agreements of the Central American presidents, I agree with him. Much else that he says is unjustified, misleading, or out-and-out false.

Under the Sandinistas, in Nicaragua, there was a government custom to send Sandinista mobs or police to assault opposition marches and rallies and then to cover up these assaults by blaming the violence on the opposition. Rosenfeld refers to "supposed (fictional) Sandinista violations of human rights," as if this custom never existed. But in Nicaraguan towns like Nandaime, Masaya, León, and many other places, the policy of sending Sandinista mobs to intimidate and beat the opposition was no invention of Sandinismo's enemies. That custom was, in fact, one of the main reasons why many foreign observers (as well as the Sandinistas themselves) failed to notice the unpopularity of the Sandinista government. The Nicaraguan majority who opposed the Sandinistas didn't dare show themselves in public.

Rosenfeld thinks that the report of a mob at Masetepe is a false story that derives from conservatives of the Center for Democracy, who got the U.S. press to repeat the story as fact. But that is not correct. Members of the Center for Democracy were indeed present at Masatepe and have offered testimony. Reports of what occurred in that town came from people with a variety of different political persuasions. The most damning account came from Robert Beckel, Walter Mondale's 1984 presidential campaign manager, who happened to be in Masetepe and stood near the man who was killed in a machete attack. I drew my own view of Masetepe from still another person who was there, the veteran Central America reporter Clifford Kraus, currently of the *New York Times*, who described the event in the course of a "McLaughlin Group" debate involving Elliott Abrams, myself, and Kraus.

A large number of still other reports on the incident were gathered by Jimmy Carter's group in Nicaragua, the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government. According to these reports, the violence at Masetepe began when a group of youths armed with machetes attacked the UNO demonstrators who fought back. The Sandinista police did not intervene until international observers ran back to the police station and asked them to do something. According to the reports received by Carter's group, the man who was macheted to death was indeed an UNO supporter, though his family supported the Sandinistas and buried him in a Sandinista flag.

The OAS issued a number of official reports on the election campaign. I have heard of one small footnote in a Latin American Studies Association account referring to some kind of OAS document called *Apreciación de los hechos en Masetepe*, with a date that precedes that of the report by the Center for Democracy. But the document in question did not figure among the main OAS reports. To cite an obscure document against the barrage of reports received by Jimmy Carter's group and given by the reporters is unjustified.

The violence at Masetepe led to negotiations by Jimmy Carter about the role of police and mobs at election rallies in Nicaragua—and afterward, mob attacks at UNO rallies did pretty much come to an end. That was one of the reasons why UNO was able to win.

In trying to explain why the Nicaraguans voted the way they did, Rosenfeld suggests that contra terror in the countryside—"a cloud of contra violence"—was a significant reason. The contra war was pretty much over. There was indeed some atrocious contra violence, for which it is correct to hold the U.S. government accountable. But to have a reasonably accurate idea of what life has been like in Nicaragua, it is necessary to recall that the greater violence in the countryside during the period 1987–1989, as reported by Americas Watch, was at the hands of the Sandinistas (nineteen murders by the contras, seventy-four murders by the Sandinistas). It is shocking to many people to learn such an unexpected fact. But in most of the remoter regions, the rural contras did possess, for better or for worse, a social base with a stronger local popularity than the city-based Sandinistas. Apart from one small re-

(continued on p. 112)

EDITORIAL BY MICHAEL LERNER

"thirtysomething" and Judaism

Notes on the Task of Television and Screenwriters

In the fall premiere of "thirtysomething," the show's hero, up-and-coming advertising mogul Michael Steadman, a mostly assimilated Jew, and his non-Jewish wife Hope must decide whether to have a *brit milah* (circumcision) ceremony for their newborn son. While Michael does his best to avoid the issue, Hope insists that if their child is going to be raised as a Jew then both son and father should know what that means. Michael vacillates, but eventually opts for a ritual ceremony on the grounds that he doesn't want to break the chain of the generations linking father to son from time immemorial. His ambivalence and internalized anti-Semitism are so deftly scripted that most viewers probably missed how empty Steadman's reasoning turned out to be.

"Thirtysomething" is such a refreshing change from the usual TV pabulum, so psychologically sophisticated and nuanced, that it almost seems a crime to find fault with the details of its scripts. After all, one might argue, "thirtysomething"'s major impact is to legitimate a style of emotionally honest discourse normally absent from prime time television, and this it does admirably. For this alone, we'll continue to urge others to watch the show.

But because we do have respect for the crew that has put this television show together, we feel all the more upset with the show's presentation of Jews. And the failures in this realm raise some deeper questions that face everyone who attempts to write for television or the movies.

We have yet to see a single portrayal on national television of a Jew who has some good reason other than family tradition for holding on to Judaism. In a key scene, Steadman has an edifying fantasy that his son chooses football over a thirteenth birthday party; he recognizes that something has been lost by missing bar mitzvah. But what, exactly, he can't say.

Ethnicity and cultural identity are likely to be "in" for a while in America—a trend that at least in part reflects the growing ethnic diversity of the American population. In fact, *Tikkun* itself may be one of the beneficiaries, as more Americans realize that speaking "as a Jew" need not relegate one to the cultural or political backwaters. That the mainstream press continually quotes *Tikkun*'s reflections, not just on Jewish life and Israel, but on wider political and cultural issues, is a happy sign that Jewish interests no longer automatically marginalize intellectuals, writers, or artists (though being "too Jewish" remains a term of disparagement in some liberal, progressive, and "left" circles).

But what is the *content* and *meaning* of being Jewish? It apparently never occurred to the writers of "thirtysomething" that generations of martyrs died to keep Judaism alive precisely because there was "a there there," a message and a meaning. If Jewishness amounts to little more than circumcision, a bat or bar mitzvah party after a child has memorized a Torah reading that (s)he finds largely incomprehensible, some gifts for Chanukah, and a family meal at Passover, it will remain very difficult to convince friends or partners less sympathetic than Hope Steadman that there is much worth preserving. Much as we love our ancestors, many Jews respect the tradition not simply because it belonged to our ancestors, but because it says something that commands our attention.

In its simplest form, that content is embodied in the Sh'ma prayer. "Hear O Israel, YHVH (the force in the universe that makes possible human liberation and a breaking of the bonds of all the various forms of slavery) is Eloheynu (the creator and of the universe, the organizer of the processes of nature), YHVH is one (that is, the totality of all being and all reality)." The governing force of the universe is the force that makes for the possibility of human liberation. Moreover, because we have benefited from the workings of that power in history (that is, we have gone from slavery in Egypt to self-governing freedom), we are under an obligation to testify to the possibility of human liberation from every form of slavery. Our religion embodies the memory of that struggle and witnesses the possibility of liberation. The weekly observance of Shabbat, the seasonal holidays, the prayers are all built around retelling the story and reminding us of its lessons.

Understanding Judaism in these terms may also help explain why many Jews were unable to make a compromise with Jesus and the early Christians. When Christianity first appeared, Jews were mounting a massive

struggle against the Roman imperialists who dominated our land and who even tried to redefine reality by renaming our land "Palestine." Our struggle with the imperialists was in part rooted in a religious notion that the cruelty and moral depravity of Roman rule were an abomination we had to combat even though we were relatively powerless. To the Jews engaged in this mortal combat, the Christian cult was one of several messianic or mystical movements that diverted energy from the struggle. "My kingdom is not of this world," and "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's" may have had a special or more restrictive meaning to Jesus, but to many Jews these words shifted the focus *away* from the confrontation with Roman imperialism and toward more otherworldly concerns. Jewish reluctance to celebrate Christmas has certainly been overlaid with other meanings arising from the long history of Christian persecution and forced conversion of Jews. But this reluctance originally issued from a refusal to recognize anyone as messiah who did not actually bring peace on earth and did not engage in the this-worldly struggle against slavery in all its guises. When assimilated Jews wonder about what extent they ought to participate in Christmas, they often neglect to ask themselves about the degree to which Jewish existence is committed to the notion that the world has *not yet been redeemed*, that *the Messiah has not yet come*, and that consequently our task is to remind the world to stop celebrating what *is* and start fighting for what *ought to be*.

Can anyone blame the writers of "thirtysomething" for not knowing or understanding this message? Most American Jews have had little contact with a Judaism that could articulate to itself this kind of truth in anything but the most abstract and cursory way. Even when the words are there in the tradition, how can anyone learn the words of the tradition when they are presented in ways that suggest that the speaker doesn't take the message seriously? The most noble words in our tradition are stated when the most Jews are in synagogue: just before Yizkor (the memorial service for the dead) on Yom Kippur. On that occasion we read the chapter of the Book of Isaiah in which the prophet denounces the Jews assembled for their own Yom Kippur fast. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen," thunders Isaiah in the voice of God, "to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to stop oppression, to loose every yoke?" But people come to hear these words and return to a world in which they do not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or fight against oppression. So the underlying message many young people get is that the prophet's stirring appeal, so central to the essence of Judaism that it has been placed in the liturgy at the moment it is most likely to be heard by the greatest number of Jews, is just a bunch of words that nobody takes seriously. In fact, all too many Jews conclude that the only things Judaism really takes seriously are Israel, Jewish survival, communal fundraising, and a set of ritual incantations to please a God that even most Jews who remain affiliated don't really believe in.

Today the Jewish community is so often stultified by deadening ritual, materialism, conformism, political conservatism, anti-intellectualism, Israel-is-always-right-ism, and Jews-are-better-than-everyone-else-ism that the revolutionary message of Torah can barely be discerned. Why should anyone be surprised if most teenagers find little to engage them in *that kind of a Judaism?* So, as soon as pressure from parents ends (once the bar or bat mitzvah has happened), most of these youngsters flee from any association with Jewish learning. And when they become adults, confronted with the choice of how Jewish they want to be, they can only base that choice on the knowledge of Judaism they acquired till they were thirteen. It is scarcely astonishing that they find it difficult to know why to stay Jewish. They may feel loyalty to parents, or a stubborn refusal to give Hitler a posthumous victory through total assimilation. But these largely symbolic loyalties will not serve to explain to a potential spouse why one wants to raise one's children in a Jewish way, or why one wants to have a Jewish home, if the tradition being passed on has been reduced to a set of ritual, Hebrew prayers that are largely unintelligible to most American Jews. While an older generation could compensate for its lack of attachment to Judaism itself by substituting blind loyalty to Israel, Holocaust memorials, fundraising, and a general ethnic chauvinism that often manifested itself as goyim-bashing, these are unlikely to work to hold future generations in the fold.

Michael Steadman (and the writers and producers of "thirtysomething" might argue here—as those in the media often do—that they are merely describing reality. They didn't create it, so why condemn the messenger? Yet every so-called neutral description is always a selection from reality. And when the television show that most accurately reflects the generation of people touched most deeply by the social change movements of the sixties and seventies makes *its* selections, we want to reflect on what the consequences of those choices might be.

We can see the problem more clearly if we also notice the way that "thirtysomething" represents and misrepresents the legacy of the sixties. Just as the underlying message of Judaism gets trivialized in the "thirtysomething" world, so too the political messages of progressive social change are routinely diluted and misunderstood. Moments of touching nostalgia for the sixties are vitiated by a gen-

eral cynicism about that past and about anyone seriously committed to a "cause." Though several characters still have some attachment to progressive political ideals, Michael looks on with the knowing cynicism of having to face "reality," viz. the complexities of making a living. "Thirtysomething" manages to depict as neurotic, infantile, self-serving, or narcissistic virtually all those who try to blend their ideals with their attempts to make a living. It never occurs to the writers of "thirtysomething" that there are hundreds of thousands of people (many of them readers of *Tikkun*) who remain committed to the best ideals of the sixties, who do their best to consciously embody those ideals in their work, and whose compromises with the demands of the capitalist marketplace are fraught with the tension that inevitably arises in the lives of morally sensitive human beings. Many of the survivors of the sixties and seventies are now raising families, trying to find economic security, and even enjoying family, good food, sex life, play, and humor. But this doesn't make them one whit less morally pure or less committed to the values of the past. Though there may not be any prominent political movement for them to identify with (given the collapse of any coherent and psychologically sophisticated Left) they have not abandoned their values. In fact, they remain a potent political force. But television for the past two decades has been convincing them that they really don't exist, that no one is like them, that only weirdos still hold on to a progressive vision, and that they'd be smarter to be like Michael Steadman and put most of their energy into having and holding a good job and raising their children.

Just as "thirtysomething" underplays and discounts the idealism that has shaped the generation that is its audience, so it has also missed the emergence of a Jewish renewal movement that has lent considerable depth and vitality to Jewish life in the past twenty years, a movement that finds expression in *Tikkun* and that has helped make us one of the largest-circulation independent Jewish magazines in the U.S. Growing numbers of Jews have rejected both the conservative spiritual deadness of the organized Jewish community and the equally dead-end route of assimilation. Ironically, Philadelphia, where "thirtysomething" is set, is one of the powerful centers of our renewal movement.

The problem, then, is that "thirtysomething" tells the truth about only one part of reality: it ignores those who have retained a coherent vision of the good. And by ignoring them, it helps create the reality that it claims to be merely describing. It reflects back to the viewer a world in which Judaism has been emptied of content and daily life has been emptied of political possibility. And each of us, looking at this picture, has the cynical and despairing part of our psyches slightly strengthened, the hopeful and idealistic part slightly undermined. The alternative? "After all, you can't expect us to become advocates for some religious or political orientation," television and movie writers will piously insist in response. Of course not. The alternative is to air the coherent voice of someone who is not portrayed as neurotic or irrelevant, someone who can articulate the vision of those of us who remain committed to Judaism and/or of those who remain committed to progressive politics. Allow that voice to be one of the many that get presented. Until that happens, "thirtysomething" will continue to reinforce and reflect TV's spiritual and political vacuity rather than transcend it. □

Free Associations Free Associations Free Associations Free

Operation Exodus leaves some people in the cold. That's what the Board of Directors of the East Bay's Kehillah Community Synagogue feared. They wrote on May 16, 1990, to the Jewish Federation asking whether Soviet Jews would be given higher priority than newly arrived Jews from Ethiopia. "That the Jewish community never mobilized behind their rescue and resettlement to nearly the same extent as that of the Soviet Jews raises very uncomfortable questions," according to the synagogue board.

The board also asked, "How can we be assured that the right wing in Israel will not use this massive immigration as an excuse to expropriate more Arab lands in the West Bank?" Their letter has still not been answered as we go to press in October. It was submitted to the *Northern California Jewish Bulletin* and the *Jerusalem Post,* neither of which has published it.

Recent reports from Israel provide an ominous partial answer to their second question. The Shamir government has to date allowed "market forces" to do the work of increasing settlement on the West Bank. As tens of thousands of Soviet Jews stream into Israel each month and receive generous governmental rental subsidies, the demand for housing increases dramatically. The twin results are homelessness and increasing numbers of Israelis pushed to purchase housing on the West Bank, where mortgages receive generous governmental subsidies. Shamir can thus avoid compelling Russian immigrants to settle on the West Bank, and nevertheless achieve the same effect as low-income Israelis begin to find West Bank housing the only affordable option.

Not everything is permitted. When at least 20 Arabs were killed in a clash on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem October 7, the Israeli government should have been apologetic and promised the world that this would not happen again. Palestinians who dumped rocks from the Temple Mount on the heads of Jews peaceably assembled for prayer at the Western Wall below were engaged in an outrageous assault. Morally unacceptable as the Palestinians' violence was, Israel must understand that incidents of this sort are inevitable as long as it continues to rule by force over a million-and-a-half Palestinians. Law and order could and should have been restored without killing so many Palestinians.

Instead of acting contritely, Shamir's government defiantly refused to meet with UN representatives. Even weak-kneed Israeli Labor Party leader Peres called for Shamir to resign once it became clear how stupid and self-destructive this latest rejectionism had become. Understandably, in light of the "Zionism is racism" resolution, few Israelis have much respect for the moral integrity of the UN. But by defying the U.S.-sponsored compromise resolution, Israel managed to divert attention from Iraq's aggression in Kuwait and endanger the anti-Saddam coalition that the U.S. had carefully forged. The real benefit Israel might reap from having its most powerful enemy weakened in a war with the U.S. was ignored—so that Israel could protect its self-destructive policy of West Bank occupation. Shamir could not have given Saddam a better gift.

Did U.S. Jews warn Israel that it was undermining its own interests? Not a chance! Except for the Reform movement, *Tikkun,* and Peace Now, Jewish leaders rallied to Shamir and refused to acknowledge how self-destructive Israel's obstinacy has been.

Low level radioactive waste? That's what the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is calling the more than 30 percent of all radioactive waste generated by U.S. power plants that it has decided to deregulate. The NRC is calling this "BRC," or Below Regulatory Concern (get it?). The policy, adopted June 27, 1990, will increase virtually everyone's exposure to toxic radiation, allowing the nuclear industry and the government to dump this waste in ordinary municipal landfills, burn it in incinerators, flush it down sewer systems, and recycle it in consumer products such as frying pans and cosmetics. Included in the "low level" waste is reactor hardware



that has become radioactive, control rods from the core of nuclear power plants, resins, sludges, and entire nuclear power plants (if and when they are dismantled). Senator George Mitchell has introduced legislation that would revoke the BRC policies—but so far his bill has been stalled.

Now more than ever: *Tikkun*'s Jerusalem conference. Israeli peace activists have reaffirmed their desire for the international conference of progressive Jews that *Tikkun* has scheduled for the last week of June 1991. Although the part of the conference addressing the tasks of progressives in the post-cold war period has no specifically Jewish focus, another section of the conference will address strategies for the peace movement in light of the Iraq crisis. Palestinians will also be invited to share their perspective. Israeli doves predict that by June any dangers from Bush's war with Iraq will have long passed—and they will very much need this kind of forum to explore ideas for the future. More info: *TIKKUN* ISRAEL CONFERENCE, 5100 Leona Street, Oakland, CA 94619.

Free Associations Free Associations Free Associations Free

Bailing out the rich? While American political leaders continue to insist that there are simply no funds to pay for adequate housing and health care, they came up with hundreds of billions to bail out the nation's largest S&Ls. A recent study of the bailout by the Southern Finance Project of Charlotte, N.C., reveals that one-third of the depositors at rescued thrifts held accounts of more than $80,000. And the rescued thrifts devoted significantly less of their loan portfolios to single-family mortgages than did the rest of the industry between 1987 and 1989.

The SFP suggests that the abnormally large number of "hot money" high-cost brokered deposits (they averaged 50 percent more accounts over $100,000 than the industry at large) pushed the cocksure thrifts to try the sort of risky commercial investments that eventually sank the industry. Ominously, the dependence of many S&Ls on these brokered deposits by rich investors has deepened since they went into conservatorship or were sold, suggesting that more ugly surprises are still in store for the taxpayer. (Copies of the report are available from the Southern Finance Project, 329 Rensselaer, Charlotte, NC 28203.)

The alleged justification for private ownership has always been that the private investor is taking the risk and therefore deserves the benefits. Now that these S&Ls have failed, and the taxpayers have put hundreds of billions of dollars into the pot (money that should have been used to create national health care), some observers are arguing that the public deserves control over profits from the rescued S&Ls. Such profits could go directly into the public coffers, to be used for our most needy social programs. At the bare minimum, local communities should be given the right to elect the majority of the board of directors of rescued thrifts, to ensure that public needs will be given higher priority when allocating future loans and investments.

German Reunification. Not everyone rejoiced. *Tikkun*'s initial opposition to reunification was only reinforced when official documents of the new Germany failed to mention the historical responsibility of the nation for the genocide of the Jewish and Gypsy peoples. Already there are incidents of anti-Semitism. And most recently the new Germany has decided to severely restrict immigration of Jews from Russia, though ethnic Germans in the hundreds of thousands have been welcomed. The new Germany may or may not become the center of an anti-Semitic revival. But that it could have been created without making atonement for the pathology of its past nationalism the cornerstone of its new national identity testifies to how lightly the world punishes genocide. We will yet see the world question the wisdom of this development.

Is progressive politics dead? The Canadians who voted in a democratic socialist government in the province of Ontario on September 10 think not. The New Democratic Party that took office in October has a platform that promised "basically *tikkun olam*," according to feminist journalist Michele Landsberg: gender equality, environmental clean-up, antipoverty legislation, affordable housing, urban transit, and an egalitarian open government. Feminists hail the party's unprecedented decision to fill eleven out of twenty-six cabinet posts with women. A stinging blow to the entrenched interests that have always ruled Canada's wealthiest province, this victory could be a galvanizing example for sleepy progressives in the U.S. who have much to learn from their neighbors to the north.

Male Democracies, Female Dissidents

Ruth Rosen

Ruth Rosen spent the past July in Prague and Budapest conducting interviews about women's role as dissidents and their prospects within the emerging political culture.

When I visit Prague in July, the heady euphoria of last fall has already been replaced by uncertainty and anxiety about future social problems. Months have passed "since the revolution"—a phrase that punctuates every other sentence. Anticipated unemployment and rising prices will cause painful dislocations. Concern about the future hangs over many conversations; people must carve out new personal lives.

Jiřina Šiklová, a fifty-five-year-old sociologist, writer, and longtime dissident, is especially concerned about women's future in the new Czechoslovakia. It is a subject she has thought about for a long time. In 1985 she published a book entitled *How Much More Can Women Bear?,* which focused on women's exhaustion from a double work day, society's stereotypes about women and men, and women's negative self-images. The book was published above ground, in an edition of one hundred thousand copies, which quickly sold out.

Šiklová is not the only person to tell me that life was simpler before the revolution, when "it was just us and them." As for so many Czech intellectuals, 1968 was a turning point for her. For twenty years, she lived as a banned intellectual, worked as a cleaning lady, wrote samizdat literature, and smuggled manuscripts to and from England in shopping bags. In 1980 she received a ten-year sentence for her underground activities and spent one year in prison. Two weeks ago, the new "Office for the Protection of Democracy," manned by technicians formerly employed by the secret police, finally "deinstalled" the three microphones that had monitored her activities for the last two decades. An active member of Charter 77, a human-rights organization, and Civic Forum, the political coalition which toppled the Communist government last year, she now contemplates the seemingly insuperable problems facing women in a free Czechoslovakia.

Ruth Rosen, a professor of history at the University of California at Davis, is the author of The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America *(Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). She is currently writing a cultural history of contemporary American feminism.*

In nearly all the former Eastern Bloc countries there are individuals and small groups of self-proclaimed feminists who fear that the new democracy and free market will erode many of the rights and privileges women enjoyed under state socialism. This is not to suggest that they harbor any nostalgic longing for the past order; they simply worry that the forces of an unbridled market, glorified by prevailing center-right politics, will succeed in dismantling many of the social welfare programs that protected women and children under communism.

Their fears are not unwarranted. Contaminated by association with a totalitarian past, social democracy is now wholly discredited. Its fall from favor has left a vacuum Christian Democrats and Christian renewal groups have been quick to fill. "They are very important in setting the political atmosphere right now," says Šiklová. Their call for a Christian renewal, for traditional values, and for support for the "traditional family" finds a receptive audience among both sexes, especially in heavily Catholic Slovakia. The Czechoslovakian Christian Democrats' slogan, "Let's Try What Was Tried," is, at the moment, more appealing to most than any ideas about women's right to choose their fates and define their destinies as individuals. Moreover, Šiklová explains, women see staying at home as "new and progressive." Only professional women see what women might lose, though it is also true that only professional women have jobs that are truly worth holding on to.

Propaganda which seeks to send women home is pervasive. From the church, the media, and pro-life groups comes the familiar chant that women's participation in the labor force and absence from the home is responsible for the high divorce rate, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism—even men's high rate of heart attacks in Hungary. As unemployment rises, according to Šiklová, economists plan to retire women and the elderly to ease the economic plight of working-age men. The calculation is simple: dismantling the crèches and bringing women home with their children is cheaper than keeping women in the labor force and paying for their childcare.

With the exception of a thin stratum of women professionals in Eastern Europe, most women are rather receptive to this idea. It is a measure of communism's

evil aroma that "feminism" and "women's emancipation" reek of past betrayal. Few women have any notion of Western feminism; rather, feminism is associated with the state and its coercive power. In the name of "women's equality" or "women's emancipation," the state forced women into a sex-segregated labor force where they worked at unskilled jobs for subsistence wages and returned home to housework and childcare. Even at the professional level, salaries often emphasized men's greater worth. A female Czech journalist tells me she is paid fifty crowns less than her male colleague—a trifling difference, just enough to let them both know whose work is more valued.

Since the state sometimes encouraged abortion as a form of birth control, many men and women now regard abortion as part of the state's barbaric and inhumane policies.

I ask if there are any divisions among Civic Forum leaders about these matters. Šiklová explains that most Civic Forum leaders—all but one of whom are male—basically agree on the benefit of women returning to the home. They see it not only as a wise way of dealing with the anticipated high unemployment, but also as the natural order of things. "You see," explains my translator Vladimira Žáková, a self-defined feminist, "most of these people cannot even grasp the kind of dependence women will experience once they are at home.

Žáková has a bleak assessment of the level of women's feminist consciousness. She cites an example that astonished her: one of President Vaclav Havel's aides, a woman, was asked about Havel's position toward women's issues. She naively responded, "He likes women very much and treats us all very well." Žáková hoped that a new women's magazine named *Nora* would air some of women's concerns. "I was so disappointed," she tells me. "Here was a magazine named after the famous Nora who slams the door in Ibsen's play *A Doll's House,* and the major article was about how Czech women should wear brown shoes, not only the standard black ones."

The philosopher Ladislav Hejdanek places this constricted political discourse into a wider context: "It's unnatural to have no Left," he says. Just so. It is one of the paradoxes of current Eastern European political culture that freedom of speech has broadened, but political discourse has narrowed. Because of the past forty years, it is difficult to discuss workers', women's, or welfare issues without "sounding like a Communist." Some intellectuals think it is only a matter of time before a social democratic Left emerges out of Civic Forum, one that can create a new language with which to discuss these issues. Šiklová even goes so far as to predict that within five years, a "hard feminism" will emerge in Czechoslovakia, a feminism that will reveal the inequalities between men and women and openly discuss women's needs and desires.

In the short run, however, the staggering economic dislocation—combined with the profound revulsion against Communist rhetoric about women's emancipation—will push women back into the home and make them dependent on men's decreasing wages. "I can accept this," says Šiklová. "It may be necessary for the short run, during this economic crisis. But I cannot accept any ideological rationalization that argues that women naturally belong in the home." Žáková counters, "I cannot accept Jiřina's position. Once the childcare is dismantled and women are home, it will be very difficult to integrate women into public life again." She, like other self-described feminists, sees the emergence of a new civil society that ought to integrate men and women into both the private and public spheres.

Not surprisingly, the new political and social freedoms have also changed the way women are depicted in public life. Within the last few months Prague taxi drivers have begun adorning their mirrors with small pictures of naked women. Young men on Wenceslas Square hawk new hardcore pornography magazines which have flooded the city. With less police surveillance, prostitution has risen. Near hotels and restaurants frequented by Westerners, Gypsy women offer to change money or, if that is refused, some "Liebe" (love). Signs advertising striptease joints plaster the walls. "They will grow tired of it eventually," says the wife of a member of the Hungarian parliament who has seen the same progression of pornography there during the past two years. "Right now it is so new, everyone sees pornography as freedom." Many women don't like the new pornography and strip joints, but for some, especially the young, it is like the sexual revolution of the mid-sixties, a whiff of fresh air, a sense of new beginning, a sign of freedom. After forty years of repression, the idea of courting state censorship is unthinkable.

Besides, there are more urgent moral issues. In addition to inflation and unemployment, there is the need to uncover the hidden history of women's lives under Communist regimes. Sexual harassment in the workplace, for instance, "was very routine," according to Šiklová, but, as in the United States a decade ago, it was simply accepted as a part of life. The power

(continued on p. 100)

Democracy in America: Bringing It All Back Home

J. Peter Euben

Last March the *New York Times* ran a series of articles entitled "The Trouble with Politics." The series and the issues it raised have since been eclipsed by the Iraq crisis, but whenever and however that crisis is "resolved" the trouble with politics will remain.

The *Times* articles suggested that our public life is being inundated with banality. As America's "democratic visions and values seem to triumph around the world, an unhappy consensus has emerged at home that domestic politics has become so shallow, mean and even meaningless that it is failing to produce the ideas and leadership needed to guide the United States in a rapidly changing world." Too much of our political discourse is "trivial," "obscurantist," and defined by the search for the image, code, or picture that will grab the attention of an information-saturated, entertainment-hardened, easily bored public. We have too many "wet-fingered politicians" who rely on political professionals to track the public mood, which since Watergate and Vietnam has been "profoundly disenchanted." As a result no vigorous, substantive debate is possible on the major issues that confront the nation: the prospect of an economically integrated Europe and the challenge of Japanese economic power, the rootlessness and homelessness of our people, and the second-rate educational performance of our young. The lament is summed up in Representative David Obey's (D-Wis) question: "Is American politics so brain-dead that we are reduced to having political shysters manipulate symbols?"

The occasion for the articles—and Obey's lament—was the upheaval in Eastern Europe, symbolized by Czechoslovakian president Vaclav Havel's address before a joint session of Congress. Havel's presence and presidency vividly reminded Americans that the cold war had ended, and that our pallid but useful self-congratulatory claim to be the leader of the free world was now obsolete. Some celebrated "our victory" over communism as a sign of our chosenness: we were, unknowingly, the apotheosis of civilization, the ideal become real, and the telos of history. But the *Times* articles present a different mood, one of anxiety about who "we" are, an unease over whether the emperor is, if not entirely naked, then too shabbily dressed to keep up appearances. It is an anxiety likely to return as patriotic fervor for Middle Eastern intervention wanes.

As the *Times* articles made clear, whatever it is about us that inspires Polish workers, Czech intellectuals, and Chinese students no longer inspires us. Though we are part (and only a part) of the democratic vision and vistas that animate them, we ourselves have grown oblivious to both. We have no Pericles or Lincoln, no Whitman or Martin Luther King, Jr., no Adam Michnik or Havel, which is exactly what the latter's speech "brought home." (Asked how a man of Havel's thoughtfulness and sophistication would fare if he ran for office here, Representative Bill Thomas replied: "How much money does he have? Which consultant does he have? And is he willing to shave his moustache?") Opinion polls that report satisfaction with the Bush administration need to be understood in a broader context: of other polls indicating that, for the first time in our history, we expect the lives of our children to be harder than our own; of rising apathy as evidenced by a continuing decline in voter turnout; of two national studies which claim that "the typical young person" is indifferent, lethargic, alienated, ignorant, and uninterested in anything except parochial and trivial matters.

Havel's speech was particularly noteworthy given his immediate audience. In front of those with power he mocked his own power. Facing those often complacent about the power of human beings to control nature and destiny, he warned against the "vain belief" that "man is the pinnacle of creation," rather than part of it, and the corresponding delusion that "therefore everything is permitted." Speaking before those who have inordinate faith in economics and science, and who offer moral platitudes while keeping their Ethics Committees busy, Havel insists on the primacy of moral principles that eschew self-righteousness and Manichaeanism. A student of American democracy, he also appears as a teacher schooled by a totalitarianism that has, unintentionally, provided him and his compatriots with

J. Peter Euben is a professor of politics and the history of consciousness at UC Santa Cruz. He is the author of The Tragedy of Political Theory *(Princeton University Press, 1990).*

"a special capacity to look, from time to time, somewhat further than someone who had not undergone this bitter experience."

What, then, is it that Havel's speech, his presence, and his character can teach us? First of all, that there are no lessons, if by lessons we mean terse hypotheses about politics or morality. Havel is too shrewd and too much the ironist for that, having learned through experience to appreciate Aristotle's injunction that an educated person should bring no more precision to a subject matter (politics and morality) than that subject matter warrants. Having lived under a regime in which everyday mendacity was obscured by grandiose ideological defenses, he knows that life is always richer than our categories, and that action, choice, and character confound the self-serving polarity between "we" who act righteously and justly because of what we know and "they" who are unjust, evil, and ignorant. He is too much the student of absurdist theater not to recognize how often compromise and baseness lurk within nobility and how often redemptive moments shine forth from what is ordinary and unexpected. In his New Year's speech to his people, Havel speaks of how their "education" under the communist regime has developed in them "a profound distrust of all generalizations, ideological platitudes, clichés, slogans, intellectual stereotypes and insidious appeals to various levels of our emotions, from the base to the loftier."

Havel (like Michnik) chooses his own words carefully and there is a lesson in that too. Many of those words—democracy, freedom, power, citizenship, and justice—are familiar enough, in fact so familiar that many of us regard them as pieties ritually invoked to sustain a lapsed (and therefore manipulative) cultural myth. Yet Havel's voice lends these words urgency and depth. For example, consider the dignity he accords "citizen" in his speech before Congress. Paying homage to American airmen and soldiers who died on Czechoslovakian soil, he calls them "young citizens." Paying homage to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, he sums up their significance by saying they "inspire us all to be citizens."

But that is not how they inspire Americans, at least not if we take citizenship as a serious public responsibility. Indeed, much of our political discourse exemplifies what Havel distrusts: platitudes, clichés, slogans, stereotypes, and manipulative emotional appeals. That is, surely, another lesson Havel (inadvertently) taught his listeners. While many Americans wince at the banal invocations of our democratic past by our own political leaders, that same past moves Walesa, Havel, and Mandela, and moves us anew when such figures lay claim to its legacy. Given who they are, what they have done and must yet accomplish, they have earned the right to invoke Jefferson and Lincoln in a way our leaders have not. While they are founding or renewing democracies, our domestic politics consists in trying to extricate ourselves from a savings and loan scandal that touches the president's son and the second highest-ranking Democrat in the Senate.

The end of the cold war has only widened the gap between our past and present, between our political life and public discourse and those taking shape in Eastern Europe. That is because our political identity can no longer be defined in terms of antagonisms and alliances and by what we are not: totalitarian. As even this thin cultural narrative loses its hold, formerly inconceivable, marginal, or very old questions become central, compelling, and new. What does it mean to be a citizen of a democratic polity? Why do so many value public life so highly? Why do demands for freedom appear as demands for political participation?

The cold war's demise not only raises these general questions about our political identity, but also problematizes specific policies justified in its name. Consider for a moment, how it framed the educational reform movement. There was the Gardner Commission's call in 1983 for "educational excellence" defined in terms of national security imperatives. And William Bennett insisted in 1988 that "the survival of Western civilization and the protection of our children" mandated a strong "arsenal of democracy," stocked with military hardware and fueled by the Manichaean contrast between the evil Communist East and the good free West. What is curious about this language and these sentiments is that they share more with the Communist regimes Havel and Michnik helped to overthrow than with the movements they helped to lead. The language of cold-war educational reform is now curiously old-fashioned. Clearly we need to think anew and more deeply about the education of democratic citizens.

Havel's speech and the events in Eastern Europe can teach us to honor both what we have and what we lack. What we have is a democracy based on an independent judiciary, individual rights, and free elections; what we don't have is democracy in the sense of sustained and direct citizen participation. For Havel, "democracy in the full sense of the word" is an ideal one may approach as one would a horizon. We steadily move toward it while recognizing that there is no finality to the goal that nonetheless guides us, that the distance between it and ourselves mandates that we treat every means as an end and every end as a means.

Since the upheavals in Eastern Europe, fewer and fewer observers casually dismiss what we have as "bourgeois rights and liberties" though critics remain who

rightly condemn our inconsistent fidelity to those rights. Many more dismiss what we do not have as unworthy of honor.

Redressing this imbalance requires, at a minimum, that we add depth to central terms of our political discourse: democracy, power, freedom, and politics. We could begin by taking seriously Lincoln's belief that government is rightly of, by, and for the people. This means viewing with suspicion the arguments by "responsible elites" that because government for the people cannot be government by or of them, the few must rule in order to save democracy from itself. Havel agrees that there is no democratic heaven on earth, but disagrees with many conventional "realists" that our fallen political state entitles some intellectual or political elite to claims of special power or privilege. Dissident leaders have no monopoly on truth and goodness, and their opponents are not permanently immune to appeals based on justice and freedom. For all his insistence that "intellectuals cannot go on forever avoiding their share of responsibility for the world and hiding their distaste for politics under an alleged need to be independent," he is himself modest about his own views, self-mocking about his present position, and as we have seen, suspicious of politics. Havel understands democracy as the participatory process by which free citizens take their places in the deliberative forums which shape their individual and collective lives. He is suspicious of political experts and expertise, and this suspicion raises the question of whether "democracies" must rely on institutional leadership to the degree they do or whether ordinary citizens can handle complex political matters without specialized knowledge.

In Eastern Europe, popular citizen committees took the political initiative away from governments and, in the case of the German Democratic Republic's Round Table, from *all* parties. This opening up of public life contrasts with the attempts of the Reagan and Bush administrations to close it down. Consider how these administrations have dismantled our already compromised democratic life piece by piece: limiting the Freedom of Information Act, systematically deceiving the press, arrogantly lying in the Iran-Contra affair, and unilaterally invading Grenada and Panama. Compare this sorry record with the opening up of public discourse and life in Eastern Europe, where the redefinition of public space was accompanied by what might be called a redefinition of mental space; the change in who could talk and where such talk could happen was matched by an expansion of what could be talked about. As this widening of public discourse has occurred the people as a whole have progressively appropriated the conduct, knowledge, and procedures that originally were the exclusive domain of the party and government elites. As knowledge, values, and techniques became elements of a common culture, they were submitted to criticism and controversy: in other words they became "politicized."

In many respects our politics is becoming more and more the preserve of king and priests, of professionals and professors, and less and less the subject of widespread public debate. Fewer things are brought before the commons, and more are claimed as the eminent domain of experts who reappropriate knowledge while forming a caste of initiates.

Two national studies claim that "the typical young person" is indifferent, lethargic, alienated, ignorant, and uninterested in anything except parochial and trivial matters.

To be skeptical of the idea of self-appointed responsible elites, political experts, and the narrow public life in which they thrive is not to ignore the fact that citizens possess different degrees of courage, eloquence, wealth, and political acumen, or to deny that special competence can serve democratic ends. Some citizens more fully embody a nation's ideal of character than others (even when that ideal is democratic pluralism) and so contribute more to public life. Perhaps they deserve special public recognition for so doing. Indeed a *political* community presupposes difference in experience, function, interests, identities, and points of view among citizens. Public life exists precisely to recognize and sustain those differences and provide a forum in which they can be expressed. "We" are, for all that separates us, one people who share, however imperfectly and contentiously, a common past, present, and future. Political participation brings such differences before others, translates opinions and interests from the "private" idiom of personal interest ("I want") into the more impersonal public idiom ("what should we do?"). For this to occur, the superiority of the one or the few cannot entail inferiority or passivity of the many.

Here is where so many of the various national reports on education have failed. They vacillate between platitudinous references to democratic citizenship and quantitative hysteria over declining test scores—which are taken to demonstrate both the steady slide away from earlier pedagogic standards, and the pressing need to regain our scientific, military, or commercial hegemony. But what if the primary questions asked of any policy—and especially of any educational policy—were whether and how it helped students think of themselves as po-

tential citizens of a democratic polity? What if a central aim of education were to increase students' knowledge of past democratic experiences (both exemplary and cautionary) and expand the democratic culture they experience as preparation for living a public life? I do not think there are single or simple answers to these questions, or any one place or way wisdom or judgment can be learned. If Sheldon Wolin is right that "American politics in all its ramifications requires a multiple self, one who is required to act the citizen in diverse settings" such as "nation, state, city or town, neighborhood and voluntary association," then many sites present themselves as places where a deliberative self can be formed and political judgment cultivated. That is surely one of the lessons the Solidarity movement can teach us.

Redressing the imbalance would also require rethinking the nature of power. During the cold war, power was largely defined (as it is now in the Middle East) in military terms, which was doubly useful for the United States since power could be quantified and we could be seen to have more of it than anyone else. But as the significance of military power as an aspect of national power recedes (even in spite of its dismaying resurgence in the Middle East), what it means to be "powerful" is unclear. Once again Havel, Adam Michnik, and the events in Eastern Europe can help us. Havel has argued that anyone with the courage to insist on the truth at the risk of his or her life has more power than thousands of anonymous voters. The refusal of such exemplary individuals to live lies (refusing, for example, to put up signs with Marxist slogans in their shops) can move others to speak the truth and even to risk justice and freedom. The seemingly unpolitical jailing of a rock group, Havel argues in *Disturbing the Peace,* revealed power's hidden intention to make "life entirely the same, to surgically remove from it everything that was even slightly different, everything that was highly individual, everything that stood out, that was independent and unclassifiable." The events argue that while absolute power corrupts absolutely, the absence of power corrupts just as absolutely. Both facts speak to the need to share power and responsibility. Finally, Michnik argues (or rather anticipates) that mass movements for democracy must create power within civil society rather than attempt simply to wrest power from the state. In practicing the politics of everyday life, Solidarity was reacting to a totalitarian regime that had itself politicized social life. But it was more than a reaction, it was also a recognition that power is created whenever people work together for a common aim, no matter how local or particular that aim might be. The point of such action was not only to deal with a particular need—obtaining food, getting a friend out of jail, or protecting jobs—but to enlarge both the capacity to act collectively and the commitment to such action. The new power could not be narrowly partisan or conspiratorial since that would imitate the kind of state politics one was opposing. "Every conspiracy," Michnik writes, "demoralizes. In its depths flourishes the spirit of a sect that uses a language all its own, that is based on rites of initiation, on tactics to which everything is subordinated, on an instrumental attitude toward truth, and on disregard for any values that are not political."

Jonathan Schell summarizes Michnik's views (and elaborates some of Havel's) in the following words: "Do you believe in freedom of speech? Then speak freely. Do you love truth? Then tell it. Do you believe in an open society? Then act in the open." If you wish to act locally, "then what could be more local than yourself?" And if you wish to produce results today, "then what area of life [is] more ready to hand, more thoroughly within your grasp, than your own actions?" And if, accordingly, you make yourself and your own actions the starting point for the reform of society, then how can you "permit those actions to be degraded by brutality, deception, or any other disfigurement?"

Events in Eastern Europe have given new dignity to politics, and new meaning to the phrase "political freedom." Some understand political freedom as a contradiction in terms; one might become political to protect one's freedom but hardly to *be* free. Yet the demands for freedom by Civic Forum, the East German Round Table, and Solidarity were not simply (or even primarily) demands for individual liberties, but for direct participation in the collective decisions that shape individual lives. To be political is to be free and vice versa, because it is in the realm of politics that people unite to constitute a human world, to empower each other in order to jointly take control and responsibility for forces that might otherwise control them. Here is Havel: "Only by looking outward, only by caring for things that in terms of pure survival he needn't bother with at all, by constantly asking himself all sorts of questions, and by throwing himself over and over again into the tumult of the world, with the intention of making his voice count, only thus does one really become a person." The challenge to selfhood Havel locates in "the tumult of the world" is akin to what Sethe, a newly escaped slave woman now living in a freed community, faces in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*:

> She had twenty-eight days . . . of unslaved life. . . . Days of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better. One taught her

(continued on p. 101)

The Rambowitz Syndrome

Paul Breines

Until knowledge is understood in human and political terms as something to be won to the service of coexistence and community, not of particular races, nations, classes, or religions, the future augurs badly.

—Edward Said, *Covering Islam*

Unlike many Jewish stereotypes, those of Jewish weakness or gentleness have been affirmed by Jews themselves, transformed into a tribal norm and myth. Frailty, a sunken chest, and nearsightedness serve as embodiments of the peaceful, morally sensitive Jewish other in a non-Jewish world of brawn and brutality. Remember Jewish weaklings, schlemiels, and disheveled scholars? They can still be found in Woody Allen's films, Isaac Bashevis Singer's stories, and in other nooks and crannies, but by and large the remarkably durable image of the meek or mild Jewish man has passed unceremoniously, almost unnoticed, from the landscape of contemporary stereotypes. This departure has involved significant changes in the moral identity of American Jews.

Yet it is not really surprising that few have noticed and still fewer have grieved the passing of weak and gentle Jews. Little attention has been paid to the waning of the weak Jew because so much has been paid to the celebration of his—in this article I'll discuss only male stereotypes—tough Jewish replacement. This celebration was especially noticeable between the Six Day War, which remains the truly mythmaking moment of Jewish toughness, and 1972–73, when the massacre of Israeli Olympic athletes and the near defeat of Israel in the Yom Kippur War partially restored the image of Jewish vulnerability.

Although it hardly required it, that image has, of course, just been given new energy by Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait and the threat this seems to pose to Israel. And as notions of Jewish vulnerability circulate more actively, Jewish yearnings for the tough Jew become more intense. It is precisely amid this revitalized Jewish-American embrace of the terms of toughness—terms Jews have, historically, forsworn—that critical questioning is badly needed.

Needless to say, the theory and practice of Jewish toughness is not a product of Saddam Hussein's appetites. For going on three decades, one has been able to glimpse the tough Jew all over contemporary America: in *Commentary* and *The New Republic* editorials; in the activities and public statements of the "Jewish lobby"; in such films as *Once Upon a Time in America* and *The Raid at Entebbe;* and in media depictions of Israeli Defense Forces suppressing the intifada.

One especially instructive site of tough Jewish political fantasies is a new genre of pulp fiction that my friend Max Pensky has felicitously named the "Rambowitz" novels, after the Rambo-like Jews who appear on the covers. With their prototype in Leon Uris's *Exodus* (1958), these novels—I know of roughly fifty—are linked by their idealized representations of Jewish warriors, tough guys, gangsters, Mossad agents, and Jews of all ages and sexes who fight back against their tormentors. They're written by Ken Follett and Gerald Green and by less familiar authors like Gloria Goldreich, Fred Lawrence, Chaim Zeldis, and Joel Gross. The writers are mostly men, mostly Jews, and mostly American. In their tough Jewish fantasies we meet muscular, manly Jews who have left behind their historic neuroses and nearsightedness in favor of proficient fighting and fucking. We might, admittedly with bitterness, call them the first *normal* Jews in all of modern literature.

David Laker, hero of *The Aswan Solution,* is an exemplary Rambowitz. *The Aswan Solution* was written in 1979 by John Rowe, an Australian who before turning to writing had served with Australian and U.S. troops in Vietnam and then with the United States Defense Intelligence Service in Washington, D.C. Like many of its type, this is a tough Jewish bildungsroman. Although he is not quite a schlemiel, Laker has a minimal Jewish identity—in this respect a representative American Jew—and is certainly not a warrior. An engineer, David Laker goes to Israel in the early seventies and is unwittingly recruited for service to Israel by a tough Jewish woman: Miriam Heller, a Mossad agent of beauty

Paul Breines, an editor of Telos, *teaches modern European intellectual history at Boston College. The above article is adapted from his recently published book,* Tough Jews *(©Basic Books, 1990).*



and charm who is also the widow of an Israeli Defense Force martyr.

The Israeli government seeks Laker's expertise in connection with an extraordinary attempt to blow up the Aswan Dam in the event of an Egyptian invasion of Israel. His transformation from assimilated Jew into fervent Zionist begins on the flight to Tel Aviv, during which Laker reflects on some of the other Jewish American passengers, one Sammy Bergman in particular. "Were they members of the new Jewish warrior race?" Laker wonders. "Horseshit," he thinks to himself in response. "American Jews are fat asses with soft families rooting for a new kind of football team—the Israeli Defense Forces—and supporting these Jewish Green Bay Packers with cash contributions and a new chauvinism.... And Sammy Bergman, he felt scornfully, you say it all. Then he chastised himself. What sort of a man and a Jew was he?" Initially, David Laker is not much of either, but the combination of Arab terrorists and a loving Israeli woman warrior transforms him into a brave and passionate Jew who saves Israel by helping to blow up the Aswan Dam.

Rambowitz novels are precisely *not* subtle or richly developed works, but pulp fiction; stereotypes, simplification, and fervent Zionism are their lifeblood. Readers of the novels are probably not *Tikkun* subscribers. But I believe that tough Jewish political fantasies operate in basically the same manner whether one is, like me, a college professor in the humanities, a Jewish businessman or butcher in Kansas City, an author of a Rambowitz novel, or an Israeli Prime Minister.

Take the case of an Israeli Prime Minister. Menachem Begin defended the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon on the grounds that rooting out the PLO was like (and thus morally and politically equivalent to) the Allied armies closing in on Hitler in his Berlin bunker in 1945. Although Begin's statement drew criticism from many Israelis and even from some American Jews, it is nevertheless a *representative* tough Jewish fantasy. As in *The Aswan Solution,* Jewish toughness and Jewish weakness operate in tandem, and this symbiosis generates a new Jewish moral identity.

Tough Jews are present in Begin's fantasy in the obvious form of the Israeli armed forces. Weak and gentle Jews are not actually depicted, but this is only because there is no need. Their presence in Begin's story is taken for granted: they—the Nazis' Jewish victims—frame and give meaning to the whole fantasy in the first place. In *The Aswan Solution,* Jewish weakness appears in the form of the soft American, Sammy Bergman, and in hero David Laker's own initial ambivalence. In a fantasy of my own, a virtual replica of the Rambowitz novel that inspired it, the weak Jew appears in the apparently frail body of a character who is actually a tough Jew, a quite deadly Mossad agent who saves Israel from destruction by Arab states.

When Israeli Defense Forces and West Bank settlers brutalize Palestinians, Jews in America start loud discussions of the Holocaust.

In each of these fantasies, the allusion to or appearance of the weak Jew or Jewish victim provides the tough one with the ethical glow toughness requires. This stems from a historically formed Jewish need to be an ethical people. In other words, tough Jewish political fantasies are *acts of conscience.* But in a double sense. In those tough Jewish political fantasies, conscience is at work; it is, so to speak, making things happen in the fantasies. But these are also acts of conscience in the sense that conscience is putting on an act; it is *appearing* to be a conscience when it has become a vindicator of toughness and of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians.

Confronted with the choice of being ethical or tough, Jews since the Holocaust have opted for both paths at once. By this I do not mean what official Israel and its American supporters might mean here: that historic Jewish ethics serve as the built-in restraint on Jewish militarism. I mean rather that we—far more problematically—vindicate Israeli conquest and militarism (that is, its victimization of Palestinians) by invoking weak Jews and Jewish victims. The premise of the new Jewish moral identity that emerges from the tough Jewish fantasies is that after Auschwitz non-Jews cannot tell the Jews anything about morality. Or, one could say that because of Auschwitz, what Jews do *is*

ethical. Or, to put it still more pointedly, when Israeli Defense Forces and West Bank settlers brutalize Palestinians, Jews in America start loud discussions of the Holocaust.

We Jews in America constitute one of the three most extraordinary developments in modern Jewish history, the other two being Auschwitz and Israel. We embrace both Auschwitz and Israel in our fantasies (which is to say in our politics as well) as if without them we would be nothing ... but American Jews. But it may be that precisely in our move toward tough Jews we are discarding the possibility of Jewish renaissance, and instead deeply and enthusiastically *normalizing* and *Americanizing* ourselves. Rambowitz comes partly from an American Jewish need to be American.

The need for tough Jews comes partly from the persistent marginalization and victimization of Jews. But it also comes from taking as virtual laws of nature the anti-Semitic toughness and nationalism that gave rise to Jewish weakness and victimization in the first place. I am proposing we question the notion of an omnipresent anti-Semitism. In this regard, one of the greatest tough Jewish fantasies is germane.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Sigmund Freud recounted what has come to be known as the "cap-in-the-mud" story. Hoping to highlight recent improvements in the Jewish situation in central Europe in the 1860s, Jakob Freud told the eight-year-old Sigmund that in his own youth his hat had been knocked from his head by an anti-Semitic nobleman, who then commanded, "Jew! Get off the pavement!" This sort of thing, the elder Freud wanted his son to appreciate, was no longer commonplace.

Freud, whose concerns differed from his father's, recalls asking: "And what did you do?"

> 'I went into the roadway and picked up my hat,' was his quiet reply. This struck me as unheroic conduct on the part of the big strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand. I contrasted this situation with another which fitted my feelings better, the scene in which Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, made his boy swear before the household altar to take vengeance on the Romans. Ever since that time Hannibal had had a place in my fantasies.

Freud's Hannibal, the "Semitic general," is clearly a tough Jew and the cap-in-the-mud story is Freud's tough Jewish fantasy.

What interests me here is the absence of the non-Jew who *rejects* anti-Semitism: that absence makes this story possible. Consider the men who *do* make up this story: Jakob Freud, the weak Jew; the Jew-hating nobleman; Hannibal, the tough Jew; Sigmund Freud himself, the

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fantasist. Had the non-Jew who rejects anti-Semitism been on the scene, there would have been no cap-in-the-mud story.

To be sure, non-Jews who actively oppose anti-Semitism have been in short supply. Freud's story reflects this. But unless this story is critically reconsidered, it does more than passively mirror an anti-Semitic state of affairs: it acts to confirm anti-Semitism.

Freud's invocation of Hannibal may seem laudable to anyone, Jew or not, who supports Jewish efforts to emerge from a history of weak responses to persecution. But Freud's appeal to Hannibal actually *accepts* the terms of a world of ethnic-national-racial dividedness. It accepts the essential constituent of anti-Semitism, an ethos of political-military toughness.

In contrast, although I do not mean merely to endorse it, I do want to note that Jakob Freud's apparently craven response to the anti-Semite's assault actually carries within it the possibility, or at least the principle, of a world *not* organized around martial manliness; of an alternative to the underlying terms of the anti-Semite's world. Jakob Freud is, after all, strong enough to resist the very terms of that world.

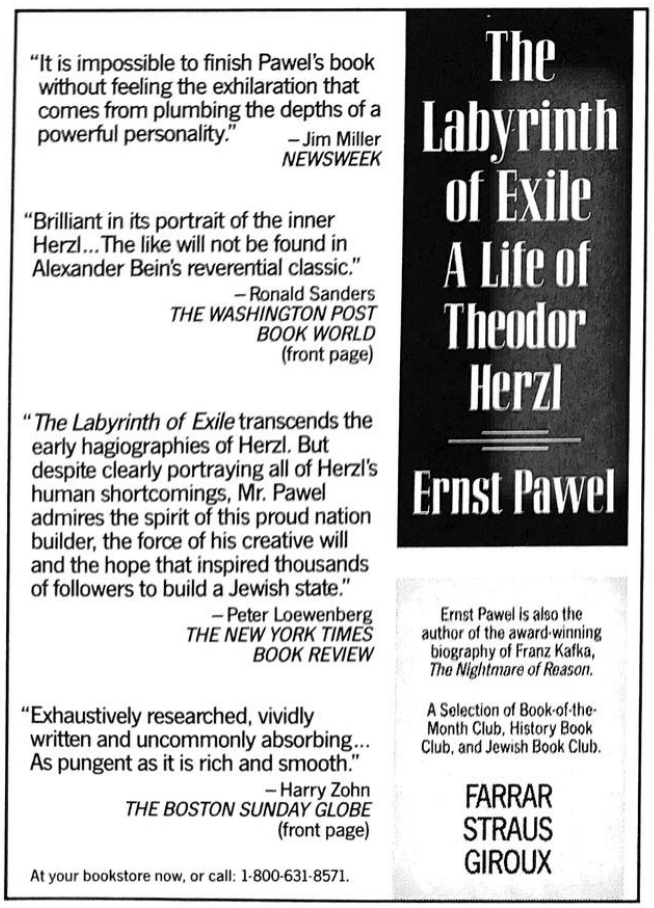
In excluding the figure of the non-Jew who opposes anti-Semitism, the story Freud tells leaves unexamined and unchallenged certain notions not merely of the difference but also of the *distance* between Jew and non-Jew. These are notions that need reappraisal, I am arguing, because their *American* historical foundations are shifting. Such assumptions of difference and distance remain alive among American Jews today. This is notable because Jewish American experience, especially in recent decades, has been shaped—not solely to be sure, but certainly to an unprecedented degree—by non-Jews who reject anti-Semitism. American Jews have not really reflected on the implications of being accepted, welcomed, and loved by non-Jews, and of accepting, welcoming, and loving them as well.

Instead, tough Jew imagery among American Jews has provided an unwitting and ironic form of assimilation. For while this worship of tough Jews entails some Zionization of American Jews, it also involves in even larger measure their Americanization, more precisely their Ramboization.

Post-Holocaust American Jews, in other words, have come to embrace and make their own the very principles of (often xenophobic) nationalism and toughness that have made and continue to make for much Jewish misery. It is, of course, difficult to criticize this strategy of Jewish toughness *if* the sole alternative to it is Jewish victimization. If the only existing model is Jakob Freud, then surely Sigmund Freud's invocation of Hannibal has its merits. Once again, however, seeing matters only in such terms excludes the non-Jew who opposes anti-Semitism and is prepared to prove it, and who interacts with Jews as the varied people they are.

Thus pushing American Jews to reappraise and revise our relation to the ideals and practices of the tough Jews will not work if it is only a Jewish project. The point is to disinvoke *toughness* itself and its political-moral framework, nationalism—particularly in its xenophobic forms. Criticism of the tough Jew (and, for example, Jewish American bigotry toward blacks and Arabs), then, has to be accompanied by non-Jewish (as well as Jewish) criticism of anti-Semitism and cults of nationalistic toughness in this country, Europe, and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the displacement of the weak and gentle Jewish stereotypes by that of the tough Jew suggests that if Jews ever were the moral conscience of a violent, non-Jewish world, they are so no longer. Israel's treatment of Palestinians and the rise of Rambowitz in this country prove that well enough. Contrary to first appearances, however, this may not be a bad development. For in creating their own version of the always ascendant political culture of toughness, Jews have not simply renounced the burden of being the conscience of the tough world. They have at the same time placed that burden—the burden of speaking for gentleness and weakness—on *everyone's* shoulders. □



Profaning the Sacred: On a Writer's Relationship to Justice

Michael Blumenthal

I want to preface this little essay/lecture by saying that I very much consider it to contain questions I am addressing to myself, as well as to any prospective audience. I emphasize this at the outset, since it seems to me not only that the only questions worth asking are those we ask of ourselves as well, but that those who worry themselves too much over the character of *others* are surely avoiding taking too close a look into the dark corridors of their own.

Just a few months ago, I watched what for any living writer, perhaps an American writer most of all, was an incredibly moving, almost unbelievable, sight. I watched a Czechoslovakian playwright and essayist named Vaclav Havel stand up before a packed joint session of the United States Congress and address that body—a body sadly bereft of poets, novelists, or playwrights—about his vision of the free world, its present urgencies, and its possible future. Which aspect of this event was the most moving—seeing a serious writer addressing the United States Congress, having that writer be the president of his nation, or actually having anyone in our own Congress *pay attention*—I'll leave it for you to decide. Let's just suffice it to say I haven't yet quite recovered.

When I compare Havel's example to the issues being debated by his American counterparts, I can't help but feel a certain sadness for my kind, a sense of near-desperation at the situation of the writer in this supposedly great country of ours. For, if the contrast between the incident I mentioned and the narrow issues of jobs, teaching, prizes, publication, and networking that are so often the subjects of our own writerly gatherings and professional publications seems a sad testimonial concerning the American writer's relationship to his culture, I think that is an accurate appraisal. Indeed, the event I referred to ought to be enough to move any real American writer to tears, both out of a certain, though not unambivalent, gladness that fellow writers have been chosen by fate to play active roles in the life of their nation, and, frankly, also out of a corresponding sadness that such a role seems virtually closed to writers in our own country.

I say this *not* because I think writers tend, or ought, to be persons with overtly political ambitions (most of them, frankly, wouldn't be able to tolerate the substanceless, sound-bite-laden cacophony of American politics anyway), but because I think that every real writer's dream—whether it's a dream revealed in the quest for fulfillment of the so-called personal poem, or in the implicit social and economic scrutiny of the serious novel, or merely in the accurate rendering of some previously unspoken-for character or moment in the world—is to have a relationship with justice, with the healing of wounds often both personal and interpersonal.

So that when—as in the case of Havel—writers, because of the influence their words or deeds have had on a great number of fellow citizens, have the opportunity to pursue that dream of justice both in the world of articulation *and* in the world of action, it's hard for an American writer not to pause for a moment in fear, praise, and wonder.

It's hard, for example, for American writers—though they *must* be aware of the tremendous personal price paid—not to feel a certain envy at the words of the Czechoslovakian playwright at a ceremony in West Germany at which he was awarded a peace prize shortly before becoming president of his country. "Yes," Vaclav Havel said on that occasion,

> I really do inhabit a system in which words are capable of shaking the entire structure of government, where words can prove mightier than ten military divisions, where Solzhenitsyn's words of truth were regarded as something so dangerous that it was necessary to bundle their author into an aeroplane and transport him.

I want to speak more about those words, and about what I see as the writer's inextricable relationship to justice, a bit later on. But first I want to comment on the more immediate fact that a writer invited to speak at a writers' conference is, more or less, in the good news business. In fact, I think it's fair to say that conferences in general tend to be in the good news business *—for why else have them?* Their purpose, after all, is to gather the troops, rally the forces, pump up the moral

Michael Blumenthal is the director of the Creative Writing Program at Harvard. His most recent book of poems is Against Romance *(Viking-Penguin, 1987). He has just completed a novel entitled* Weinstock Among the Dying.

adrenalin, identify the enemy, and—though we don't like to admit it—grease the wheels of the so-called network.

So that when a writer arrives at such a gathering full of good news—like Neville Chamberlain returning triumphantly to London with what he called "peace in our time" after meeting with Hitler—*who can blame him?* The check, after all, is—at least for most writers—awfully good; the stay benevolently short; the audience eager and attentive; the location usually attractive; there isn't even a mailbox to which unsolicited (and, let's face it, usually unwanted) manuscripts can be sent, and the writer has an opportunity to speak in glowing, metaphoric terms of an activity which, on the face of it, is rather uneventful—namely, typing.

The Writers' Conference is, in fact, a kind of hit-and-run affair, one of a writer's rare actual opportunities to relish the non-Zen-like sound of two hands clapping, to feel that he or she may be connecting with *someone.* And all the writer needs to do in return is to tell a few people how talented they are, a few more—in words, to quote the poet Philip Larkin, "both not untrue and not unkind"—how talented they may become, and to make some general, one would hope inspiring, remarks about the trials and triumphs of the writing life, whose principal hazards, as John Updike has noted, are at least in *this* country alcoholism and eyestrain....

Our problem isn't that we aren't intimate, but that, as Wallace Stevens put it, "we are intimate with everyone."

So why not be cheerful?

But the writer, or so we hope, is also in another kind of business—a little harder and, often, less appealing than good news, and certainly not as eagerly received by most folks. And that's the truth business—not *the* truth, because none of us has the key to that, but *a* truth, one person's version of purity of heart. And so what I'm going to try and tell you today is a little bit of mine.

For it's been my experience and observation, on the limited number of such occasions at which I've been present, that a funny thing often happens *after* the writers' conference, when the adrenalin subsides and the wine glass empties, when the brief, intoxicating affair turns into yet another earthbound encumbrance, when yesterday's genius takes off its mask and reveals itself as this morning's stupidity, when the noun becomes a verb and the heady state of *being* a writer becomes again the more difficult and challenging act of actually *writing.*

That thing is that the beefed-up participants—encouraged to believe that they are the path to a "kinder, gentler nation" of art—often wind up feeling betrayed when the actual pains and pleasures of a difficult reality rear their ugly heads once more, and what they had hoped would be the easy road to Nirvana is revealed, once again, as: LIFE. In this sense, it's very much like the transition from *being* in love, which is mainly the state of loving a *condition,* to *loving,* which is about an ongoing affection for an actual, limited, and limiting, human being.

They feel betrayed, for example, when several years down the road they awaken to find that the M.F.A. they spent years and thousands of hard-earned dollars on, and which they thought stood for "Master of Fine Arts," often comes to stand, in the world of activity and engagement, of breaking and entering, for "Missing From Action." And they also feel betrayed, on a more poignant and more personal level, when their attentions are once again redirected from that attractive, Icarus-like figure of the writer in public to the lonely, frustrating, and intensely private struggles of the writer not yet on the conference masthead.

Of course, there will always be those who are going, for better or worse, to become writers because they *have* no choice, because they have gone beyond the inspiration and talent required for the individual work into the inspiration and commitment of the devoted life. And they, at least, are blessed or cursed with what the German poet Friedrich von Schiller called the ultimate freedom—"the freedom to do what one *must* [italics mine]." And nothing said at any writer's conference or anywhere else is going to deter or discourage them—those poor, lucky bastards. ... I know, because I was once one of them.

"Ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night," the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in the first of his *Letters to a Young Poet:*

> *must* I write? Delve into yourself for a deep answer. And if this should be affirmative, if you may meet this earnest question with a strong and simple "I must," then build your life according to this necessity; your life even into its most indifferent and slightest hour must be a sign of this urge and a testimony to it.

Now Rilke, quite obviously, is talking about the kind of choice that is beyond choice itself, the kind of choice in which the actor is the *chosen,* whether we consider the vehicle of that choice madness, the Muse, or divine

inspiration. In the Rilkean view, the writer so chosen—the writer who "must"—has really only one "choice": *to submit.*

But, for those who *do* have a choice—not necessarily about writing itself, but about writing as a *vocation*—I think it's worth thinking about something Ezra Pound said, something I still consider with respect to myself, deep in the thick of it though I may seem. What Pound said was that, though he respected everyone's right to play an instrument, he didn't necessarily respect everyone's right to be part of the orchestra.

Now, when I first came across that comment I remember thinking, as many of you may be, "What a snotty, elitist thing to say! What a pile of exclusionary crap!" But now, years later, I've come, reluctantly, to agree, not only with Pound, but with another snob of a sort, W. H. Auden, who maintained that all too many people who seem to have no appreciable talent for *anything* seem to feel that their true vocation in life is to become a writer. And I've begun to feel that it's a kind of duty on the part of those of us who have made our way at least into a small town band (being, as we are, in a state somewhat akin to parenthood) to try and speak as compassionately and honestly as we can to those who are out there doing what we once did—namely, trying to become writers. Since parents, to the extent they have a choice, can choose between two possibilities: to reproduce their own hurts and failures in the next generation or to try to create something *better* than what made them.

Now, in doing this, it can be all too easy to sound like the guy who puts up a shopping mall somewhere and then petitions the zoning board to have the neighborhood rezoned residential—the kind of person who says, in effect, "I'm in, now don't enter!" But I think there's also an honest and less self-serving way to go about the advice business, which is to look as coldly and as honestly as one can at the fact that writing in this country today—especially the writing of poetry and non-popular fiction and the business of teaching and talking about them—has become a real "business," a profession complete with newsletters, job lists, conventions, associations, "networks," conferences, professional debts, blurb-exchanges, customers, schools, and factions. And at the fact that, though most writers cannot make anything approaching a living by *writing* in a marketplace in which they have to compete with such luminous works of literature as the poems of Jimmy Stewart or the true confessions of Ronald Reagan's speechwriter, they can make a pretty decent living indeed teaching and *talking* about writing. In fact, in the last several years alone, books by Eudora Welty, Annie Dillard, and the late John Gardner *about* the writing life have all made it to places on the best seller list that the actual fiction writings of

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So that it's a pretty good working definition that the writers who teach or talk or write *about* writing are precisely the kind of writers who cannot support themselves by their supposedly primary vocation. And, I assure you, there are plenty of us. Since 1975, for example, the number of graduate programs offering an M.A. or an M.F.A. with a concentration in creative writing has gone from 47 to an astonishing 207 (with 328 offering some kind of graduate or undergraduate writing program), a 300 percent increase!

Three other related phenomena have taken place in the so-called world of letters, all having to do with what I'll call the relationship between the worlds of the profane and of the sacred. Because—just as the vocation of the writer was once thought of as a sacred, rather than simply another democratic, calling—so too was the book once thought of as a sacred text, as something that could not only please and entertain, but instruct us; instruct us, that is, not in sexual technique or control of cholesterol levels, nor in the ups and downs of suburban life, but *in how to live.* That, in fact, was once considered the "job" of books—from *the* Good Book to such other "good books" as *Paradise Lost,* the *Divine Comedy,* the dialogues of Plato, the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, *Crime and Punishment, Moby Dick.* They helped us, as Wallace Stevens said of poetry, to live our lives.

But, at some point in recent history, something very strange happened: namely, writing went from being a *calling* to a *profession,* and the book went from being a sacred text to a credential. "Joe Blank"—we are introduced to the famous writer in somewhat the same tone as if we were being given the statistics for the world bench press champion—"is the author of *eleven* books" ... as though having written *one* really terrific one wouldn't be enough! And that, I suppose, is in fact one of the more hazardous definitions of being a "professional" anything: *you must do it again and again.* Though perhaps you only *had* one wonderful book living inside you, you are now—especially if you are in need of such vocation support as readings, teaching jobs, tenure, and appearances at writers' conferences—obliged to write others.

In fact, it seems to me, the world of writing these days is starting to seem very much like the fulfillment of a bit of prophecy found chiseled into an Assyrian tablet from the year 2800 B.C.:

> The earth is degenerating in these latter days. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end. Bribery and corruption abound. The children no longer obey their parents. Every man wants to write a book, and it is evident that the end of the world is rapidly approaching.

And another thing has happened as well: Writers have begun not simply to know each other's work, but *to know each other,* in great numbers and with increasing (in the biblical sense) intimacy. At conferences, readings, workshops, universities, artist colonies, and cocktail parties galore, writers in great numbers have begun to congregate, marry, make love, "network" (that awful word) until, finally, that greatest possible compliment a writer can receive from anyone—namely, the totally impersonal (yet *profoundly* personal) affecting of another human soul by the mere force of one's words—has been largely superseded by the personal relationship, the friendship, the love affair, the vocational debt.

In other words, what it was once the job of the *work* to accomplish has been replaced—in the lives of many writers without the dignity and courage, say, of Thomas Pynchon or J. D. Salinger—by the *network.* Our problem isn't that we aren't intimate, but that, as Wallace Stevens put it, "we are intimate with *everyone.*" Until, for many of us, I suspect, we can often no longer even really tell: Is it that *poem* that moves me, or that beautiful ass? Is it this *novel* I can't stand, or the son-of-a-bitch who stole my wife?

Now, I'm certainly not trying to say that writers haven't always known one another or been friends and/or lovers. But what I *am* saying is that there has never before been a time when one could build as much of one's career—and a career entirely detached from the social and political life of the nation—on what Wallace Stevens ironically called "the pleasures of merely circulating." Here are the words of my (oops!) friend and colleague Seamus Heaney on the subject:

> The poet in the United States is aware that the machine of reputation-making and book distribution, whether it elevates or ignores him or her, is *indifferent to the moral and ethical force of the poetry being distributed.* A grant-aided pluralism of fashions and schools, a highly amplified language of praise which becomes the language of promotion and marketing—all this which produces from among the most gifted a procession of ironists and dandies and reflexive talents, produces also a subliminal awareness of the alternative conditions and an anxious over-the-shoulder glance toward them. [italics mine]

So that this little talk of mine, indeed, *is* aware of the

(continued on p. 102)

Southern Discomfort

Lore Dickstein

The South is making me feel more Jewish, much to my consternation and surprise. I am not sure this is such a good thing, as it reeks of parochialism and has a heavy tinge of paranoia. There are moments here when I feel like the Woody Allen character in *Annie Hall,* who is seen at his WASP girlfriend's dinner table transformed into a payyes-wearing Yiddl. Oh yes, one person says, meaning well, trying to make me feel welcome amid the alien corn, I have Jewish friends (pause), they're very nice. Our landlady, a native of Louisiana who runs an office at the university, has very considerately left small containers of milk and juice and coffee (regular and decaf) for our arrival after a long ten-hour drive. I feel like an ingrate for resenting the fact that she has also left bagels and cream cheese. Are we stock characters, so easily labeled? Were last year's Irish tenants left corned beef hash and potatoes?

Despite everything I have become, I am still the Other to these people. I am reacting badly to this sense of displacement. It reminds me too much of my childhood, when I went from a kosher home with four sets of dishes and mezuzahs on every doorway to a public school where I recited the Lord's Prayer every morning, and sang Christmas carols, and dyed Easter eggs that nestled in pastel baskets filled with green, shredded plastic (that was miraculous, I loved it). Despite this heavy immersion in a Christian culture, I knew—and was told—that I would never pass, never really belong. My best friend at age six, Mary Jo, at whose house I saw a resplendent Christmas tree, told me one afternoon that she could no longer play with me. I had killed Christ. She showed me the passage in her catechism that said so. Puzzled, hurt, I went home and asked my mother who Christ was. What must my mother, who had fled Nazi Germany only seven years before, have thought of this haven called America?

Christmas in North Carolina is different from New York: there is much less commercialization in the stores and on TV, fewer lights strung on homes. I guess this is because these people don't need to proclaim themselves quite so publicly. The wild ethnic stew that is New York, where Greek Orthodox and Irish Catholics and Puerto Ricans and Sikhs and Muslims and Buddhists and Jews are constantly vying for space and attention is markedly absent; the vast majority in North Carolina is white and Baptist. Readers of the Bible, they should be familiar territory for me, but they seem more alien than the Catholics and Presbyterians I grew up with. Perhaps because *I* am alien to them.

The think tank where my husband Morris is spending the year puts up a Christmas tree for the holiday season. It is enormous, almost twenty feet tall, the biggest tree I have ever seen indoors. A request for ornaments goes out to all the fellows. The ornaments from previous years are hung with great ceremony (I deliberately boycott this occasion, although "spouses are welcome") and the assortment of decorations is remarkably eclectic. One fellow, who had either a bad year or a warped sense of humor, has contributed a giant rat trap, standard hardware store issue and hideously ugly. A number of people have hung computer disks, which I consider highly unimaginative, but I wonder just what is on the disks: rejected bibliographies, footnotes too obscure to be included?

Morris asks me for suggestions on what to contribute, and this sets off an enormous argument, that is, I am yelling and steaming and carrying on, and he is quietly befuddled by my reaction. I acidly suggest he hang a yellow star, made of cloth. He does not find this funny, nor do I. I object violently to the idea of his contributing anything at all. The tree is a secular object, he claims; to me it is an embodiment of Christianity. Bring in a menorah, I say. (Although I feel this equation between Chanukah and Christmas is absurd; me too! the menorah seems to say.) We go around in circles for days on this subject, though why he feels he has to placate me, and why I feel I have to convince him of the wrongness of this act escapes us as we argue. He finally purchases a small, stuffed, feathered bird with wire feet. He writes his name on a tag and it perches on the tree alongside the other objects.

This is not an argument we ever thought we would have. On the surface, our backgrounds are remarkably similar: we are both from Orthodox families. Only my

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Lore Dickstein, a writer and critic based in New York City, spent the academic year 1989–90 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She is a frequent contributor to The New York Times Book Review *and* Newsday.

sex excused me from what might have been a more rigorous religious childhood. But Morris grew up in the urban cocoon of New York Jewish life while I was the only Jew on the block in a New England town. While I saw Christmas trees in the homes of friends, Morris saw them only in department stores. Hence his amazement to find that Christians personalized their ornaments by hanging handmade objects, souvenirs from travels, things of sentimental value, things having nothing to do with Christmas at all. (Rat traps?) Morris had thought the only things available were those fragile red, green, and blue balls and silver tinsel.

Have a nice day, anyway, she says. Anyway? Even if I burn in Hell, is what she means.

In eighth grade, without my parents' knowledge, I submitted an essay on "What Christmas Means to Me" for a contest sponsored by the Royal Typewriter Company. The grand prize was, of course, a typewriter and I wanted one, badly. I have only a faint recollection of what I wrote, but I remember starting off with the assertion that although I did not celebrate Christmas, I was delighted by the downtown streets ablaze with light and the caroling in our neighborhood. I came home from school one afternoon many months later to find my mother standing stiffly at the door, an opened envelope in her hand. I had won third prize, and ten dollars; I was one of three state winners. I was disappointed (I wanted that typewriter), my parents were irate and feeling very betrayed (I had not informed them of what I was doing; I was writing about Christmas, of all things; what had they done wrong?). The money went into the bank; I did not get a typewriter until I left for college five years later.

The Bible Brigade is canvassing our Chapel Hill neighborhood of ticky-tacky suburban ranch houses. What are they doing here? This is unlikely territory; it is a neighborhood largely populated with academics and professionals, poor candidates for born-again conversions. Here they come, women in pairs, some black, some white, carrying plastic tote bags of literature, slowly making their way up the gentle slope of Landerwood Lane. Through the picture window I see them heading for us. With a quick retreat in mind, I answer the door. An elderly white woman with piercing gray eyes and a neat coif of gray hair says, Hello Ma'am. She has only a faint Southern accent. Her companion, a large, heavyset black woman with swollen ankles, stands silently a few feet behind her, leaning on a cane. The woman who has addressed me is practically in the door. She leans forward and with a beatific smile that I find unnerving, says, Would you like to share a piece of Scripture with us today? They want to come inside and sit down with me.

I don't think so, I say gently. I am taken aback by their request to come in, a presumption unheard of in New York.

Don't you believe in world peace? she asks me.

Well, yes, I do, I say.

Nodding solemnly, she says, it's in the Bible you know.

No, I say, I don't think so; not in the Bible. This response has apparently struck a chord and she is quick with a retort.

You're not a religious person, then, are you?

No, I'm not, I reply, feeling stupid for compulsively answering all these questions.

She does not give up so easily.

Well, how long have you felt this way, she asks, her face only a few inches from mine. She is so close that I can make out each coarse gray hair on her upper lip. This last question, stated so insistently and fervently, pushes me over the edge from curiosity to annoyance.

My head thrown back in defiance, and calling upon my most dismissive New York voice, I reply, I don't think that's any concern of yours. I bite off the words.

It works. She takes an imperceptible step backward. Her eyes narrow, she takes me in: heathen, Northerner, Christ killer. One of the chosen people, her supposed ally, the people of the Book.

Well, have a nice day, anyway, she says. Anyway? Even if you burn in Hell, is what she means. Jesus doesn't love me, that's for sure, even if the bumper stickers and the little wooden signs with a heart for the word love say so.

A few weeks later another pair of smiley women appear. Why are they so happy? Do they know something I don't? These women too want to come inside and talk. I firmly refuse. They smile and bob, and hand me a large glossy brochure—they are Mormons—that features a head shot of Jesus on the cover.

The image is exactly as I remember from my childhood, the saintly expression, the long blond hair, the androgynous aspect. This is no tormented Guido Reni Christ, eyes rolled back in agony, neck muscles taut, a crown of thorns scraping the scalp. It does not resemble the bleeding, tortured, writhing Christs I have seen in Italian cathedrals. The airbrushed visage I contemplate here is somehow too familiar; this is the same pastel version that hung on the O'Briens' living room wall, and occupied a space of honor dead center above Mary Jo's bed. The Kennys had one that was like a joke;

as you moved, the eyes would follow you, giving an unnervingly literal interpretation to the maxim that God is always watching you.

Almost twenty years ago, when my father had his first, severe heart attack, he was sent to a nearby Catholic hospital. Half alive, half dead, monitored, catheterized, oxygenated, tubed into every orifice, he held my hand and motioned to the crucifix above his head. It worried him. It was more threatening to him to lie beneath this stark metal cross than to be where he was: in the Coronary Care Unit barely clinging to life.

What's the matter, Dad? I said. I was terribly frightened, unsure how coherent he was. He had just told me he loved me for the first time in my life.

I don't think I should be here, he said, with Chaim Yankel up there on the wall. He jerked his chin in the direction of the cross, the nasal tubes digging into his nostrils. Dad always used this ridiculous Yiddish name for Jesus; it was the punch line for many of his bad jokes.

My father had gotten permission from the CCU nurses to break hospital regimen and wear a yarmulke. I was sure he had already complained to them about the wall decoration. I didn't envy these harassed, overworked women in dealing with the obdurate belief of this Orthodox Jew.

Look at it this way, I bantered, you've got both sides working for you. I smiled weakly, hoping he would smile too. But this was no laughing matter for him, he was serious, and very upset. I tried to swallow my disbelief that with one foot in the grave, as his doctor so crudely put it, my father could still be so consistently hard-line. (Or perhaps that was why.)

When I returned a few hours later, he was much less agitated, serene almost. I spoke to the rabbi, he told me, and he said it was allowed. While I was grateful to the rabbi for calming my father, I groaned inwardly; I have no truck with rabbinical dispensations. It is the rules, so many of them, that give me trouble.

This hospital, a well-run, humane place, is familiar to me. I worked here one summer examining Pap smears for cancer. Some of the slides are from the nuns who administer the hospital, and I peruse these very carefully, looking for the incriminating sperm. I do not find any. I was also a patient here myself, at age ten, when I had acute appendicitis. I never tell my parents that the morning after the operation, a nun in a floor-length black habit and a starched white wimple comes to my bedside, sprinkles me with cold water, and makes the sign of the cross over my forehead. I have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, she tells me. I sputter objections; she has wasted her

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Brandeis in the Balance

Gordon Fellman

Brandeis University has been struggling with the nature of its Jewishness. With its fifth president about to depart, after a presidency that to many observers seemed aimed at decreasing the public identification of Brandeis as a "Jewish university," the university faces a rare opportunity to shape its direction and rethink its relationship to its Jewishness.

Outsiders became aware of the turmoil at Brandeis when the media reported on a university uproar over dining hall menus. For nearly forty years, the university had maintained one dining hall for kosher students and several others for everyone else. These other kitchens did not buy kosher meat and did mix milk with meat, but pork and shellfish remained off limits. So, in a rather subtle way the university deferred both to religious demands and to more lenient ideas of tradition held by many less religious and nonreligious Jews.

Three years ago, pork and shellfish were introduced into one of the two major nonkosher dining halls. At about the same time, the Hebrew word *emet* (truth) was removed from the university logo. The university calendar dropped all references to Jewish holidays and replaced these with the oddly euphemistic "no university exercises."

Some community members saw these moves as attempts to help relieve the embarrassment some people feel at being identified as Jewish. Others saw the gestures as reasonable ways of not letting anyone at Brandeis feel excluded for ethnic reasons. The menu change was officially billed as "internationalizing" the cuisine, and references were made to African American and Asian students who had been deprived of familiar foods in the dining halls. Even students fully indifferent to all this scorned the assumption (apparently one of the motives behind the food change) that Brandeis would recruit more broadly in the future—as if anyone chooses a university according to its cuisine. The current status of the change is uncertain, and most controversy about it has blown over; Hebrew has been restored to the logo, and Jewish holidays are once again specified on the university calendar.

If these matters seem to be tempests in teapots, indeed they might be seen that way. As with most such concerns, however, they are meaningful primarily as metaphors. The basic issue is assimilation or the degree of it—at Brandeis and in America.

Being Jewish in the United States today is a lot like not wearing sneakers when nearly everyone else is. One stands out in a context where contrast is suspect. One wants, after all, to speak the native tongue with the native accent. For many people, to "be an American" means to identify with the powerful WASPs who set the tone and terms of the dominant culture. Since WASPs themselves are no longer a majority, their hegemony depends on recruitment to their numbers (though not necessarily to their religion) through embrace of their cultural norms and values. Many minority group members believe that by becoming like WASPs they can achieve recognition and approval: the power in the friendly nod of the head by the confident other, the warmly smiling eye, the invitation to the ball, the brass ring sought by minority persons not sure of the worth of their distinctiveness and nervous about disapproval and rejection.

The plunge into cultural assimilation is not complicated on the surface: a name change here, plastic surgery there, a Christmas tree, a turn away from rituals, connections, identifications with the Jewish community. Within a generation or two it is almost possible to drop the whole thing, give or take a strained reference to being "of Jewish descent."

Cultural assimilation can be institutional as well as individual. While unlikely to change their names, institutions too reach the point where they can claim that they are merely "of Jewish descent."

Brandeis University has been struggling with what could be seen, in a complex way, as this temptation to assimilate. Founded in 1948, Brandeis was conceived in the thirties as a high quality institution that would, unlike other leading schools, have no Jewish quota. By the time the war ended and the building of the university could proceed, most universities had dropped their more overt anti-Semitic obsessions, and Brandeis presented itself as a Jewish-sponsored nonsectarian university that would return something of value to America for having welcomed Jews to these shores. It recruited an exciting faculty, some daring students, and a funding

Gordon Fellman teaches sociology at Brandeis University. He is a long-time Middle East activist in New Jewish Agenda.

base that allowed a unique institution to bloom almost immediately.

In the years since, the university has remained solid and strong in many academic areas; it continues to recruit extremely able faculty and students and sports the kinds of healthy turmoil and self-examination that are the marks of a lively place of learning.

But these days many people connected with Brandeis share a common American Jewish ambivalence about being Jewish or, at least, about "how Jewish" to be (as in "looking too Jewish," "sounding too Jewish," "acting too Jewish," etc.). If this concern is not internalized contempt, it at least signifies discomfort in how one views one's Jewishness. It is precisely this crisis of identity that threatens the future of Brandeis, which for now exists distinctively as the only nonsectarian Jewish-sponsored university in the United States.

In one area where assimilation seems to be a possible solution, Brandeis seems unsure what to do. The university is facing a critical problem in fund-raising. A number of Brandeis's early donors have died, and by now others are turning their fortunes over to successors, some of whom have no particular interest in Brandeis or in Jewish causes generally. The university, then, has either to cultivate the heirs, find new support from potential major donors committed to the Jewish community, or turn elsewhere for money.

This funding imperative appears to have been part of the reason for the dining, logo, and calendar moves. Apparently hoping that more non-Jewish money could be drawn by downplaying the origins of the institution, the university failed to see how that move would antagonize some significant Jewish donors (it has) and muddy the image of the university.

Of course, Brandeis's difficulties with fund-raising are not the same as those of other universities. The problem lies partly in, and faithfully reflects, the American Jewish community at this stage of its evolution. Most markers of blatant anti-Semitism lie in the past now, and many wealthy American Jews give money to Ivy League and other major universities. They are unsure how fully to remain part of the Jewish philanthropic community, and Brandeis may suffer as a result of this wavering. Meanwhile, Brandeis's experience of itself as Jewish appears to be quite contradictory. To the extent that there is discernible unease, it is apparent not only in fund-raising and student recruitment; it exists in the structure, the curriculum, and the very soul of the university.

Why does it appear harder for Brandeis than for Catholic institutions such as Boston College and Georgetown University to retain a comfortable, assertive identification with its ethnic/religious background? These two schools have managed to present themselves comfortably and forthrightly as both secular and Catholic. (I do not know the internal struggles and contradictions of either place, but they appear to handle the balance quite well.) Of course, the differences between being a distinct minority and a minority aligned with the majority are suggestive. Whatever the history of anti-Catholic bias in this country, Catholics are part of the Christian majority and have not experienced the sustained, pervasive discrimination that Jews have. Nor have they a history of two millennia of vilification by nearly all host nations on the planet.

Many people connected with Brandeis share a common American Jewish ambivalence about being Jewish or, at least, about "how Jewish" to be.

Not unreasonably, given this history, many Jews tend to fear standing out, being different. Furthermore, like women, blacks, and members of other persecuted groups, Jews have not uncommonly learned to transform their tormentors' hatred of them into a kind of self-hatred that forbids pleasure or pride in distinctiveness and self-exploration.

Brandeis has also faced the difficulty of unraveling the complicated tangle of Jewish religion and ethnicity. The process of disaffection from Orthodox religious conviction is probably even further along in the Jewish community than among Catholics. As the only American minority that is both a religious and an ethnic group, Jews have the choice, as whites, of dropping one or both of those identifications. The range of options by which one can express one's connection with the Jewish people and Jewish history and culture is often unclear to observers, and to many Jews themselves.

Contrary to those who find Brandeis's Jewishness embarrassing, others, including gentiles, often find it attractive. I am impressed that some of my outstanding non-Jewish students have come to the university *because of* their appreciation of Jewish traditions of inquiry and activism. Some have learned much from what it means to be part of a minority. A wise Brandeis would not, it seems to me, shy away from these aspects of its uniqueness but would look hard to see what of this tradition might be emphasized and nurtured. Proudly affirming the literature, philosophy, and history of the Jewish people, Brandeis could provide its students with a unique perspective on world civilization that would enrich their understanding and give a special dimension to a Brandeis education.

Assimilation is not a simple matter. It means learning the language and sports of one's society, its values and its prejudices, its noblest aspirations and its most dubious practices. Like all societies, the United States offers contradictory norms: those of democracy, human advancement, and genuine fulfillment, and also those of selfishness, indifference, exploitation, domination, and lack of conscience. Assimilation usually means embracing a hodgepodge of qualities, contradictions and all.

When the assimilator's goal is complete acceptance by the rich and powerful members of the society, the elite's norms are embraced as fully as possible. Indeed, it can be argued that one style of assimilation—and this seems to be true of some of the people running Brandeis and actively supporting it—is assimilation to whatever will earn acceptance by feared, admired, powerful elites and the majority of the society that identifies with them.

By defining its success by conventional American norms—"more is better" and "don't rock the boat"—Brandeis risks losing what many Jews consider especially valuable about a certain part of Jewish tradition, the concern with social transformation and social justice—*tikkun olam*. If Brandeis saw itself as attempting to energize its students to become involved in the struggle for social justice, and reclaiming this part of the Jewish tradition as the legacy that it wished to transmit, it would follow a very different path from that which has emerged in the past decade. One need only note the shift in emphasis from teaching to research to see how far Brandeis has moved from its original concern with creating and energizing students: once its reputation as both a small, intense liberal arts college and a research institution marked Brandeis as unusual and vital; now the pressure for professors to publish threatens the school's long history of pedagogic excellence.

I should note that a very small minority of professors do indeed publish important work and teach conscientiously and brilliantly as well. They are to be congratulated and admired. I do not suggest downplaying their contributions, but rather propose what would be a breathtaking, liberating innovation for all major institutions of higher education: honoring equally the two major forms of scholarship—the word written in books and journals, and the word spoken in the classroom. Each, at its best, calls upon diligent research skills, imagination, creativity, and commitment to convey to others what one believes is important, and to stimulate them to think critically.

Brandeis University is just like thousands of American Jews in not quite being able to make up its mind whether to assimilate to the attractive privileges of "Success"—financial and otherwise—or to forge ahead to distinguish itself noticeably from other outstanding universities. If there is to continue to be such a Jewish institution, how will it be Jewish? Should it just be a very good copy of whatever is out there in the larger society? Or are there distinctively Jewish ways in which it can continue to be healthy, productive, and stimulating?

Some of the first Brandeis faculty were immigrant professors, too socially critical and daring for most universities. Brandeis received them with open arms and in doing so created a socially conscious, critical milieu consistent with one of the many strains of Jewish tradition, that of prophecy. Over the years, Brandeis students, faculty, and alumni seem to have been more active in civil rights, antiwar, feminist, and other vital social causes than students of most other universities.

Jews and Brandeis could, now, struggle to redefine and renew the prophetic tradition in Judaism. Given its history of socially aware students and faculty, Brandeis could choose to celebrate the critical edge that defines one respectable part of Jewish tradition and apply it to discovering truths at the heart of the society, the economy, the political system, and education itself.

Many activist students, Jewish and non-Jewish, do choose Brandeis for its reputation in this area. The most memorable of the two dozen Brandeis commencements I have attended was in 1976, when Texas Congressperson Barbara Jordan celebrated Brandeis students' prominence in voter registration in the South, the anti-Vietnam war protest movement, and so many other leading issues of our time. The Jewish concern with justice is a proud Brandeis tradition. Rededicating itself in that direction would not be a radical shift for Brandeis, which boasted in its formative and middle years such giants of critical analysis, innovation, and inspiration as Herbert Marcuse, Abraham Maslow, Philip Rahv, J. V. Cunningham, Denise Levertov, Sacvan Bercovitch, Aileen Ward, Kathleen Gough Aberle, Howard Nemerov, Adrienne Rich, Max Lerner, Cyrus Gordon, Philip Slater, Irving Howe, Philip Rieff, and Ludwig Lewisohn. In the humanities and social sciences, Brandeis excelled at presenting and developing humanistic scholarship that analyzed and criticized technocracy rather than yielding to its trendy, facile demands.

Twenty years after the National Student Strike of 1970, it is certainly appropriate to dwell again on the relationship of inquiry to action. The strike, which climaxed several years of student protest against the war in Vietnam, involved well over five hundred colleges and universities for about two weeks in May. It was conceived by a handful of Brandeis students and faculty who traveled to New Haven one weekend to join the president of Yale and thousands of others to protest the trial of Black Panther Bobby Seale.

The strike caught on immediately, as did its demands for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Southeast Asia, release of all political prisoners, and an end to university participation in the war effort. Brandeis students organized and ran the National Strike Information Center for those two weeks of the strike and the subsequent summer.

Brandeis could choose to acclaim and reclaim this tradition of activist engagement, one of its finest. Indeed, the key to Brandeis maintaining a distinct persona that would be consistent with one significant branch of Jewish education and ethics would be to shift its focus from knowledge for career and income purposes to an explicit devotion to knowledge for genuine liberation of the self and for enhancement of the broadest possible community.

Imagine a Brandeis that would face swelling applications precisely because it was known as an outstanding institution that embodied a commitment to ideals of creating a just and peaceful world. It would not only teach the role of Western thought in shaping the modern world, but would also familiarize its students with the history, aspirations, accomplishments, ideas, literature, and cultures of African, Asian, and Latin American peoples.

Focusing its curriculum on urgent planetary issues, Brandeis would at the same time attend to Jewish traditions and concerns. It might offer seminars and retreats wherein Jewish students, faculty, and staff could grapple with crucial questions facing Jews in the United States: Why have so many Western Jews traditionally identified with socially transformative movements? Why the drift to the right of parts of the Jewish mainstream in recent years? What are the bases for Jewish identification and for the ambivalence it generates among more and more Jews in this era? What does it mean to build and sustain a Jewish life in the pluralist United States, and what are the appropriate institutions for this endeavor? How should Jewish ethical concerns affect the practice of law, medicine, business, education, and other lines of work? How can one retain a Jewish identity if one does not accept traditional Jewish religious beliefs, or has been alienated by sexist and chauvinist elements of Jewish tradition, or has found American Jewish institutional life to be stifling and uninspiring?

These specifically Jewish concerns would complement a larger, comprehensive emphasis on the universalist and liberative directions of all cultures. Brandeis would shape a substantial part of its program to reflect the pressing issues of the current era. I envision a Brandeis that would integrate its Jewish strengths with those of other cultures and traditions, non-Western as well as Western, a Brandeis which would work toward shaping a universal culture aimed at supporting individual and communal freedom and liberation. The same emancipatory spark that led to the works of Marx, Freud, Einstein, and Marcuse could guide the reshaping of Brandeis. Indeed, some of Brandeis's graduate programs, recently under scrutiny as possible sacrifices to budget-cutting plans, would be recognized as the leading edge of exploration into vital areas of inquiry that would partially define the university.

Brandeis's controversial Hillel rabbi, Albert Axelrad, perhaps best exemplifies that part of Jewish tradition's commitment to unify education with *tikkun olam*. Indeed, the controversy is about Axelrad's insistence on combining inquiry with action. In his essay, "Religious Faith and Higher Education" (collected in his book *Meditations of a Maverick Rabbi,* Rossel Books, 1984), Axelrad objects to "the tendency in some scholarship to deal overwhelmingly with trivia and matters of no consequence to human well-being." He calls for redirecting attention to issues of real human values, such as community and responsibility to others.

Axelrad suggests that Brandeis drop any traces of embarrassment about Jewishness and, rather, proudly assert its ethnic tradition in courses that explore traditional religious issues (Brandeis has no religion department) and courses that struggle with the conflict between

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particularism and universalism that is so troublesome to American Jews. He suggests an Institute for Holocaust Studies that would "double as a center for the study and exposure of human tyranny, oppression" in more universal terms. And he imagines an "experimental institute in human reconciliation and conflict resolution" that would bring Israelis, Arab Muslims and Christians, Palestinians, diaspora Jews, and others together for dialogue about the Middle Eastern conflict.

Axelrad would have Brandeis celebrate Jewish literature, music, art, and drama as well as Jewish scholarship. He would, in other words, have Brandeis present its Jewishness in a nonsectarian and even secular way, as it does at present, but more fully and without that niggling feeling of discomfort that so often accompanies such efforts now. He even suggests a rabbinical training school unaffiliated with any of the formal streams of Judaism. "At one and the same time," says Axelrad, "Judaism lauds learning for its own sake ... yet concludes that learning's essential purpose is doing, actions, service."

Brandeis could offer a core curriculum that brings students into the highest levels of research and discourse about saving the planet from environmental devastation and nuclear holocaust. These topics are currently as peripheral at Brandeis as they are at most other colleges and universities.

Doesn't it seem peculiar that as the turn of the millennium approaches, students are not enjoined to study the political and economic problems that account for the growing misery of over two-thirds of the inhabitants of our planet, most of whom are not white and who live in degradation so that "we" may live in comfort? Will it not boggle the minds of our descendants—if political processes allow us to have some—that at one time not all students had as part of their education courses in women's studies, colonialism, power and wealth inequities, racism, and nationalism, despite the urgency of these issues today in American society and in the entire world? Brandeis could assume the responsibility of implementing such a program.

Imagine also if Brandeis were to shape an education that energetically promoted students' thinking about the nature of the self—how our selves are constituted, how we become aware of the world and reflective about ourselves, and how emotions might be channeled into socially useful behavior but also might result in selfish, thoughtless, and destructive actions.

Further, though Brandeis makes the usual claims about the importance of teaching, it does not yet weigh this factor sufficiently in awarding tenure. Imagine a university that actually, not just rhetorically, honored both the gifted researcher *and* the gifted teacher, and stopped pretending that it esteems only those who excel at both those tasks. Such a school could become famous for its candor and famous for its commitment to outstanding teaching as well as front-rank research. It would continue to combine exceptional graduate programs with exceptional undergraduate education and celebrate the integral link it had already forged between the two. The excitement that such a university would generate among its students would quickly become a major asset in keeping it alive and flourishing.

Brandeis could innovate in ways profoundly important for education and democracy by bringing students into their education less as consumers than as active participants, and by involving faculty in the very processes that would allow them to feel less like neglected employees than like active participants in the institutions to which they devote their working lives. In a historical moment when democracy is alive and flourishing in societies newly freed for it, and languishing in societies long accustomed to it, Brandeis could explore the meanings of participation in ways integral to the very notions of liberal (liberating) education.

This returns us to the crucial question of survivability. In an era of a shrinking applicant pool, universities seem puzzled as to how to appeal to more potential enrollees. They tinker with promotional brochures, landscape improvements, state-of-the-art gymnasia, and menu changes, meanwhile neglecting the great likelihood that gifted, energetic, and vibrant prospective students might well respond most favorably to a university that introduces honest and systematic inquiry into the real crises of the era.

As Jewish religious and secular traditions offer rich, full material from which to build that inquiry, how fine it would be if Brandeis would draw not upon market research and efforts to imitate Ivy League schools but upon its Jewish strengths and beauties.

By choosing to spend less time worrying about what "they" think of us, Brandeis could rediscover and enact, at least in part, the magnificence of the prophetic vision. That would make Brandeis not only distinctive, but true indeed to its birthright and to its motto: Truth Even Unto Its Innermost Parts. □


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Sex and the Spirit

Tamar Frankiel

Portions of this article are excerpted from Dr. Frankiel's forthcoming book The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality and Traditional Judaism *which will be published by Harper & Row in the fall of 1990.*

Contemporary women frequently castigate Judaism's attitudes toward sexuality—especially women's sexuality. Most people admit that Jewish attitudes are not so harsh as Christianity's, with its pronounced ascetic tradition that poured blame on Chavah (Eve), but Judaism nevertheless has assumed the burden of supposedly outdated sexual attitudes. Sex restricted to the marriage relationship, disciplines around sex between husband and wife, comments that portray men as vulnerable to female temptations—these are all viewed as expressions of a deep-seated hostility toward women and the feminine.

These negative attitudes, Judith Plaskow has argued in a recent article in *Tikkun* ("Divine Conversations," Nov./Dec. 1989), have resulted in an insistence within traditional Judaism on approaching sexuality by means of "boundaries and control," especially control of women. As Plaskow puts it:

> The stigma and burden of sexuality fall differently on women than on men. Traditionally Judaism posits men's sexual impulses as powerful—'evil'—inclinations in need of firm control. But women's very bodily functions are devalued and made the center of a complex of taboos: women's gait, their voices, and their natural beauty are all regarded as snares or temptations and subjected to elaborate precautions . . . [T]he energy/control paradigm of sexuality . . . assumes that sexuality is an alien energy that takes control over the self.

In this view, women and the female body are a locus of this alien energy; thus Judaism insists on boundaries around women and sexuality.

Discipline, boundaries, and control are in themselves at odds with contemporary Western mores. As Plaskow says, "These strictures are thoroughly out of tune with both the modern temper and the lived decisions of most contemporary Jews." But being out of tune with the times does not make something wrong; and if this were her only reason for rejecting tradition it would be a flimsy argument indeed.

But Plaskow wants to make a further point. Traditional strictures on sexuality, she claims, lead us to suppress our sexual feelings and, because the erotic involves a broad continuum of human experience, to deny other feelings as well:

> We cannot suppress our capacity for sexual feeling without suppressing our capacity for feeling more generally. If sexuality is one dimension of our ability to live passionately in the world, then in cutting off our sexual feelings we diminish our overall power to feel, know, and value deeply.

The implication here is that discipline or control of *actions* requires suppression of *feeling*. Here, I think, Plaskow makes a crucial error. Restrictions around sexual practice do not necessarily lead to loss of sexual feeling—any more than closing an oven door decreases its heat.

Indeed, boundaries can intensify passion, sexual attractiveness, and the personal power that is rooted in one's sexual being. In Jewish tradition, the guarding of sexuality is recognized as a powerful part of personal and spiritual development. The traditional language for this guarding is the language of modesty, which is not much in fashion today. We tend to hear instructions about modesty as reflecting hatred or fear of the human body, and particularly of women's bodies. But this is not so.

Let us first clarify some basic points. As indicated above, Plaskow argues that sexuality in Judaism is regarded as an alien energy, called the *yetzer hara* or "evil inclination." It is because of this alien energy that our bodies have to be subdued. This is, I think, a misunderstanding of what is usually understood by the term *yetzer hara*. As Chasidic and Musar teachings make clear, the "evil inclination" is what we usually mean by egotism or selfishness: the inclination toward some desire or goal that serves our pleasure. Sexuality, like other desires, is not evil in itself, but evil in the way it usually tends, or inclines, to go. Controlling the *yetzer hara* in

Dr. Frankiel currently lives in San Rafael, California, where she is a free-lance author, editor, and lecturer.

its sexual expression is no different, in principle, than controlling one's urge to steal, to overeat, or to gossip—though, because sexual urges are so basic and so strong, their control is considered far more difficult in practice.

Thus traditional Judaism is in agreement with Plaskow that sexuality is part of a "spectrum of body and life energy"—our spectrum of desire, or what Plaskow, following Audre Lorde, refers to as the "erotic." Desire springs from our natural life force and therefore is not "alien" energy at all. Our passions can be seen as the energy that fuels the world, that drives us to create, to have children, to live with strength, vitality, and joy. As Plaskow recognizes in *Standing Again at Sinai,* the larger work from which her article is excerpted, Jewish tradition affirms this force as God's creation, and does not advocate asceticism. Judaism is passionate, this-worldly. In this respect there is continuity between Plaskow's views and those of tradition. Judaism does insist, however, that erotic or life-force energy can be, and often is, wrongly used for egotistical purposes.

The question is, then: How is sexuality to be affirmed? Judaism does not teach us to hate our bodies; yet it does teach control of our sexual impulses—not because they are an alien energy but because we need to guide and channel them into positive and creative deeds. When so channeled, sexuality becomes not only acceptable but actually holy. Plaskow recognizes this: "In the mysteries of the marriage bed on Sabbath night, in the sanctity of the Song of Songs, in the very nature and dynamics of the Godhead, sexual expression is an image of and a path to the holy." But, she claims, Judaism has also undermined this vision by making sexuality *sometimes* evil, and allowing it to be good only in the context of "patriarchal possession and control." She refers to Jewish restrictions relating to marriage, for example.

Restrictions around sexual practice do not necessarily lead to loss of sexual feeling—any more than closing an oven door decreases its heat.

Plaskow's argument, however, rests on a misleading interpretation—I think a misunderstanding—of Jewish law. Marriage, Plaskow holds, should be "entered into and dissolved by mutual initiative and consent." The "sharing of sexuality with another is something that should happen only by mutual consent, a consent that is not a blanket permission but rather one that is continually renewed in the actual rhythms of particular relationships." She claims that these principles challenge "both the fundamental assumptions of Jewish marriage law and the Jewish understanding of what women's sexuality is 'about'."

But consent and mutuality are fundamental aspects of Jewish marriage law. Rabbinic law forbids that an adult woman should be married to a man without her consent and strongly frowned on the ancient practice of betrothing a woman before adulthood (age twelve). Further, a husband is forbidden to force his wife into sexual relations at any time; consent *must* be renewed on each occasion. It is true that the traditional marriage contract (*kebutah*) is written such that the man is the initiator of the legal relationship—but it is the basic form of all Jewish contractual relationships that one person must initiate, while the other consents. While the legal agreement is technically called an "acquisition," it does not imply ownership of the wife as of other possessions (which, for example, can be given or loaned to others to use) or as would be true of a slave. The contract normally states that the husband agrees to provide for his wife, her sexual and material needs included. From this point on, both are committed to a monogamous relationship (at least in Ashkenazi legal tradition; by virtue of practice, among Sephardim now also). Thus the roles of man and woman in the marriage agreement are different but not necessarily hierarchical; the man's initiative does not imply unregulated power or privilege.

Marriage and commitment in Judaism do not mean sexual slavery or permission to rape. They mean commitment to guard what is holy; the woman and her body which she has consented to commit to this man and to the covenant incised in his flesh. He is bound to her as well: she circles him seven times under the *chupah,* "binding" him symbolically, which parallels his binding of *tefillin* on his arm to signify his connection to God. The legal statement of betrothal speaks of holiness rather than possession: "With this ring you are *sanctified* to me." Holiness is the primary issue—the distinctive, unique partnership of this couple, which is like no other, and which is continually reaffirmed in their physicality.

The communal institutions that place legal and practical restrictions on interaction between men and women are supports for this same holiness. Plaskow is right in pointing out that "the bonds of community are erotic bonds," and that Judaism, recognizing that we do have sexual feelings, has instituted means to protect the community from the danger that we may act on them. Restrictions on the person with whom we may act out these feelings are thus part of the traditional way of life. The holiness that is every couple's special precinct is guarded not by a sword-wielding jealous husband but

by the common consent of all.

These restrictions on behavior do not deny or diminish one's capacity for feeling. They support a couple's and a community's commitment to honor holiness. It is not always easy to maintain a marriage, to raise children in a loving and conscientious way, and to rise above the natural divisions of temperament and opinion to create a stable community. Such goals demand enormous amounts of physical and psychic energy—erotic energy, if you prefer—as well as willingness to be self-reflective and open to others.

For this reason I count myself very fortunate to live in a community that values marriages as holy, where my family and I experience love and caring on a daily basis. Nor does such a community have to be limited to married couples. Many single people with varying degrees of commitment to traditional Judaism have chosen to participate in this way of life because of the warmth and tolerance they experience. The common understanding in regard to the issue of sexuality is that respect for sexual boundaries is paramount. We all know without saying it that our personal power to love and to open ourselves to others—and our power as a community to give to one another—depend on preserving the realm of holiness that is at the center of each household.

Thus traditional Judaism does not demand that we live according to what Plaskow calls the energy/control paradigm, where life's desires are alien energies we must constantly fight to control. At the beginning of practice there are struggles, to be sure. But the aim is to transform and refine life energy to serve higher principles, to live with vitality and joy at a deeper level. Traditional practice delineates the channels for elevating our life energy—channels which may, from outside, look like boundaries designed to control or repress. But this is neither an energy/control paradigm nor a flowing expression of the erotic. Rather, it is a model in which the life force is contained, gathered, and refined for a holy purpose—like, for example, the waters of a *mikvah* (ritual bath—the word *mikvah* means "gathered"). Power, on a higher spiritual level, comes from this kind of work.

We all recognize the value of containing and directing our energies in other areas of life. We discipline ourselves in our work life, for example: no matter how exciting our ideas and projects may be, we know we cannot be effective unless we channel our energies in a specific direction. In the spiritual realm, to take another example, the whole concept of a "retreat," or of Shabbat, is to withdraw, re-focus, and gather one's energy. In areas

(continued on p. 106)

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Revisioning Historical Identities

Norman O. Brown

This is work in progress; for fellow-students, fellow-workers; I need a friendly audience, in order to be as vulnerable as I want to be; in this intertextual autobiography; a life made out of books. "Revisioning Historical Identities," the title of your conference, is the story of my life.

I was introduced as the author of *Life Against Death* and *Love's Body. Life Against Death* (1959) records the first revision of my historical identity, from Marx to Marx and Freud. I am here today because I was, I am, a premature post-Marxist. My first book, *Hermes the Thief* (1947), is a good Marxist interpretation of classical mythology. My first historical identity, my Marxist ideology, was wrecked in the frozen landscape of the cold war, the defeat of the simplistic hopes for a better world that inspired the Henry Wallace campaign for the Presidency in 1948. Things were happening in history that Marxism could not explain. Psychoanalysis was to supply Marxism with the psychology it seemed desperately to lack.

Revisioning as I have experienced it is not a luxury but life itself, a matter of survival; trying to stay alive in history; improvising a raft after shipwreck, out of whatever materials are available. Out of whatever materials are available: bits of books, the fragments we shore up against our ruin. Historical identity is made out of identifications: ancestral figures we identify with, the authors who are our authorities. Carving our own *persona* ("mask") in their image. "Identification: psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified." Trying to stay alive: it is always an emergency operation; "emergency after emergency of swift transformations." One doesn't know what one is getting into: *Entréme donde no supe.*

At the end of *Life Against Death* I repeat Freud's prayer, at the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents,* for a rebirth of Eros, to counter the threat of nuclear suicide. I didn't know that the commitment to Eros would take me to poetry. At that uncertain juncture in my life, fate led me to California. It was Robert Duncan who introduced me to modern poetry, the New American Poetry stemming from Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. Pound and Williams, and their successors Olson and Duncan, took their place inside my mind as authors having authority over me. And so there was a movement set up from modern politics to modern poetry. The last sentence in *Love's Body* is "There is only poetry." I am sentenced by my own sentence: how do you live with that? A movement or a tension, a dissension, a schism in the soul; between politics and poetry, between two kinds of revolutionism or vanguardism, between political vanguard and poetical avant-garde. The murky politics in the poetry of Ezra Pound highlights the contradictions. And the deep poetic connection between Ezra Pound and poets whose politics were the opposite of his, Olson and Duncan.

One has no choice; one must keep blundering ahead. As Malcolm X said, the chickens come home to roost. In 1968, a world turned upside down, it seemed that the poetic imagination might come to power. More sober thoughts took over with the victory of Mrs. Thatcher, the failure of the Left, the experience of defeat; and a deeper identification with Ezra Pound, the later Pound, the Pound of the defeat, the defeat of all his politics. In 1985 at the Pound centennial over in San Jose I read with feeling *Canto* CXVI. *Canto* CXVI: Pound's large sense of failure draped around Dante's sestina *"al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra,"* "a little light / in great darkness." Pound's shipwreck, like Odysseus: "my errors and wrecks lie about me." His identification with Mussolini: the *Pisan Cantos* open with Mussolini hung by the heels from a butcher's hook, killed by the Italian Partisan Resistance; *Canto* CXVI compares Pound's own *Cantos* to the futile jumble of legislation left by Mussolini, "a tangle of works

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Norman O. Brown is the author of Life Against Death *(Wesleyan University Press, 1959) and* Love's Body *(Random House, 1966; reissued from the University of California Press, 1990). "Revisioning Historical Identities" was originally presented as the keynote address to the second annual interdisciplinary conference of U.C. graduate students in the Humanities last year and will appear in* Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis, *forthcoming from University of California Press* © 1991 Regents of the University of California. *Footnotes have been deleted.*

unfinished." And some deeper notes of self-criticism: "a nice quiet paradise / over the shambles"; "if love be not in the house there is nothing."

Ezra Pound. The mysterious ways in which poetry and history are related. The *Cantos* were to be "a poem including history." Already in *Canto* I Pound identified himself with Odysseus and predicted his own shipwreck. The New American poetry: Open or Naked Poetry. Put yourself in the open; open to all the winds that blow, as winds veer in periplum. To be a poet is to be vulnerable. Odysseus on his raft. Only in 1985 did I discover in our library a copy of the periodical put out by Pound in 1927–28, *The Exile.* Only then did I get down to work; reconsidering the revolutions—Fascist and Communist, political and poetical, Marxist and modernist—in the history of the twentieth century; seeing more deeply the hidden interconnections.

In *The Exile,* Pound, the autocratic leader, lays down the law: "Quite simply," he says, "I want a new civilization." I remember one of the early landmarks in my political development, Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* The first edition (1935) had a question mark: later editions struck the question mark. And now what should the punctuation be? Pound, the extremist, goes all the way in identifying aesthetic modernism with political revolutionism: "I want a new civilization. We have the basis for a new poetry, and for a new music. The government of our country is hopelessly low-brow, there are certain crass stupidities that it is up to the literate members of the public to eradicate." The elitist pretension, the Fascist potential is clear. Pound's imprudent candor makes me think twice before dismissing the thought because it is fascist. The conflict between low-brow mass-culture and the high-brow avant-garde will not go away. Even Whitman, in *Democratic Vistas,* sees himself as facing "the appalling dangers of universal suffrage in the United States."

Even more disturbing food for thought, to this early admirer of Soviet communism, is Pound's effort, in the pages of *The Exile,* 1927–28, to fuse what he calls the Soviet idea with the Fascist idea, in the overall idea of modernism. "This century has seen two ideas move into practice," he says. Issue #2 of *The Exile* has a page with the banner headline MODERN THOUGHT, featuring first Mussolini saying, "We are tired of government in which there is no responsible person having a hind-name, a front-name, and an address"—and then Lenin saying "The banking business is declared a state monopoly." The Soviet idea needs no explanation; the Fascist idea is the attack on bureaucracy. Hannah Arendt defined bureaucracy as the rule of nobody; the Fascist idea so defined we will have around as long as there is bureaucracy. The pages of *The Exile* show Pound straining to include Communist intelligence in the struggle for renewal; debating the ABC of economics with *New Masses* editor and Communist Party literary boss Mike Gold; proposing Lenin as the model of modernist style:

> Lenin is more interesting than any surviving stylist. He probably never wrote a single brilliant sentence; he quite possibly never wrote anything an academic would consider a "good sentence," but he invented or very nearly invented a new medium, something between speech and action (language as cathode ray) that is worth any writer's study.

In the pages of *The Exile,* I found Louis Zukofsky, the Communist, collaborating with Ezra Pound, the future Fascist; Louis Zukofsky, Semite, collaborating with Ezra Pound, the future anti-Semite. Their correspondence, 1927–63; we need a complete edition. Louis Zukofsky, patron saint of the contemporary leftist sect of "language poets"; Zukofsky, whose work, especially the tour de force modernist translation of Catullus, I had previously looked at with amazement but not with identification. Only now in 1985 does Zukofsky become alive for me: Zukofsky functioning as in himself the link between the two phases of my life, the Marxist and the modernist.

We all survive as best we can;
always after shipwreck;
improvising our own raft;
revisioning our historical identity;
to tell another story.

Louis Zukofsky contributed to *The Exile* #4 (1928) an elegy on the death of Lenin, "Constellation: In Memory of V.I. Ulianov"—

O white
O orbit-trembling
Star—

It is a beautiful recall of Whitman's elegy on Lincoln; a way of saying "Communism is twentieth-century Americanism"—the slogan of the Communist Party in the thirties, the time when Pound would claim that fascism was twentieth-century Americanism, as he did in that outrageous title, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935).

But there was a more personal message for me in the quotations from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* with which Zukofsky studded his work at this time. "Constellation" is introduced with a quotation, "Wherefore, being come out of the River, they saluted them saying, We are

ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for those that be heirs of salvation." Zukofsky contributes an explanatory "Preface":

> Because, Bunyan, who had a conception of Deliverance by the right way, straight and narrow, was, if similitudes are employed, a Revolutionary pessimist with a metaphysics such as Georges Sorel wrote of in his Reflections on Violence. . . . In these 18 poems, then, the pessimistic philosophy of proletarian violence, the only contemporary Deliverance to minds thinking in terms of destiny and necessity.

Even more disturbing food for thought is Ezra Pound's effort to fuse what he calls the Soviet idea with the Fascist idea, in the overall idea of modernism.

Glossing Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* with Sorel's *Reflections On Violence*; Sorel, like Pound, an admirer of both Lenin and Mussolini. Those who keep up with the actual twists of desperate New Left thought will know that Sorel is being currently rediscovered and rehabilitated. But even more significant for me is Zukofsky's turn to Bunyan. My life-long friend and fellow-traveler with a Nonconformist conscience, Christopher Hill, Marxist historian of the English Revolution—like Zukofsky thinking in terms of destiny and necessity—after his book on *Milton and the English Revolution,* has written a book on Bunyan and the English Revolution. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* were written after the defeat of the Revolution in which their whole being had been involved. *The Experience of Defeat* is the title of a collection of essays by Christopher Hill, inscribed in friendship's name for Norman O. Brown. Christopher Hill is fond of quoting the Puritan revolutionaries themselves ruefully acknowledging, "The Lord hath spit in our faces."

The experience of defeat. Those great works of literature written in "the bright light of shipwreck." The motto is taken from George Oppen's poem—George Oppen another defeated revolutionary, who had to take refuge in exile from McCarthyism—Oppen's poem "Of Being Numerous"; a poem which he says asks the question "whether or not we can deal with humanity as something which actually does exist."

The bright light of shipwreck, sometimes uncannily predicted in the prophetic soul. Christopher Hill titles the first part of *Milton and the English Revolution* "Shipwreck Everywhere," and cites the title page of Milton's "Lycidas," published four years before the Revolution broke out; where the motto is taken from (of all things!) Petronius' *Satyricon: "si recte calculum ponas, ubique naufragium est"*—if you add it up aright, everywhere is shipwreck. Everywhere is shipwreck, and then we start moving. We start moving because we have to. It is a matter of life against death.

The sea in which we are shipwrecked is history. The high-strung equilibrium, in the 1920s, between the Soviet and the Fascist ideas could not survive into the 1930s. 1934: the Spanish Civil War; my first (Marxist) historical identity. 1933–35, Pound's *Jefferson and/or Mussolini.* The parting of the ways between Pound and Zukofsky; miraculously the correspondence, between anti-Semite and Semite, went on. 1934, Zukofsky's "Mantis," and "Mantis Interpreted," dated November 4, 1934. (The anniversary of the Russian Revolution is supposed to be on November 7.)

"Mantis" and "Mantis Interpreted": two poems which are one poem, though so far apart. "Mantis interpreted," the genesis and growth of the poem, "The actual twisting of many and diverse thoughts" in the poet's mind, in the concrete historical situation. "Mantis," the finished product, so finished, so formal: a sestina, an exact reproduction of that exacting Troubadours formal invention: a tour de force, a miracle. The sestina so heavenly, so unearthly; "Mantis Interpreted" so fragmentary, so ungainly, so down-to-earth.

The genesis of the poem, the concrete situation as articulated in "Mantis Interpreted":

"The mantis opened its body
It had been lost in the subway
It steadied against the drafts
It looked up—
Begging eyes—
It flew at my chest"
—The ungainliness
of the creature needs stating.

The ungainliness of the creature needed stating. The impulse to articulate the poet's identification with the mantis becomes the vehicle for articulating his identification with the poor:

One feels in fact inevitably
About the coincidence of the mantis lost in the subway
About the growing oppression of the poor—
Which is the situation most pertinent to us— . . .

The "Hunger Marches" of the 1930s. Resulting in the second line of the sestina:

And your terrified eyes, pins, bright, black and poor
Beg— . . .

Under the pressure of what "Mantis Interpreted" calls "The actual twisting / Of many and diverse thoughts" (condensed in the sestina to "thoughts' torsion") the theme expands: "the mantis / the poor's strength / the new world." The mantis is the praying mantis; the Greek word means prophet. The sestina calls the mantis prophetess, and ends with a prophetic summons:

> Fly, mantis, on the poor, arise like leaves
> The armies of the poor, strength: stone on stone
> And build the new world in your eyes, Save it!

Those who are old enough to remember the 1930s—the Hunger Marches, the trade union struggles, the Spanish Civil War—can recognize in Zukofsky's sestina the Communist hymn, the "Internationale," set to new measures—

> Arise, ye prisoners of starvation;
> Arise ye wretched of the earth;
> For justice thunders condemnation;
> A better world's in birth.

Zukofsky is rewriting the Communist "Internationale," and also updating Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," the most revolutionary poem in the anthology-canon of English poetry. O wild West Wind—

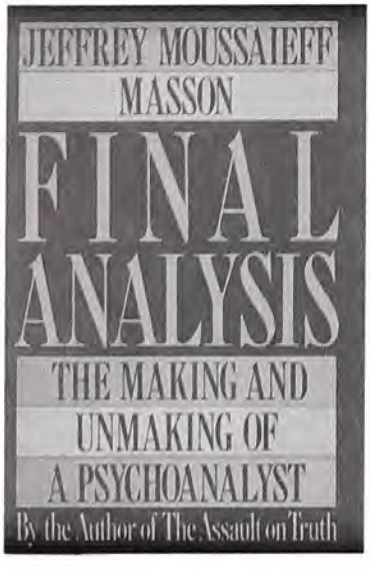
> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

The Communist "Internationale," and Shelley's "Wild West Wind"; and Dante's sestina, *"al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra."* "Mantis Interpreted" gives Zukofsky's translation, stronger than Pound's—"To the short day and the great sweep of shadow." Zukofsky revisioning historical identities; reamalgamerging them, making them new. The Communist "Internationale," set to new measures, new music. The new music is the old music of the sestina: the formal tour de force, the unearthly formality of the sestina. The unique combination of "Mantis Interpreted" with "Mantis"—a poem on a poem—forces us to think about the sestina in a new way. Zukofsky says

> Is the poem then, a sestina
> Or not a sestina?
>
> The word sestina has been
> Taken out of the original title. It is no use (killing oneself?)
>
> —Our world will not stand it,
> the implications of a too regular form.

He strikes the word from the title but persists in his

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quixotic project, linking Dante and the Proletarian Revolution. The political vanguard (Mike Gold) did not see the connection.

Dante's sestina. A sestina ("a sixer") is $6 \times 6 + 3$: six stanzas of six lines plus three concluding, wrapping it up, the envoi. Six times six lines, with what they in Dante's day called crucified retrogression: no rhymes, but six key words at the end of the line ("monorhymes"), which change places with each other at the end of the line in a tortured regressive pattern.

The sestina, then, the repeated end words
Of the lines' winding around themselves,
Since continuous in the Head, whatever has been read,
whatever is heard,
whatever is seen
Perhaps goes back cropping up again with
Inevitable recurrence again in the blood ...

The sestina as a form of thinking:

"I think" of the mantis
"I think" of other things—

A form of thinking not like the Cartesian *cogito.* Tortured thinking, Dantesque thinking:

"(thoughts' torsion)"
la battaglia delli diversi pensieri ...
the battle of diverse thoughts—
The actual twisting
Of many and diverse thoughts

La battaglia delli diversi pensieri, the battle of diverse thoughts, a quotation from Dante's *Vita Nuova* (Ch. XIX). Zukofsky links the form of the sestina to the deep philosophy of Amor in Dante's *Vita Nuova,* that deep level where love itself is a battle: *questa battaglia d'Amore* (Ch. XVI).

The sestina form, as a kind of thinking. The poet Karl Shapiro says: "The sestina would seem to require the poet's deepest love and conviction, as these take on a rather obsessive quality.... If such an obsessive vision does not in fact exist or come into existence as the poem's written, the six key words will seem unmotivated and the whole poem will turn out to be an academic exercise." And in a beautiful tribute to the Dante sestina, Leslie Fiedler says: "It is only too easy to make the sestina an embodiment of ingenuity rather than necessity. ... The successful sestina must make it seem that each monorhyme is seven times fled and seven times submitted to; that the poet is ridden by a passion which forces him back on the six obsessive words, turn and twist as he may.... The sestina seems, in this sense, a dialogue of freedom and necessity, like, say, Bach's *Art of the Fugue,* but it is one loaded heavily on the side of necessity—a predestinarian dialogue." Or like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* Or like Sorel: "the pessimistic philosophy of proletarian violence, the only contemporary Deliverance to minds thinking in terms of destiny and necessity."

The sestina: obsession, depression; the Great Depression:

The most pertinent subject of our day—
The poor....

Louis Zukofsky's sestina sent me back to Dante, first of all to read Dante's sestina with new eyes. The last line of Zukofsky's sestina: build the new world in your eyes. Dante's sestina—

si è barbato ne la dura petra
che parla e sente come fosse donna—

"so rooted in the hard *stone* which speaks and senses as if it were a *woman,*" is not about his lady giving him a hard time. We must break through the literalism and poverty of our thought about love. Love, believe it or not, is what moves the sun and all the stars; as well as any political or social movements that may be moving. And the Dante who wrote the sestina is the tortured exile, the defeated revolutionary; like Ezra Pound, like Louis Zukofsky; like Osip Mandelstam, and many others also. *Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra.* He is blocked. "Mantis Interpreted" quotes *la calcina pietra,* "cement locks stone," and *pietra sott'erba,* "stone under grass." William Carlos Williams, another contributor to *The Exile* in 1927–28, opens *Paterson* II (1948—the frozen landscape of the cold war) with

Blocked.
(Make a song out of that: concretely)
By whom?
By whom? The answer is Dante.

Louis Zukofsky went back to Dante in order to recharge his batteries with the tremendous power of Dante's overriding idealism, that idealism which brought him to Paradise even after his political shipwreck, the defeat of all his life seemed meant for. That idealism carries Zukofsky in the last line of his sestina to the new world—"and build the new world in your eyes." New world, new life: a better world's in birth. *Incipit Vita Nova.* Zukofsky sent me back to Dante's *Vita Nuova.* "Mantis Interpreted" begins by linking the revolutionary sestina with *Incipit Vita Nova,* the rubric with which Dante opens that Book of Memory in which he tells the absurd story of his Love, his Beatrice. Absurd as it may seem; Love's Body is absurd. There is a connection between Beatrice and the Revolution; Communist politics must be grounded in Amor. It will be like squaring the circle: making room in

(continued on p. 107)

Just Stories: Medieval Hebrew Narrative

David Stern

The first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of classical or medieval Jewish literature is not fiction. One thinks of legal codes, rabbinic *responsa,* biblical commentaries, philosophical treatises, perhaps some liturgical poetry. Yes, there are the many tales and parables found in midrash and Agada, but these are considered the exception rather than the rule.

The distancing of imaginative narrative from Judaism did not begin in modern times. In the Middle Ages, Jewish authorities associated with the philosophical, talmudic, and even mystical traditions tended to look down on works of the imagination as things of vanity and idleness. "Woe to that man," Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai laments in the Zohar, "who asserts that the Torah came to show us mere stories and profane matters. If this were so, we too could compose a Torah today, one that would deal with profane matters, a Torah worthy of even greater praise!" In context, this statement is part of a passage arguing that the biblical narrative is to be understood as mystical allegory, but what captures attention is the sheer disparagement that the sage attaches to "mere stories and profane matters." Yet even in the modern period, with the rise of an enlightened Hebrew literature, medieval narrative continued to be neglected. Narratives were dismissed as works of piety at best, hardly high and serious literature. And to this day, many of these compositions are unknown to scholars of Hebrew literature.

Yet it is possible that today we are more ready to draw these narratives out from the main body of medieval Hebrew literature and appreciate them for what they are—imaginative narratives, albeit of a kind so unusual that they require some explanation and words of qualification. Even when considered collectively, these narratives do not compose a tradition of their own. There is nothing in classical Hebrew literature comparable to the narrative tradition in Western literature, where it is possible to speak of a continuum passing from epic to romance to novel. Unlike Hebrew liturgical poetry, these narratives never develop into a historically self-conscious genre with fully formed literary conventions. Each text I will mention is essentially a unique phenomenon. Most initially appeared within the framework of other medieval Jewish literary traditions, and within more recognizable genres like the legal code, the commentary, or the sermon.

Furthermore, the authors of these works would themselves never have called them imaginative literature. Before the twelfth century, the Hebrew language did not even have a special word for the imagination, and though this hardly proves that the imagination did not exist then, it does suggest how differently imagination was conceived.

Yet that very difference promises the chance to explore possibilities closed off in modern Jewish literature. Where we demarcate the religious from the secular as black from white, these texts do not. While many of them deal with matters we consider wholly unreligious, all of them speak to us from a realm of experience that was profoundly shaped by the structures and practices of Judaism. In the history of Hebrew literature, these narratives occupy a unique space, not for their influence upon subsequent texts, but for what they reveal about their own origins in the medieval Jewish imagination.

One would expect the origins of classical Jewish narrative to lie in the Bible. But the early rabbis, though they believed themselves to be the sole authentic heirs of biblical tradition, never attempted to write narrative in the style of the Bible. Instead, they funneled their energy into commentary on the Bible, into midrash—literally "study," but what we today would call "interpretation." Contradictions in the biblical text, lacunae, silences, inexplicable motives, lexical or syntactic peculiarities: any of these "irritants" on the text's surface became for the rabbis an occasion to invent a narrative, or a peg upon which to hang an extra-biblical story. The rabbis allowed their narrative imaginations to blossom in the cracks of the biblical text, sometimes literally inscribing tales in the empty spaces separating words or atop the wavy scribal crowns adorning letters.

As a result, the combination of narrative and exegesis that characterizes midrash differs utterly from the form of biblical narrative. While the Bible presents a more or less unified, consecutive narrative—the epic of Israel's

David Stern teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the coeditor of Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical and Medieval Hebrew Literature *(Jewish Publication Society, 1990), in which all the narratives discussed in this article appear in English translation.*

history from the Creation to the Babylonian Exile—the unity of midrash lies in the logic of exegesis, in the linking of verse and interpretation. Even where a midrash retells a legend or invents a narrative to solve an exegetical problem, it usually presents only that part of the tale relevant to the interpretation at hand. Midrash lies, as it were, in a gray area between the separate realms of imaginative literature on one side and commentary on the other. Its genius is that it flourished precisely in that hitherto undefined space *in between,* creating narratives in the service of interpretation and offering exegeses of narrative as though they were laws.

Midrash lies in a gray area between the separate realms of imaginative literature on one side and commentary on the other.

Of the many types of narrative found in midrash, the most prominent is the *mashal,* the parable or fable, which is also the only form of narrative that the rabbis can be said to have knowingly considered fictional. Yet the *mashal*'s fictionality was for them a source of deep ambivalence. Thus, a famous passage in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* describes the purpose of the *mashal* by telling a *mashal*:

> Do not consider the *mashal* a trivial thing, for it is by means of the *mashal* that a man is able to arrive at the words of Torah. It is like (*mashal le-*) a king who lost a gold-piece or a precious gem—does he not find it with a penny-candle?

The *mashal*'s fictionality is the source of its triviality: what rescues or validates that triviality is its use as a device for understanding Torah. But in fact the *mashal*'s literary power derives as much from its imaginative force as from its exegetical acumen.

Sweet and tiny like a nut, their meaning cloaked within symbolic shells, the meshalim in midrash epitomize the paradox of the rabbinic imagination: in order to express their deepest feelings about God, the rabbis had no resources but human behavior and character. A typical midrashic *mashal* portrays a king who symbolizes God, but whose foibles and desires are those of everyman. As such, the king-*mashal* represents the single greatest attempt by the rabbis to imagine God in the human image. Its narratives are the triumph of anthropomorphic desire, the wish to make God a familiar, recognizable presence in His relationship to Israel.

Throughout the Middle Ages, *meshalim* continued to be composed, particularly in mystical texts like the *Sefer Bahir* and the Zohar. In these works, however, the character of the midrashic *mashal* was slowly transformed into an esoteric, allegorical literary form, a medium for kabbalistic theosophy. At the same time, another literary form gradually emerged that eventually overtook the *mashal* as the dominant narrative form. The form is the *ma'aseh,* in English the exemplum, a short tale which illustrates a lesson or teaches a moral.

The main difference between the *mashal* and the *ma'aseh* is that where the former openly acknowledges itself to be fictional, the *ma'aseh* claims to have taken place precisely as narrated. This claim is not merely rhetorical: it is the source of the *ma'aseh*'s capacity to enforce the moral lesson or truth it teaches. For example, the Babylonian Talmud records the following controversy: if a person forgets to say grace after meals and only remembers later, after he has left the place where he has eaten, must he return or can he say grace wherever he happens to be? Beit Hillel says he can pray wherever he is, Beit Shammai that he must return. The Gemara then cites the following *ma'aseh:*

> There were two students. One forgot to say grace, but when he remembered he acted in accordance with the House of Shammai and went back, and found a purse of gold. The other student neglected to say grace and later regretted it, but he acted in accordance with the House of Hillel and did not return and he was later eaten by a lion.

Part of the force of this narrative surely depends upon its intentional exaggeration and its implied humor. Even so, the reader must believe that the two students actually met their fates as narrated in order to be persuaded of their lessons. Hyperbole here rests on the rhetoric of realism.

As this example suggests, the roots of the *ma'aseh* lie in talmudic tradition, but it is only in the early Middle Ages that the form emerges in its full shape. A number of story collections appeared then, among them Nissim of Kairuan's *An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief After Adversity,* and *The Midrash on the Ten Commandments.* The existence of these collections, a new phenomenon in Jewish culture (possibly inspired by an Arabic model), suggests a growing interest among Jewish readers in narrative, and especially in the exemplum. Yet in reading these exempla, one realizes that what most distinguishes them is not their success at exemplification, but almost the opposite: the incongruity between the religious lessons they are supposed to communicate, and the utterly profane social and moral universe they actually depict.

One brief example from the *Midrash on the Ten*

Commandments illustrates this recurring gap. To exemplify the First Commandment, "I am the Lord Your God," the following story is told: A certain Jew who was lame once heard of a heathen shrine which could cure anyone. The Jew therefore went there and spent the night, but at midnight he suddenly awoke. He saw a demon come out of the wall with a flask of oil, anointing all the sick, who were immediately healed. The only person the demon did not approach was the Jew himself. So he said to the demon, "Why don't you anoint me?" The demon replied: "If you are Jewish, why have you come here? Can a Jew traffic in idolatry? Don't you know that heathen rites have nothing in them? It is for this reason that I am misleading the gentiles, so that they will cling to error, and so they'll have no portion in the world to come. But you! Why have you run to alien worship instead of standing up to pray before the Holy One, blessed be He? He is the one to cure you. You should know that by tomorrow your time had come to be healed, but because you have done this, you will never find a cure." In a moralizing flourish the narrator concludes: "Therefore do not trust in any mortal being, but rather in the Holy One, blessed be He. For He, this kingly God, is a physician who heals for free!" While this is certainly one lesson to be drawn, the tale's real interest lies much more in its anomalous features. The Jewish cripple who is willing even to try a heathen temple to be cured, and the demon who is as real as any human character (and precisely the one to instruct us in the worship of the one God) only begin to hint of the skewed sense of reality pervading the narrative.

The stories in the *Midrash on the Ten Commandments,* as in other exempla collections, are often awkward, at odds with themselves formally and psychologically. In fact, their pervasive incongruity has led some scholars to claim that these stories actually represent the beginning of secular narrative in Jewish literature; though cloaked in the garb of midrashic orthodoxy, possibly in order to facilitate publication, these stories have already freed themselves from the fetters of enforced religion. According to these scholars, the stories should be read ironically, against their grain.

But the moralizing framework of these stories is disregarded only at the risk of missing their meaning. Their real objective is not to preach a particular moral lesson, but to reveal the very nature of the Law, which in these narratives becomes an inescapable presence, reaching out with a long and mighty hand to enforce justice. Nearly all exempla begin with their protagonist fulfilling or—much more commonly—transgressing a commandment. Which commandment that may be is less significant than the fact of disobedience or obe-

(continued on p. 110)

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People Want Everything

Leonard Michaels

It was a summer evening in the fifties. My friend Dmitri Harris, who studied physics at Cornell, had come to town. We arranged to meet for dinner in Greenwich Village, at the San Remo. I hardly ever ate out, but I hadn't seen Dmitri in months so this would be an occasion. I left work earlier than usual and walked uptown, from Chambers Street to Bleecker Street. Dmitri was always late, but I liked sitting in the bar, staring about at the San Remo's tile floor, brown wood booths, and ceiling fans. The mirror behind the bar reflected colorful whisky bottles and a row of windows that looked out on the traffic of Macdougal and Bleecker Streets. Separate from the bar was a small dining room. Dark, serious Italians waited table; efficient men, never obsequious. When Dmitri arrived, he said, "I'm starving," and we went directly into the dining room. He ordered antipasto, minestrone soup, some kind of veal. I ordered clams Casino, salad, and a glass of wine, which probably came to less than ten dollars, but I had to think about it. I had to think about money.

I worked after classes at NYU, as a file clerk in a collection agency. I made three dollars an hour. The office had no technology, no computers. The only machine was me. Looking through the mail, I'd store names and addresses in passive memory. Then, reading through new letters that arrived daily, I'd spot a name or street address that sounded familiar, and I'd go search, try to match the clue in a letter with a file I had seen days or weeks before.

Dmitri asked, "You still have the same job?" Then he asked what I did exactly, forgetting he'd asked the question before. "I know it's a collection agency . . . "

I said my job was like the children's card game where you put the deck face down, spread cards in every direction, then start turning them over, trying to remember where you last saw a jack or queen or a three so that you could pair it with the jack, queen, or three you'd just plucked out of the spread.

"Oh yeah, yeah. I remember. Sounds like fun," said Dmitri.

"It is."

It was no fun. I felt sorry for debtors who weren't confidence men or deadbeats, but just unlucky, sick, broke, ashamed, miserable, hoping to be forgotten, if not forgiven. There was no forgetting, no forgiveness. There was no hiding from us. We had connections everywhere in towns and cities around the United States, investigators who lusted to collect. We wanted our clients made whole. We wanted our thirty percent plus expenses.

Dmitri never worked. Money came to him in scholarships. But he could have put himself through college. He won regularly at poker and bridge, picking up money from fellow students, and he hustled in Manhattan pool halls and ping-pong parlors. You'd hear people say, when Dmitri shot pool, "The ball has eyes."

He played. I worked for small pleasures and worried about the price of dinner. I boasted of him to other friends. Amazing guy. What a brain. Maybe there was faint resentment in my heart, but what the hell—Dmitri had a special chemical structure in his chromosomes. It gave him superior hand-eye coordination and let him solve problems built into the physical universe. As if from God, money came to him. He gave no thought to it that evening in the San Remo. He gorged on rum cake.

"Good?"

"Great." Munching, nodding. It was his due. He had chromosomes.

His eyes, wide apart in the flat broad bone of his upper face, carried a diffuse focus, dull, almost sleepy. As he chewed, his nostrils distended slightly, smelling the tastes. His complexion was dark and smooth, yellowish, nearly bronze. The neck of a wrestler. Thick trunk. Ape arms. His parents were first-generation Americans; his grandparents, from Odessa and Istanbul, were Russian Orthodox, except for a grandmother who was Jewish.

During dinner, Dmitri mentioned a party uptown to which he'd been invited by Nina Winslow. "Did you know we broke up?"

"You broke up?"

"Yes. Do you want to go to the party?"

"Sure. So you broke up with Nina Winslow?"

Unfortunately, he had misplaced the address. Three

Leonard Michaels is the author of two story collections and a novel, The Men's Club *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981). His most recent book,* Shuffle *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990), is autobiographical.*

times he left the table to phone Nina. He stood abruptly, in the middle of a sentence, went to the phone, returned. "What were you saying? Go on. By the way, do you want to go to the party?"

Again, I said, "Sure."

He was preoccupied, but still, his concern for the party was maybe a touch rude. I could have had dinner with my mother, saved some money. Anyhow, Nina wasn't answering.

Leaving the San Remo, we walked to Washington Square Park. Street lights were on, calling the darkness. It came to them, swarming about the glow. Above the line of rooftops, you could still see blue air, but mountainous dark clouds had begun gathering. It would be a moonless night.

Dmitri talked about his psychiatrist whose name was Jerry. He'd begun seeing Jerry for help in breaking up with Nina Winslow. He was still seeing Jerry.

"I'd have picked Nina."

"Yeah, you can always get another psychiatrist." He laughed. He didn't think it was funny.

"And Nina doesn't cost as much."

"Come on, Herman, it's no joke."

I wasn't joking. I thought both a lover and a psychiatrist captured your heart and introduced you to the dark forces within.

"I did the hardest thing in the world. Can't you sympathize with your old friend, Saint Demitrious?"

He'd told me on previous visits that he couldn't let a day go without phoning Nina. He'd beg her to skip work and come up from the city. Once, he took off in a blizzard, driving from Ithaca to New York to spend a few hours with Nina. Now he was telling me different. No crazy yearning, no fucking. They were friends.

"I couldn't think, couldn't do my work. The department was going to throw me out of the lab. I was risking my life, Herman. For what? There is no future in death. You think that's a joke?"

"Nina is great. A lot of class."

Dmitri's mouth, half-open with a feeble smile, made a look of bemused surprise. His big hands lifted, pressed to his chest. "Herman, this is me."

"I know who you are. I'm sorry you broke up with Nina. I think she's great."

"I did it," he said, "after much work with Jerry."

"Work?"

"It's an expression."

Dmitri invested too much in Jerry, I supposed, but then Jerry was a doctor, he had knowledge, understanding. Nina was what she was, totally instinctive, every feeling instantly apparent. She didn't understand anything. Just walking down the street she caused trouble. People would feel a horrible rush of happiness. She had too much life. Who could live with it? Dmitri had a career. I understood completely, but I didn't sympathize. He wanted me to say I did.

People want everything.

In the park we found a bench and sat. Nearby, a woman was playing guitar and singing folk songs. A small crowd collected. She had curly brown hair and a high, sweet, quavering, plaintive voice. It seemed to say, "I am suffering."

Dmitri—preoccupied, restless, not listening to her—made me uncomfortable. He still hoped to reach Nina, get the address of the party. He had a compulsive streak, and was giving off nervous impatient signals, like a kid who needs to pee.

I ignored him for a moment, surrendering to the spell of the woman's singing. He noticed. Nudging me with his elbow, he proposed a math problem. I had no interest in math problems. He insisted: "An idiot could solve this problem. Listen . . . "

I listened. He repeated himself, emphasizing crucial elements, but I couldn't understand the problem, let alone solve it. "We know different idiots," I said.

He wanted me to feel stupid. Why? I hadn't said what he wanted to hear. Is a friend required to lie about feelings? He knew I liked Nina. She made a picture of contrasts, big green eyes and sharp bones—knees, elbows. Long fine neck.

I hadn't said what he wanted to hear. Is a friend required to lie about feelings?

Dmitri was saying something. I heard his voice. Beyond his voice, I listened to the woman singing. She created an effect of prettiness, though her face was irregular; too interesting to be pretty. I succumbed to the pleading in her voice and gave her what she wanted. I gave feeling, I felt close to her. She suffered. She wore a lavender dress and green shoes, colors of sensibility, heartbreak, love, art. Dmitri's knee bumped mine. He leaned toward me and revealed four matchsticks lying in his palm.

"Let one match touch another. Then try to make any two of the other matches . . . "

I said, "Enough. No more. I don't even know how to begin to think about these problems."

The singing ended.

Dmitri said, "Let's get out of here. I'll phone Nina again."

He said it as if conceding to me, phoning Nina for my sake. The phone booth, in a corner drugstore,

had greenish sheet-metal walls with a quilted imprint. He dialed, listened, saying nothing for long minutes. Apparently, Nina still wasn't home. He smacked the receiver into the cradle. Hands in his pants pockets, he went strolling up Fourth Street toward Sheridan Square. I went after him. His shoulders were held high, packed with tension, his posture stiff. People got out of his way. The big neck and deep slope of his shoulders, bunched, explosive looking. He was walking in the middle of the sidewalk.

I was too conscious of Dmitri's moods. I felt tension in my shoulders. Neither of us spoke. We walked, the minutes passed. At last I said, "Tell me something. How come you and Nina didn't get married?"

"She didn't want to get married."

"No?"

"She wants to be out there. In the action. I told you I went to a doctor. Can you believe I did that? We evaluated my needs for a woman like Nina. Jerry said, 'I'd like to meet her.' Nina agreed to come up to Ithaca, but then, the day of the appointment, she says, 'What for? There is nothing for me to talk about.' She was there in Ithaca, five minutes from Jerry's office, and she says, 'I don't want to. I changed my mind. What's the point?' The point is that I was trying. Trying is not even not in my nature. She owed me something. She says, 'What for? What for?' I said, 'OK, if you don't know what for, I don't know what for. Let's say it's over between us. OK? OK?' I kept saying OK, like I was asking her permission. I told her to pack. I was going to drive her to New York that minute. She didn't want me to. She wanted to take the bus, but I flung her suitcase and purse into the trunk of my car and locked it. We drove to New York."

Again, Dmitri and I walked in silence. We'd often walked this way, sometimes for miles. No girlfriend would have enjoyed the silence, the nothing. Dmitri was thinking this, too. He said, "Girls have no staying power. You always have to do something. Make a plan. Entertain them every minute. You know what I mean? Every damn minute." He meant Nina, I supposed. Big, wild, green eyes, wiry blond hair, narrow hips, gangly white legs. She was a very white bony person; high-strung. She talked fast, bit her nails. She was shy, self-deprecating. She had headaches. She couldn't do this, couldn't do that—a drag on Dmitri's patience—but she did well enough and people loved her. Dmitri would get phone calls at his lab from Nina. She'd say her stomach was upset or there was a funny color in her urine, like blood. He'd say, "Did you eat beets?" She'd groan: "You can't imagine how worried I've been." She worked for her father in a Wall Street brokerage, selling stocks on the telephone. High-stress male society. She thrived in it. She had a mellifluous alto voice, clear, sensible. Clients couldn't see her damaged fingernails.

From Sheridan Square we walked along Grove to Hudson Street, then back to Bleecker and down to Sixth Avenue, then turned toward the park again, passing the same store windows, the same concrete flux of sidewalk mutilated by weather and the weight of people. From below came vibrations and the subway's hollow wailing. Steam lifted through grates.

There was no moon or stars. The air was heavy, dead, fat with water. The black sky rumbled. People seemed to hurry, neurotically agitated, or else to walk with unnatural slowness. Dmitri said, his voice tensely controlled, "Any two people have only so much to say to each other. I mean this in a purely mathematical sense. The quantity of talk in any two people is finite. When they have said it all, they have said it all. There is nothing left for them but repetition. Which is worse than nothing."

Did he mean our friendship was over? No. I supposed he was making a pain referral: He couldn't cry over Nina, so he beat on me.

I said, "Call her up. Say you want her to take you back."

"That's the worst idea I ever heard in my life."

"Well, forget it."

"No."

"You want Nina to take you back, Dmitri."

He yelled, "On my terms."

We continued to walk, approaching Louie's now, a popular bar. I could see the mob inside. You walked down into Louie's, into a basement with a low ceiling. It might be good to be with other people, talk on every side. There was nowhere else to go until Seventh Avenue and the bright white diner, Mother Hubbard's. We could sit at the counter and have hot apple pie, and coffee. I'd pay. It would show affection. Straight ahead was the island on Seventh Avenue, where a kiosk stood blazing with magazines and newspapers. The night would end there for me, buying the *New York Times,* reading it on the subway going home. But not yet.

I said, "Would you like to have coffee, or maybe have a beer?" Dmitri shrugged. We were standing in front of Louie's. "Come on," I said, "Let's have a beer."

I went down into Louie's. He followed, hands still in his pants pockets, as if he meant nobody harm. It was a symbolic gesture, but why was he symbolizing? Did he mean somebody harm? He had a bad temper and was very strong. As a kid, growing up in Manhattan, Dmitri had been in street fights. A small scar, left by a bottle, marked his right temple.

There was no great danger of a fight in Louie's. The crowd was literary, like the crowd at the White Horse on Hudson Street—college students, actors, painters,

editors, journalists, and people who wrote copy in advertising agencies. You'd occasionally see important writers, Norman Mailer, Mary McCarthy, Dwight MacDonald. For awhile, Dylan Thomas hung out at the White Horse. Tonight at Louie's I spotted another writer, Francis Bonbon, slender, average height, skin the color of gun metal and hard blue eyes, arrogant glowing eyes.

He was always seen with a woman, always a different one. Each of them, as it is said of lunatics—*certifiably*—beautiful. A writer, but Bonbon was more a figure of life than art. His face couldn't be reconciled with mediocrity. The glowing eyes bespoke a universe of feeling. It was rumored that he was obsessed by sex and liked women to watch him masturbate while he sat in a chair, naked but for high-heeled shoes and sunglasses. He was a Village character, mythical. I'd always been in awe of his shameless operations, his endless women.

It was hot inside, the air was thick. The low ceiling trapped cigarette smoke and odors of rancid beer, perfume, sweat. There was a sharp urinous draft when bathroom doors opened. More people arrived every minute, not discouraged by the crowd. They were anticipating the storm. I saw excitement in the faces, heat in their cheeks, eyes shining. I got the bartender's attention, bought two beers, then shoved through to Dmitri. He'd found a spot against a wall, his back to Bonbon. I slipped between him and Dmitri. Now my back was to Bonbon. I handed Dmitri his beer. He took a quick swallow. I heard Bonbon say, "I've been impotent for a long time, but I think you're the one who is going to change that for me."

Dmitri heard it, too. He grimaced. I wanted to turn and see Bonbon's woman, but restrained myself. I was glad we'd come down into Louie's.

Beyond the voices, I heard thunder building in the sky and the crack of lighting—and then—street lights went out. Louie's went black. The crowd hushed, except for some giggles. Bonbon whispered, "Gimme kiss."

It was like being in the hold of a freighter, in the tropics, at the mercy of a storm. The floor seemed to tip. Screams and crying would begin. People would pray. Bodies leaning and swaying, stood in the fearsome place, between life and death.

Lights went on.

I glanced about, looking for reactions. Bonbon's woman smiled at me, a happy childlike smile. Me?

Even after she registered I felt estranged, seeing her through glass. Nina was the woman with Bonbon.

Not at all a certifiable beauty. How could Bonbon have known she was beautiful? Somebody must have told him. I had these thoughts, then a fiery moral vision: Women needed protection in this bad world—*from themselves*. The Arabs were right. Wrong. I knew only one thing: Nina Winslow, in the public arena, stood with Francis Bonbon. Everybody in the world, man or woman, needs protection from the darkness within. But still, Nina had gone too far, visiting shame on herself and all women, not to mention Dmitri and me. How else could I feel? I was no cynic. There was dreadful pressure in my chest. I really cared. Such feeling must exist or nothing will. Her smile collapsed. She saw what appeared in my face. Doubtless, she'd seen it in other men, too. The tumult, the confusion of jealous blood. Then she saw Dmitri looming behind me, shoving me out of the way, and Nina's big green eyes were shot with distress. I touched the rage in Dmitri's body as I grabbed his arm. "Don't," I said. "Don't say anything. Don't do anything. Come, we're going." I couldn't hold him.

Bonbon, seeing Nina's expression, turned from her, as if to confront Dmitri, but with no sense of what was happening until he saw the huge face of hate and rage falling upon him. Dmitri's hands went to Bonbon's head, seizing it by an ear, and the other hand, still holding the neck of the beer bottle, smeared it against Bonbon's skull as Bonbon's face snapped forward toward Dmitri's. A space opened in the crowd. Grinding his mouth on Bonbon's, as Bonbon flailed in wide arcs at Dmitri's ribs and head, Dmitri kissed him. He kissed Francis Bonbon. They sank slowly toward the floor, Dmitri bending over Bonbon, clutching his head, mouth to mouth.

The crowd wanted to watch, but desire invoked its antithesis when Nina shrieked, "Dmitri, you're disgusting." A few men joined me, tearing at Dmitri, dragging at his shirt and hair. Dmitri let Bonbon go. The mythic head bumped wood. I kneeled beside him, saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Nothing personal. You'll be all right, Mr. Bonbon," and then I pushed Dmitri toward the street. He didn't resist. Nina came after us, purse and shoes in her hand.

Rain slammed the sidewalk, dazzling blinding rain. I moved Dmitri around the corner, holding an arm. Nina took the other. Dmitri, dopey, clung to his beer bottle. We moved him up some steps into a doorway. Nina smacked the beer bottle. It flashed away into the street and smashed. Dmitri fell back against the door and hung, his face turning as Nina hit at him with her purse, feeble blows, more like pushes. She was crying. He lifted his hands, but didn't defend himself or try to touch her. He was waiting till she finished. I started to intercede; thought better of it. That's how I left them.

At the kiosk, I bought the *New York Times,* and shoved it under my shirt. I hunched over, protecting it from the rain as I ran toward the subway. □

By the time you read this there may already be a war raging between the U.S. and Iraq. In the exchange that appears below, Tikkun*'s editor argues that there is a justifiable war that could be fought with Iraq, but it is unlikely that the war we will be fighting is that war. Lerner believes that it would be legitimate to fight Iraq to protect Israel and to stop proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons. But he also argues that if a war is to be fought, the goal should be to change the conditions that led to the rise of Saddam Hussein and his ilk in the first place. In order to achieve this goal, the U.S. should adopt a larger strategy that includes a wider settlement of Middle Eastern problems. And that strategy, were it to be tried, could be a viable alternative to a bloody war.*

A series of critics from the Left and the Right respond to Lerner, challenging his assumptions and/or his strategy. Afterwards, Lerner responds to his critics. Lerner has written his proposal as an unconventional personal essay rather than as an official Tikkun *editorial, partly to avoid the "policy paper" format that forces us into a mode that disallows inner ambivalence, and partly to acknowledge the wide divisions that exist among our editorial board on virtually every aspect of how to understand the current situation. Even if there is a war by the time you read this, we believe that the material presented here raises a series of fundamental issues that will remain vital to assessing the meaning of that war.*

My Inner Conflict About Iraq

MICHAEL LERNER

The Iraqi crisis is the first time I've felt real tensions between my instincts as a liberal and my instincts as a Jew. Although these tensions can be resolved at the level of theory, I'm not sure that in the short run they can be resolved at the level of pragmatic political action. And in speaking to liberals and activists around the country I've found that the pain I've been experiencing about these issues is shared by many of us in the *Tikkun* constituency.

On the one hand ... as a liberal I have long understood that much of the world's pain and suffering—what we sometimes euphemistically refer to as "underdevelopment" but which in reality translates into starvation, disease, and inadequate shelter, clothing, and medical care—is a direct result of the long history of Western colonialism and imperialism. The economic exchange between countries has not been equal. The wealth of the developed world has often depended on the ability of developed countries to set terms of trade disadvantageous to third world countries while exploiting their natural resources. Military interventions, foreign aid, loans from American banks and the World Bank, and political alliances have all stabilized the rule of local domestic elites in third world countries willing to "freely" enter into agreements with Western governments and Western corporations that served Western interests over the interests of their own citizens. So, I naturally look with great suspicion on any Western intervention in the Third World—understanding that it is usually aimed at propping up this system of unequal exchange (conventionally called "imperialism").

It was just twenty years ago that as one of the "Seattle Seven" I went on trial for organizing anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. I never would have imagined in the months that I sat in Terminal Island Federal Penitentiary serving a sentence for contempt of court that there would come a day when I might support U.S. foreign intervention. In fact, I've opposed every U.S. intervention from Vietnam to Panama, and I have deep reasons to worry about the *motives* of U.S. intervention in the Middle East. I watched the U.S. strangle the economy of Nicaragua and violate international law with impunity to support the Contras. I watch with horror as the U.S. government continues to aid the repressive regime in El Salvador. And I am deeply concerned that the U.S.'s "war on drugs" will be used as yet another excuse to intervene and dominate the lives of peoples in Central America.

Moreover, there are some grounds to be suspicious about this specific involvement of the U.S. in the affairs of the Middle East. No matter how many pious statements the U.S. makes about Iraq's aggressive violations of territorial integrity, most of us know that the U.S. would not be so interested if the West's oil were not at stake. The boundaries of Kuwait, like those of the entire Middle East, were drawn by the occupying colonial powers, more concerned to divide and control the peoples of the area than to honor their actual desires.

Regimes like the Emirate of Kuwait and the House of Saud were never chosen by their people. Like most of the Arab leaders whom the U.S. now boasts as friends and allies in the struggle with Iraq, they rule through bribery and the clever but arbitrary use of power. The outrage some Arabs express at the massing of American troops in Saudi Arabia often sounds strange to American ears (after all, Iraq *did* invade Kuwait and the Saudis *did* invite U.S. troops to protect this Arab regime). Yet their anger makes more sense once one realizes that many Arabs perceive their current regimes and their current boundaries as imposed upon a larger Arab nation by European and, later, American forces, forces intent on dividing and conquering in order to better exploit the oil resources of the area for Western consumption. The yearning for an undivided Arab nation throughout the Middle East is in part an aspiration to throw off the consequences of hundreds of years of colonialism—and many Arabs have been attracted to one or another charismatic Arab leader (from Nasser to Saddam) who has promised to stand up to the West (and to its coterie of Western-aligned Arab elites). No wonder, then, that many Arabs question the sudden indignation the world feels about the sanctity of national boundaries in the Arab world—boundaries that from their standpoint not only have no legitimacy but are merely the legacy of past oppression.

If one focuses one's attention primarily on this history of oppression, as some progressives are inclined to do, it's hard to justify sending people to die in the sands of the Middle East to reinstate the autocrats who ruled Kuwait, to defend the interests of American oil, or to protect the anti-Semitic and racist regime in Saudi Arabia.

Of course, many liberals recognize that another more serious principle is at stake: preserving some form of international order. Even if we acknowledge that every international border has been drawn by murder, pillage, robbery, or colonialist arrogance, at some point we want to put an end to that process and say, "No matter how borders were arrived at, let's freeze things now rather than continue a war of all against all in which any country can grab any other on the grounds of rectifying past wrongs." This is what was at stake when the United Nations was formed—the countries of the world decided to agree together to stop allowing the strong to gobble up the weak. And so, despite the U.S.'s long history of illegitimate interventions in the affairs of other countries, we at *Tikkun* and most liberals in the U.S. supported the initial steps that the U.S. took to stop Saddam Hussein's troops and to organize an international economic boycott.

Simultaneously, we called for a genuine internationalization of the response to the crisis. We did not mean that the U.S. should decide what to do and then line up a bunch of allies who would sign on, donate money, or in a few instances send token troop deployments. We meant that the U.S. should genuinely hand the problem over to the United Nations, push them to create a *real* international police force with *real* power to intervene in situations of this sort, and then let that United Nations body lead the struggle against Iraq. If this *had* been done, we would have created a precedent for a new world order in fact and not just in rhetoric. True internationalization would have powerfully tested the possibilities of overcoming the narrowly defined approaches to national sovereignty that have disfigured the twentieth century.

But creating a new world order requires something more than a focus on law and order. Two other things are essential: redistribution of wealth and the creation of a real sense of international solidarity and community. It's ridiculous to expect that those who have been exploited and who remain impoverished will get very excited about a new world order whose sole focus is to keep in place the current unfair distribution of the world's goodies. Calls for "law and order" on the international level are unlikely to be any more persuasive than they have been on the local level as long as many people perceive that the existing order is unfair. So if we want to build trust and solidarity among nations, we need a serious plan to rectify the historical and systematic plundering of the resources of underdeveloped countries by developed countries.

Second, and equally important, we need to build a positive ethos of international solidarity, a real sense that all of the world's peoples are "in it together." The ending of the cold war offers unique possibilities for building a different way of doing politics in the world. And developing a sense of community among peoples who had previously been antagonists or had shared little mutual understanding or common purpose would be a decisive and transformative step toward that new politics. We can create a new sense of solidarity by focusing our attention on shared problems. A worldwide offensive to save the planet from ecological destruction might be a useful vehicle. Another important step would be to move beyond Western chauvinism on the cultural and intellectual levels. We need to learn the languages, histories, and traditions of other cultures.

So, from the standpoint of progressive politics, the key criterion for international action today must be "Does it contribute to building the new kind of world order that is currently on the agenda?" Admittedly, such an order requires dealing with Saddam Hussein. But it may not require that we deal with him immediately, before we have taken the time to put in place the requisite mechanisms of international cooperation.

Once Bush put the multinational forces in place, and established the means for an international economic boycott—and in both cases, used the United Nations as a central part of the strategy—we no longer faced an immediate threat from Hussein. While some have feared that unless the U.S. found ways to provoke Saddam into an immediate fight we would lose the momentum of support not only from other countries, but also from the people of the U.S., there are many reasons *not* to rush into an immediate war (even if Saddam does give us the provocations needed to justify it). A war now would likely lend renewed prestige to the Pentagon, thereby undermining the forces working to reduce defense spending and redirect the potential "peace dividend" to badly needed social spending. A war might be long and costly—and it might unleash even more radical forces in the Arab world. And a war now might subvert the peace instincts of the U.S. population and make it more likely that the new world order would be one in which the U.S., as the one remaining superpower, could dominate the international arena and have its domination confirmed by a subservient United Nations.

So, although Saddam Hussein must be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons or poison gas delivery systems, it is possible to argue from the standpoint of progressive politics that once Saddam is contained, dealing with him and his aggression in Iraq should not dominate the international agenda. We should not allow a focus on him to prevent us from building a new world order and a new kind of international economic and ecological cooperativeness. There are other dictators and other aggressors and other occupations—Saddam, and the dismal current of world history he represents, need not provoke a return to the global war of all against all. War should be avoided if at all possible—and the possibilities for avoiding it should be given much greater attention than they have up to now. Let Saddam huff and puff all he wants about taking military action against the U.S. forces, the oil fields, even Israel—in fact, most progressives reason, he would be unlikely to take those actions if the U.S. does not send signals that it intends to take military action at an early date. With the Soviets indicating possible support for for military intervention and the UN tightening the noose by including shipments by air in the economic blockade, Saddam might provide the provocation the U.S. may be waiting for. But if military confrontation can be avoided, better that it should be. Better to postpone that date, if at all possible, because in the interim there is much to be accomplished that might be less likely should a war break out soon. That, at least, might be what I would have thought if I were approaching this issue solely from the perspective of progressive politics.

But on the other hand ... as a Jew deeply involved with Israel and its survival, I cannot look at this situation as though it was happening on some other planet. Saddam Hussein has made credible threats to burn half of Israel to the ground. He has shown himself capable of sending over a million Iraqis to their death in the war with Iran, and capable of genocidal gassing of his own nation's population. It is delusional to believe that Saddam Hussein would *not* attack Israel should he decide the conditions were ripe. Hussein may at moments be a clever and skillful tactician; his offer to put Bush on Iraqi television and his ability to make peace with Iran after years of warfare testify to this. But as both the war with Iran and the invasion of Kuwait also demonstrate, this is not a man who thinks out all the consequences of his action and comes to reasonable conclusions.

It is all too easy to imagine a scenario in which Iraq *does* withdraw from Kuwait, and the U.S. withdraws from Saudi Arabia (as the U.S. has promised both the Saudis and Gorbachev it will). Such a scenario might involve a military coup in Iraq that leaves in charge a new set of generals, with an agenda not wildly different from that of Hussein, or it might involve Saddam suddenly coming to his senses and realizing that he is not yet ready for a war against the superpowers (something that might be easier for him to handle once he develops his nuclear capabilities). In either case, Iraq would retain its chemical weapons, its delivery systems, and its ability to import technology to build nuclear weapons. After the U.S. troops are removed, Saddam would move troops into Jordan, threatening Israel. Israel would retaliate and a devastating war would break out, causing the deaths of tens of thousands of Israelis and many more Iraqis. The U.S. would probably not be willing to reintroduce troops immediately after withdrawing them from the region. We need only remember how quickly the U.S. wanted to forget about Lebanon once Reagan had withdrawn our troops—and the sigh of relief would be even deeper when Bush brought home a hundred thousand or more troops from the Middle East. Moreover, Israelis would be unlikely to ask for direct help until things were desperate and it was really too late for any extensive reinvolvement of U.S. troops. The U.S. would likely send military supplies and air support—but probably too little and too late. It would be difficult if not impossible to get the American troops back into the Middle East—particularly if they had faced actual combat in Kuwait. And other Arab countries, hoping to find viable ways to live with Iraq, would likely support aggressive action. In short, Israel would be more vulnerable than it would have been before the U.S. got involved in Kuwait.



And there are other scenarios, all with the common theme of Iraq trying to reestablish prestige lost in the encounter with the U.S. by striking out once again (as it has already done against Iran, then against the Kurds, then against Kuwait). The world will be in greater danger if Iraq, after having revealed what it is willing to do, is allowed to remain militarily intact. But given the kinds of weak responses coming from most of the world—e.g., the difficulties that Bush has had in getting Germany and Japan to donate substantial funds to pay for U.S. troops in the Gulf, and the willingness of many regimes to send food and medical supplies that will certainly weaken the embargo—it would be silly to imagine that leaving the whole business in the hands of the UN would lead to the Iraqi offensive military capacity being dismantled—at least not quickly enough to deflect a possible Iraqi strike against Israel.

So from the standpoint of Israeli security, there is little doubt in my mind that the United States should change its focus from the issue of withdrawal from Kuwait and to the issue of dismantling the Iraqi offensive military capacity. I mean by this that Iraq's capacities for nuclear and chemical weapons and potential missile delivery systems—plus the key elements in the Iraqi military machinery that would make it possible for Hussein to fight a war with Israel—must be incapacitated in a way that prevents their being rebuilt in the next twenty years. If such steps must be taken, it seems reasonable that the U.S., France, Soviet Union, and other members of the international community should take the primary military risks, rather than Israel—after all, they, *not* Israel, stupidly armed and trained Iraqi forces in the past decade.

When I first came to see what was compelling about this picture, I tried to avoid it, using a few arguments that soon seemed flat. For example, I warned myself that a U.S. military intervention would increase the likelihood of an Iraqi strike against Israel as a way of widening the conflict by appealing to anti-Israel sentiments in the Arab world. But since I could easily see that Israel would likely face a strike in any event, it seemed clear to me that Israel would do much better to face a war *now,* with the U.S. clearly involved, rather than later, when the U.S. had largely withdrawn from the region.

I told myself that any line of thinking that might lead me to support a potentially violent intervention necessarily contradicted my abhorrence of violence. But the pictures of Saddam's genocide of the Kurds remained too powerful in my mind for me to ignore the obvious fact that should Iraq remain militarily powerful

it will inevitably acquire instruments of mass destruction that will be used against my people. I have read a recent interview with an East German scientist, Professor Karlheinz Lohs, who had been involved in discussions with the Iraqis about chemical warfare. When he lectured to Iraqi generals, one said to him *explicitly* that they hoped to use gas against Israel, and they wanted his advice because "you Germans know a lot about gassing Jews." From my standpoint, this century ought not to see another Jew gassed or burned or victim of homicidal dictators. And if that means using force, then that is what we should use.

By this point I was almost ready to say goodbye to the entire noninterventionist Left. After all, I never really supported "nonintervention" in principle. I had always felt that it was immoral on some deeper level. It was, for example, appropriate to take part in World War II. In fact I believed that it was immoral for the world *not* to intervene earlier, when Jews were being sent to concentration camps, even though from a formal standpoint Germany could have argued that the repression of German Jews was strictly an *internal* affair. Similarly, I've advocated in the pages of *Tikkun* that the U.S. intervene on the side of the ANC in South Africa. My anti-interventionism had been situational: given the causes for which the U.S. would likely intervene, I wanted the U.S. to stop intervening.

But if thinking of Jewish interests forced me to part ways with the knee-jerk noninterventionists of some corners of the Left, it did not force me to abandon much else. The primary interest of the Jewish people is to live in a world of peace and justice that allows us to be ourselves and to contribute to the larger community of nations. Far from being at variance with progressive politics, this leads directly to taking seriously the needs of others, including the needs of Arabs and Palestinians. In fact, Israel would be far more secure if the peoples of the Middle East were no longer subject to various oppressive regimes, be they the totalitarian dictatorships of Saddam Hussein, Qaddafi, and Assad, or be they the monarchies and emirates of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait. No one seriously can deny the racism and anti-Semitic ideologies that flourish in the Arab states. Yet much of that racism gains popularity and support as an outlet for anger against domestic oppression. If the long legacy of colonialism and imperial exploitation could be undone, the Arabs would be much safer neighbors for Israel. Ironically, then, though it is in Israel's interests to dismantle Iraq's offensive military capacity (let's call it the IOMC for short), it is also in Israel's interests to see a redistribution of the world's resources and power so as to vitiate the legitimate anger now being cynically manipulated into racist and anti-Semitic channels by various Middle Eastern ruling elites.

President Bush has defined the issues in a way that corresponds to American economic interests, and nothing more. Conservatives in the Jewish world may like to delude themselves into believing that Bush secretly cares about Israel and is doing what he can to help them, but his public actions are much more clearly understandable as a response to the needs of American oil interests—interests which rarely aid the Jews. As I have argued here, Jewish interests will not be served either by merely forcing the Iraqis out of Kuwait or by restoring Kuwait's discredited Emirate. Dismantling the IOMC is the one reasonable military goal from the standpoint of Israeli interests, but it is not Bush's goal.

So let me make this clear: if the U.S. responds to some real or fantasized provocation by invading Kuwait with ground troops, with the aim of pushing out the Iraqi troops and restoring the Emir, I would not support that kind of military struggle. Though Bush has shown some minimal concern about the IOMC, he has made it appear that his major concerns are really oil and restoring the Emir—concerns not adequate, in my estimation, to justify any further escalation of the struggle. I can understand why some liberals would support even that limited war to free Kuwait, reestablish the Emir, and protect Western oil supplies: doing so would set an important precedent for a new world order that quickly punishes international aggression. But I believe that such a war, sure to be cheered on by the Arab elites, would be for the Arab masses another humiliating imposition from the outside, and hence would make it more likely that they would soon seek to strike out against Israel once the conflict's limited goals had been achieved and Western troops withdrawn. Many people will have died, yet the IOMC would remain in place and the underlying grievances of many Arabs would have only been intensified—who but British imperialists chose the Emir and his family in the first place? While some part of the IOMC would likely be destroyed anyway in such a war, the Iraqi military could preserve its remaining parts by withdrawing from Kuwait. And that would leave the region just as unstable as ever.

Israeli interests dictate a dismantling of the IOMC. But given the realities of world politics at this moment and given America's desire to retain its support from the Arab states that have aligned with it in opposing Iraq, how could we possibly imagine that taking the necessary military steps against Iraq's offensive military capacity would not lead to a serious erosion of the international support Bush has so carefully cultivated? Moreover, wouldn't a broader intervention

against the IOMC risk Arab rebellions against the very elites in the "moderate" Arab states that are now our allies?

Bush's answer to these kinds of questions is to narrow the goals of his policy to restoring the Emir of Kuwait. But I draw an opposite conclusion: to make sense of *any* level of American intervention in the Middle East, Bush must have a policy that speaks to some of the legitimate needs of the Arab masses. And that leads us straight to the Palestinians.

I know full well that Arab elites have cynically used the issue of the Palestinians as a way of drumming up anti-Semitism among the Arab masses—always an effective way for leaders to draw attention away from their own shortcomings. But I also know that there is something deeply symbolic to many Arabs about the oppression of the Palestinian people. Many feel that the Palestinian experience has been a sort of object study in the kind of exploitation that the entire region has suffered at the hands of the Turks, the French, the British, and finally the Americans—with the added, bracing awareness that, in addition, the Palestinians were forced into exile.

I've argued before in *Tikkun* that this picture is wildly distorted to the extent that it ignores the history of Arab oppression against Jews, the illegitimate opposition of Arabs to the Jewish minority in Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century, their outrageous efforts to keep Jews from immigrating to Palestine from Europe during World War II, and the incredible arrogance and stupidity that led Palestinian leaders to reject a compromise that would have granted them their own state in 1947. But as Benny Morris and other Israeli historians have also demonstrated in *Tikkun,* there's something legitimate about Arab outrage at what happened to the Palestinians, and it is that legitimate grievance that helps fuel current Arab antagonism to Israel and the U.S. Israel is to some the symbol of a long history in which people perceived as outsiders divided up the Arab nation into a series of artificial states, took part of their land, and promoted ruling elites who would use the resources of the area to enrich themselves as they served Western interests.

It is, as I've suggested, an unfair and in some ways self-deluding picture. But it is nevertheless a compelling picture to many of the Arab masses who today cheer on Saddam Hussein because in some way he speaks to deep and legitimate longings for a very different kind of world. As *Tikkun* has argued in its analysis of the rise of the American Right, the way to deal with this kind of situation is to acknowledge what are legitimate human needs, and then to find a more rational and moral way to satisfy them—some solution that allows us to move these people away from the demagogues and fanatics who preach destructive means to achieve partially legitimate ends. In this case, the legitimate part of the picture is this: there are one and a half million people living under Israeli military occupation who have demonstrated repeatedly that they demand freedom and self-determination. While that right cannot be granted in a manner that might threaten Israel, a way can and must be found to accommodate those desires. In so doing, we weaken the hands of the demagogues who can use the real suffering of the Palestinians to justify almost any outrageous action.

The U.S. already realizes that if it is going to remain involved in the Middle East even long enough to achieve its limited aim of restoring the Emir, it's going to have to help to stabilize friendly regimes. I think this can be accomplished if the U.S. presents an approach to the region that speaks to the underlying needs that stir the Arab people. Instead, Bush has chosen to give the elites more arms, a solution that is both stupid and threatening to Israel. I am appalled at the willingness of the Israel lobby in the U.S. to go along with any part of the arms sales to the Saudis, purportedly so the Saudis can defend themselves against Iraq. If the Saudis could defend themselves, they wouldn't need a hundred thousand American troops. Those arms are meant more to crush domestic dissent than to offset what would still be an unstoppable force should Iraq decide to invade once the U.S. was no longer there. And those



arms may well be turned against Israel, either by the Arab elites themselves or by militants who come to power in the wake of Arab outrage at the willingness of their elites to cooperate with U.S. imperialism.

A much more plausible and effective strategy is to arm those elites with something more effective: gains that actually speak to the underlying grievances of the Arab masses. And one way to do that would be for the U.S. to insist, as a condition of its willingness to destroy the IOMC, that Israel agree to create a demilitarized Palestinian state.

Understandably, given the way the issues have been currently defined, many Israelis resist *any* linkage on these issues. The right-wingers resist because they are ideologically opposed to any path that might end in ceding land for peace. The peace-movement people—many of them ideological Zionists who are proud of Israel's independence and her ability to defend herself—resist because they think it is demeaning to Israel to have to acknowledge a need for outside help. Nevertheless, this kind of linkage *is* in Israel's best interests, not only because the U.S. could then justify destroying the IOMC, but also because, as we have extensively argued in these pages, it is in Israel's *interests*. And the realpolitik argument is overwhelming: if the American president is to risk American lives to dismantle the Iraqi military, then Israel too must be prepared to offer something of great seriousness. To define the issues more narrowly in ways that don't get to the Palestinian issue will be to give too many cards to Saddam Hussein and other radicals in the area—and this would not be in the interests of either the U.S. or Israel.

Some "realists" have argued against any policy that links U.S. policy on Iraq with the Palestinian issue. They fear that in so doing we would give Saddam a victory, a reward for his aggression. That argument has some plausibility if the linkage being discussed is between Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. But it seems less compelling if the trade brings Israel the destruction or dismantling of its most serious military adversary's offensive military capacity. Left without this kind of military capability, Saddam could posture for as long as he wants—he would no longer be a serious threat to anyone in the region.

Moreover, linkage leads to a result that will well serve Israeli interests and the interests of justice and world peace. We have repeatedly argued in *Tikkun* that the only Palestinian state we would support would be totally demilitarized. Israel would be given a security zone on the borders of the Palestinian state and the surrounding Arab states with sufficient territory to station all the troops and hardware that it would feel it needed to defend itself from other Arab states. Furthermore, the borders would be policed and the demilitarization overseen, at first by American troops, and eventually by an international force along the lines we have proposed above. Many Israeli generals and military experts testify that such a Palestinian state would actually enhance Israeli security, and it would give Palestinians a stake in the region that might temper their current enthusiasm for the most extremist elements in the Arab world.

It is no surprise to us that Palestinians have been attracted to Saddam Hussein or whoever else is around to stand up to the U.S. and Israel, given the repeated rebuffs their calls for direct negotiations have received from the Shamir government. While aligning themselves with Hussein has been incredibly stupid, and while it has alienated them from the Israeli peace movement and seriously damaged their support in Israel, we should not be astonished to see an oppressed group side with the enemy of its enemy. Israeli doves who reacted with shock simply reveal their naiveté. The fact is that no one should have ever based their support for a Palestinian state on the supposition that Palestinians were good guys at heart. Rather, that support should be based on two things: (1) the intrinsic right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination, a right that is as valid as the same right for the Jewish people or any other people, and (2) the ability to devise a way to satisfy that right without endangering the right of the Jewish people to its own national self-determination—hence the necessity of a *demilitarization* of any Palestinian state. Any arrangement that depended on trust at this historical moment would be a mistake—what is necessary, instead, are military arrangements that firmly protect Israel and ensure full demilitarization. And although the actual needs of such a state would likely push it to ally with Israel economically, within a fully demilitarized Palestinian state it should make no difference to us or to Israelis if every day tens of thousands of Palestinians march around with pictures of Hussein or have Arafat as their leader or have diplomats in the UN who side with Israel's enemies—as long as the demilitarization is powerfully enforced for generations to come.

Israel faces a real and serious danger from Iraq and no serious danger from a demilitarized Palestinian state. It would be foolish and self-destructive for Israel to refuse a deal that gave the U.S. the primary role in dismantling the Iraqi threat in exchange for the creation of the Palestinian state. But if the U.S. is to risk its troops and its prestige in an operation that might be seen by many as decisively in Israel's interests, it has every right to demand a quid pro quo that runs against

Israeli politics but not against Israeli interests.

Yet Israel is still likely to resist this demand as long as the Arab states of the region remain hostile. Therefore, we need a third component in this strategy. The U.S. must insist that all the Arab states make peace with Israel in exchange for the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state. While Arab regimes would be wary that such a peace might inflame the Arab masses and kindle a new enthusiasm for Iraq, they could nevertheless justify such an agreement if it did in fact provide for the creation of a Palestinian state and the return of Palestinian refugees to the West Bank. By showing the Arab masses that they had been able to accomplish something real, as opposed to Saddam Hussein who had been able to generate nothing but rhetoric and suffering for his people, the Arab states could justify acceding to this kind of deal. Moreover, they have themselves been calling for concerted military action against Hussein and would greatly benefit from U.S. intervention designed to dismantle the IOMC. But they must expect that this protection comes at a price: the willingness to make peace with Israel if Israel accedes to a demilitarized Palestinian state.

By framing the issue in terms of Jewish interests, while trying to deal with the realpolitik needs of America, I am ironically led to a comprehensive plan for the Middle East. Moreover, let me now explain why this plan doesn't *necessarily* lead to a military escalation.

The threat of military intervention—in the form of massive air strikes—in order to dismantle the IOMC must be central to this plan. But the actual intervention is not central. In fact, there are many other ways that this might be achieved. Once the U.S. accepts the comprehensive plan as the goal of its activity, it can follow other steps first. Chief among these should be the willingness to accept Gorbachev's proposal for an international conference on the Middle East aimed at arriving at a satisfactory resolution of the region's problems. Such a conference should be held immediately and should include Iraq as one of its participants. While there is of course the danger that Saddam would use this conference to grandstand and drive wedges between the U.S. and its allies, by this point Saddam's credibility in world politics is rather low. The U.S. should be clear that it would resort to force if it cannot dismantle the IOMC by peaceable means—and at the same time use such an international conference to propose the three-part plan I've outlined here: dismantling the IOMC, a demilitarized Palestinian state, and peace between Israel and the Arab states.

Imagine if through such a conference Saddam agreed to the dismantling of the IOMC in exchange for a general solution to the Middle East's problems, including peace treaties with Israel and a demilitarized Palestinian state. What would be so bad about this kind of linkage? Some argue that just as he showed tactical flexibility in making peace with Iran, so Hussein might also be willing to yield at an international conference, if in so doing he could show himself to be the true hero who helped create a Palestinian state. Giving him that prestige would be a terrible mistake if he still had the IOMC intact; it would be much less of a risk if it had been permanently dismantled. Personally, I think it unlikely that he *would* accept such a deal. More likely, the international conference would be the arena in which our three-part program could be agreed upon by most of the participants, to be followed, unfortunately, by the necessary use of force to dismantle the IOMC.

But if I'm wrong and Saddam proves more flexible, then the plan outlined here gives him the room to maneuver to stay in power in Iraq. By defining the issue in terms of nonproliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons and relevant delivery systems, plus other instruments to wage aggressive war, we are allowing for the possibility that a significantly declawed Saddam could stay in power. One reason the war with Iran lasted so long is that the Iranians defined the elimination of Saddam as a major war aim—and to prevent that, Saddam was willing to fight to the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. We don't need that. Moreover, Iraq might be just as dangerous to us and to Israel if Saddam were overthrown by a clique of officers who shared his worldview, retained their military power, but made a temporary strategic withdrawal from Kuwait. Saddam is an evil man, and let us hope he will be overthrown by his own people—but the appropriate goal of our policy is not his overthrow but the dismantling of the IOMC so that Iraq will no longer be a threat regardless of who comes to power.

There's another good reason for an international conference: it raises the right set of issues by thinking in terms of a comprehensive solution rather than the kind of partial and misguided one that would come out of the war Bush has planned. However disgusting we may find the moral perversity of a murderer like Saddam Hussein, we must also always keep in mind the larger historical context that made a man like him possible—the pervasive sense of so many in the Middle East that they were being exploited by Western interests and by local Arab allies of those interests. If we don't want to see yet more wars in the Middle East (e.g., between Israel and Syria or Israel and the newly U.S.-armed Saudi Arabia), this is the time to seek a comprehensive solution. As long as we are clear that a central part of such a solution must be

a dismantling of the IOMC, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by participating in an international conference. And if in the process Israel is pushed toward accepting a demilitarized Palestinian state, all the better—as long as that state's demilitarization is rigidly guaranteed, as long as there is *real* peace with the Arab states, as long as there is a cessation of all new arms deliveries to the region (including those from the U.S.), and as long as none of this takes place without a firm commitment by the U.S. and all other relevant states to take all necessary military steps to dismantle the IOMC and prevent any further proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons in the region.

Of course, it is also possible that an international conference would not work, and that any attempt to have the United Nations take an active role in this process would founder on the stored-up anti-Americanism stemming from decades of American imperial and economic arrogance in the world. In that case, having tried to do its best to use this moment to validate international processes, the U.S. would once again be forced to consider unilateral military intervention. If the U.S. were willing to couple this intervention with the other two parts of the program as outlined, I believe such intervention would be accepted as legitimate and would have largely beneficial consequences, though it would also necessarily involve suffering and death.

I find myself trembling with disbelief that I could have written that last sentence. I hate violence and I believe that it is almost never justified. I am aware that once we begin a military struggle with Iraq we risk unpredictable consequences, including the possible whittling away of the peace dividend (though we should fight against *that* linkage) and the possible recrediting of American militarism. But I am not an absolute pacifist—there are moments when it is justified for an individual or a country to act in self-defense. I wish that Saddam Hussein were not threatening the world in general and Israel in particular with his willingness to use chemical and possibly nuclear weapons to achieve domination in the Middle East. But given his military aggression, and his very credible threat to the existence of the State of Israel, this is a moment that justifies the use of force. I believe that failure to accomplish this dismantling of the Iraqi threat will lead to a *greater* loss of life in the near future.

When I put it this way I no longer feel that my inclination to define the issues as I have done is primarily a consequence of my Jewishness. Rather, my being Jewish has forced me to look at the consequences of Saddam Hussein more seriously than most progressives and left-wingers in Europe and the United States have had to do. In fact, it seems to be one of the recurring themes of Jewish history that we are frequently situated in places where we get the first brunt of oppressive regimes. Hence the treatment of the Jews is often a good litmus test for the humanity and decency of any given political or social reality.

Nevertheless, I am left with a deep uneasiness, the product of the anti-violence ethos of the Jewish people, and of the pacifist aspirations I share with most people on the Left. I can't rejoice at any strategy that ultimately might lead to bloodshed. I know that not choosing is also a choice, and that faced with the Saddam Husseins of the world one must either act or be annihilated. I am all too aware of those Jewish idealists who thought that they could stop Hitler by counting on the good instincts of the European working class rather than on the self-organization and military strength of the Jewish people. But these arguments are too easily thrown around to justify every use of force by the Israeli government, every act of oppression against Palestinians, every compromise with principles. Still, the fact that many right-wing Jews have cried "wolf" too frequently is no proof that there is no wolf!

I've outlined a plan here that might open the door to a much wider settlement of the issues of the Middle East. I think it critical that we in the peace movement insist that Bush move beyond his narrow focus, in fact reject that focus altogether, and broaden the issues in ways that I've tried to do here. It is precisely by linking the abiding struggles of the region with strategies that rely on true international cooperation that we can hope to unite specifically Jewish interests with the wider agendas of liberals and progressives. Though some of my strategy starts from the consideration of what is best for Israel, it leads me to a position that is actually also best for the Arabs and—in its focus on preventing Saddam from obtaining nuclear and chemical weapons—best for the entire world. Yet I remain deeply pained and unsettled by any strategy that, even if only at the last moment of a considerable process that I've outlined above, depends on the credibility of its threat of a massive military escalation through an air war.

It's not hard to detect the glee that some of the "toughness *über alles*" crowd are feeling now that they have a cause that has made even someone like me support the possibility of military escalation. Yet for me this is a very sad moment. As a Jew, I believe that every human being, including every Iraqi, is created in the image of the divine, and that it is our absolute obligation to honor and cherish and sanctify human life. I feel conflicted and troubled. I share some of the optimism of those who talk about the possibilities of creating a new world order. I certainly reject any of the explanatory theses that try to talk about Saddam Hus-

sein as a proof of the intractability of evil in the world—because although I think he *is* evil, I think this kind of evil is more plausibly explained by the history of human suffering, pain, and oppression. But what a drag to have to live at a time when that evil still thrives, still has the possibility of causing immense destructiveness, and still forces people who want to live a life of love and caring to contemplate the necessity of violence.

But if this does become necessary, at the very least we should do everything in our power to ensure that the violence is not for the sake of the misguided goals that President Bush has articulated, but for a much wider program of social reconstruction that the world so badly needs. There may be a necessary war that eventually must be fought, but the war that Bush is leading us into is the wrong war, for the wrong reasons, and will only reproduce the very conditions that have led to these problems in the first place. Without this kind of nuanced and principled dissent, we may be heading down a path like that of the First World War, which promised instant gratification but in fact ensured the occurrence of future wars. Then, too, we were told that *after* the war we would work out all the details of how to make the world safe for democracy, but first we must fight. Now we are told first to fight the war, then to worry about the kind of world that would result. But precisely by insisting on no linkage and a narrowing of the issues, Bush's strategy sets up the conditions that will lead to future turmoil and more wars in the next twenty years. After that war, we will once again be asking whether it was worth all the pain and sorrow. Saddam Hussein must be stopped—but he must be stopped in a way that at least makes it likely that we will not just get more of the same afterwards. And on that point the interests of Jews and the ideology of liberals should coincide. □

Responses

Arthur Waskow

The choice is not between being Liberal and being Jewish. The traditions of both liberalism and Judaism—traditions, admittedly, that both groups often ignore—maintain that, since military force kills, mangles, and mutilates soldiers and civilians alike, it is to be used only as the absolute last resort. The traditions agree that one should use the minimum force absolutely required to achieve absolutely vital ends, and only if the ends one can reasonably hope to attain justify the death and destruction war brings.

The issue is not intervention versus nonintervention. The issue is: what kind of intervention?

One choice is for one or two countries to try to destroy the Iraqi offensive military capability. We should keep in mind that to destroy a military *capability* means the destruction not just of armies and weapons, or of an abstraction denoted by the initials IOMC. It also means destroying factories, rail lines, universities and the people in them. A society, in fact. And we should bear in mind that it may well entail not just a week or a month of raids, but a long, bloody, and very expensive war, destructive to the attacker as well as the attacked.

Another choice might be to mobilize multilateral action and to strengthen international institutions—especially the UN. This could be done not only to prevent Saddam Hussein from conquering Saudi Arabia, not only to force him to withdraw from Kuwait, but also to prevent him from developing nuclear weapons and effective delivery systems, and to defang his chemical weaponry.

The broader the global coalition to do this, the less necessary it will be to use indiscriminate military force—let alone a society-destroying attack—and the more likely that economic, political, and pinpoint military action can work. It will take patience and unremitting attention, but these are neither as expensive nor as dangerous as protracted war.

It is not possible to make both these choices at the same time. Let us explore the meaning of both paths.

Path A: U.S. air attack on large parts of Iraqi society and possibly ground occupation. (Remember, strategic bombing did not break the will of England or Germany in World War II or of Vietnam during the war there.) Four responses to such action seem likely enough *possibilities* that we should think twice, thrice, about other approaches. (It is always

Arthur Waskow is director of the Shalom Center and a member of the editorial board of Tikkun.

a danger to play "one-person chess," as though no one else should take part in this dangerous game.)

1. Horror and rage in large parts of the Arab world that until now have sided with the U.S. (and covertly with Israel) result in the collapse of Jordan as a buffer state, and the Egyptian government's abandonment of Camp David. If Israel responds to that by invading Jordan (and reoccupying the Sinai if Egypt abandons the Camp David peace treaty), what has been accomplished but tripling the intifada and shattering the ability of Israeli society to absorb the potential Russian aliya?

2. Sabotage and bombing of Saudi and other oil fields send world oil prices through the roof. Inflation and depression deeply damage the U.S. and world economy.

3. Japan, the Soviet Union, and large parts of Europe refuse to support U.S. government policy. Optimistic new efforts to reinvigorate the UN collapse, and it fails to become an effective body for preventing military aggression, nuclear proliferation, and destruction of the global environment. The U.S. gets left holding the bill of blood and money—perhaps with Israel as its only real ally.

4. The U.S. finds it impossible to cut its military budget. Mired in a ground war in Iraq, it is unable to shift money to hiring teachers, preventing drug addiction, paying for decent health care, cleaning up its poison dumps, retooling its transport to prevent air pollution and global warming. A large part of the American public becomes alienated from government policy. (One hardly needs to note who gets blamed.)

Might many of these things happen anyway if Hussein, as he has threatened, responds to a growing suffocation of the Iraqi economy by destroying oil wells and attacking Israel? Possibly—although his threats may well also be a bluff—but at absolute worst, if he does so he will face a world unified behind a policy all have agreed upon.

If the risks described above seem dire enough to examine another policy, what could that be?

Path B would focus on strengthening the institutions of "one earth" that have begun to grow so astonishingly in the wake of the end of the cold war and the invasion of Kuwait.

- It would pursue the economic blockade of Iraq under a fuller UN mandate, move step by step to put the allied forces under UN command, reduce U.S. troop numbers as other national units become effective on the front, use only such pinpoint military measures, as stopping ships, etc.
- It would press the UN to do everything necessary —registration of scientists and engineers, inspection of cargoes—to prevent the Iraqis from developing nuclear weapons and to bring them to dismantle their chemical weapons.
- It would, as Israel has proposed in the past, try to turn the Middle East into a nuclear weapons-free zone, with thorough inspection and enforcement.

How the U.S. deals with the Iraq crisis may well shape the direction of the next generation in world politics and at home, just as the Russian-American collision in Europe between 1945 and 1949 shaped forty years of cold war.

The Iraq crisis could prompt us to take the next steps toward "one earth," and to deal with enormous problems in American economic, environmental, urban, and racial-ethnic life. Or it could become an excuse to return to swollen military budgets, rotting cities, disintegrating health systems, declining education, and even more polluted earth, air, and water.

Let us choose with that fusion of street smarts and holy wisdom that our forebears called *seichel*. □

Peter Gabel

I have been in at least a dozen conversations in which people have tried to talk about Iraq, only to fall, after a few vague attempts at taking a position, into an awkward silence. In part, the silence results from our not really knowing much about the history or meaning of inter-Arab conflicts in the Middle East. But at a deeper level, I sense in myself and almost everyone else a feeling that we just cannot bear to get into an old-style, rationalistic, geopolitical discussion about yet another crazy, dangerous world situation no matter how serious it actually is. For most ordinary people, especially for those of us who think of ourselves as "political," it's slightly embarrassing and even shameful to not want to think about something that could involve the death of thousands of people. For Jews, the situation is even worse, since we know for a fact that Israel and Israelis are facing an extreme and real danger. Yet I believe there is something profoundly right and even hopeful about the paralysis that surrounds this issue.

What is right and hopeful is that many people simply no longer believe that any complex, human situation

Peter Gabel is president of New College of California and associate editor of Tikkun.

involving complex cultural and historical distortions in the consciousness of millions of people can be analyzed or solved or even "reached" by thinking about it in *any* of the ways we are familiar with. From military intervention (lots of people killed; increased fanaticism among Islamic fundamentalists; the "emir" restored to power), to principled nonintervention (Hussein, poisoner of 30,000 Kurds in his own country, becomes some kind of hero for standing up for God against Satan; refugees wander around the desert starving to death; Israel finds itself in still graver danger, which in turn strengthens the Israeli Right, increases the severity of the occupation, and drives Palestinians further toward fantasies of a resurgent and violent pan-Arab nationalism), to a long series of other variations that assume there is some discrete set of acts that will produce some discrete set of effects—none of these so-called "options" advanced by rationalistic policy analysts addresses the essential craziness and alienation and distortion in human interrelatedness that is the problem in the first place. I think more and more people are beginning to feel (maybe more women than men, but many men too) that you just can't get there from here and that it's actually better for their own souls and for the world to refuse to participate in Iraq-analysis until some new and more emotionally plausible way of thinking comes into being.

My own feeling is that this new way of thinking must be intuitive and aimed at creating cultural change rather than strategic (or "analytical") and aimed at directly reorganizing power relations. In the case of Iraq and the Middle East generally, this means that we should try to intuitively grasp the directions and intensity of both the positive and negative tendencies in world-historical consciousness at this precise moment as these tendencies weigh upon and embody the present crisis. We then need to take practical and symbolic steps that might contain the drift toward craziness and war while accentuating the drift toward sanity and peace. I use the word "drift" to describe these tendencies because they are diffuse and contradictory movements of consciousness which exist both within and across all of the cultures implicated in the conflict. They are also drifts in that they move slowly, precisely because they are in contradiction—opposing forces joining in the cultural DNA of each person and rotating, via reciprocal internalization, through small and large groups, through each subculture and (owing to institutions like the UN and television) increasingly through the world itself as a single community.

Intervention that takes this form of cultural containment and accentuation cannot proceed by a thought-process that engages obsessively with some discrete objective ("Hussein must withdraw from Kuwait!"). For this kind of instrumental thinking fuses our being to an idea in a way that suppresses our ability to comprehend and alleviate the "stress" produced by the contradictory tendencies I have outlined here. It may be true that Hussein must withdraw from Kuwait, but this objective must, if possible, be achieved by steps designed to "thaw out" rather than intensify the distorted nationalism, ethnic hatred, and religious fanaticism that constitute Hussein's symbolic power. We need to cultivate a way of thinking that is distanced enough to allow us to encompass, through a kind of perpetual double-awareness, the contradictory tendencies that shape the meaning of every aspect of the situation in the Middle East, but which still allows us enough direct engagement to intuit action-steps that "lean in" to the situation so as to foster the tendency toward sanity and peace.

My sense is that the single most powerful symbolic source of peace-consciousness is the patient attitude Gorbachev has demonstrated in world politics over what is now a very long period of time. For this reason, I think Michael Lerner is right to call for an immediate acceptance of Gorbachev's proposal for an international conference aimed at resolving the problems of the Middle East as a whole. From the perspective that I have outlined, the principal virtue of immediate acceptance of the Gorbachev proposal is that it would instantly, long before any conference actually takes place, shift world consciousness to a level of reflection on the Middle East that can encompass the contradictory historical forces that have produced the current crisis. Sustaining this level of reflection means comprehending (among other things) the historical reality of colonialism; the partial legitimacy of existing national boundaries irrespective of their origins; the practical reality of the West's dependence on oil from the Persian Gulf, the legitimate need of all the peoples of the Middle East—including Israeli Jews, the Palestinians, and the Arab masses—for a sense of cultural dignity and economic security. In this sense, movement toward an international conference might succeed in disengaging world thought from the dangerous "heat" of such images as violent rocket attacks on Iraqi military installations, the devastation of Israel, the threat of poison gas, the mass murder of American and Iraqi nineteen-year olds—and Kuwait itself as the mythological location for the latest hallucination of Armageddon, whether the Western version (a secular fantasy based on the protection of "our" interests against the new Hitler) or the Arab version (a religious fantasy of God versus Satan). In addition, by rallying to a true internationalist initiative such as Gorbachev's conference, we would symbolically identify the United Nations with the hope of bringing into being a compassionate, transnational conscience that

seeks to confirm and rectify the historical pain felt by all the peoples of the Middle East. This is a very different image of the UN from its current one as (at worst) a hopelessly pluralist battleground for every conceivable national interest, and (at best) a potential peace-keeping force that works solely to contain existing international antagonisms.

But to emphasize what is different about the kind of cultural or consciousness-based approach I am proposing, I would say that such a conference should not be proposed jointly by Bush and Gorbachev, nor by the UN as such, but rather by Western, Arab, and, ideally, Israeli leaders (most likely leaders of the Labor party or the Israeli peace movement) who would do so explicitly in Gorbachev's name and follow Gorbachev's lead. A Bush-Gorbachev initiative would reinforce the image of "the superpowers dictating the resolution of inter-Arab affairs," which is precisely an image that must be contained and gradually dissolved. A UN initiative, while it makes symbolic sense in the abstract, would at this point be too disembodied to prevent sectarian squabbles among nation-states over the real, underlying motives of such a conference, and over which representatives would play what role. What is needed is an antiwar, cross-cultural deference to a suggestion made by the person whose presence and perspective have done more to improve the prospect for world peace than virtually any leader of this century. Such a common act of deference, in spite of appearing to "lower" Bush's world status in relation to Gorbachev and to "level" his hierarchical position in relation to Arab leaders or the leaders of the Israeli peace movement, would almost certainly strengthen the moral credibility of the U.S., strengthen Gorbachev's anti-nationalist influence within the USSR, and perhaps provide some opening for the Israeli peace movement to pose an effective moral challenge to the present, seemingly invincible realism of the Israeli Right.

Perhaps this whole approach seems too much like new-age utopianism, with its emphasis on trying to link real-world actions to drifts in world consciousness. As I write these words on September 30, they certainly do not seem relevant to what is actually happening in the Middle East, as "Washington Begins Talking of Early War with Iraq" (to quote today's *San Francisco Chronicle* headline) and Iraq continues to construct poison gas facilities in southern Kuwait. But as you think about what has actually happened when you read this a month or two from now, consider the frankly absurd nature of the postmodern cultural diplomacy that went on during August and September. Bush appeared on Iraqi TV; Hussein appeared on American TV; each denounced the other in apocalyptic terms. All this posturing seemed to generate nothing more than increased cookie shipments to young and confused boys in Saudi Arabia on the American side and increasingly frenzied, anti-Satan rallies among the Arab masses on the Iraqi side. Think of how baffled and detached you felt from the entire situation at that time. Bush and Hussein evidently thought that influencing "world consciousness" was very important, judging from the means they used to try to shape public perception of whatever was about to occur. Yet they and other international leaders were incapable of thinking about the situation in the Middle East in a way that might have moved you and millions of other people to try to prevent the meaningless catastrophe that by now may well have already taken place. If the forces of peace and sanity had been able to grasp the situation with true cultural and psychological depth, isn't it possible or even probable that things could have been otherwise? Or if at the time you read this the catastrophe has not yet happened, might not a new way of thinking and intervening right now make such a catastrophe much less likely and make hope for a slowly developing Middle Eastern *tikkun* more realistic? □

Erwin Knoll

If it is our goal to heal, repair, and transform the world—to fashion a New World Order, in George Bush's ominously evocative phrase—we must begin by rejecting, emphatically and unequivocally, the scourge of militarism that has brought the world to its present sorry pass. We cannot say that we are for peace, but ... or, we are for peace, except ... or, we are for peace, unless.... If we are not for peace, we are for war.

We have been told that Saddam Hussein is a brutal despot, an aggressor, a "new Hitler." He is all that and more, but he is by no means the only national leader who fits those descriptions. Any casual newspaper reader can think of a dozen of Hussein's ilk who preside over governments on every continent in every corner of the globe. Most of these Hitlers, new or old, are allies of the U.S. government. Many were brought to power with the assistance or connivance of the United States. One or another of them can be seen in almost any month, grinning next to the President during a photo opportunity on the White House lawn.

Erwin Knoll is editor of The Progressive.

If we are to commit American military forces every time one of these tyrants threatens to commit an act of aggression, the United States will have its work cut out for it until the end of time, or until the effort bankrupts our economy and paralyzes our political system. For better or worse, neither of these scenarios is terribly remote. The Bush administration's solution to the problem of funding its Persian Gulf adventure—hiring out young Americans to serve as mercenaries for our affluent but oil-hungry "allies"—isn't likely to have much long-term appeal, especially when casualties start coming home in body bags.

If the United States can't (and of course it shouldn't) continue to play the role of world policeman, what can it do? It can begin to set a new standard for the world by abandoning aggression as a norm of international affairs. When it comes to the threat of mass annihilation, the United States has no moral force to pull rank on Saddam Hussein's Iraq—or on any other nation. If the United States were to renounce its nuclear arsenal now that the cold war has ended, it would be in a position to press for worldwide elimination of nuclear terrorism. Now *that* would be a New World Order worth talking about.

If our concern is for Israel's safety and security, the commitment of U.S. troops to the Persian Gulf must be counted a calamity. Israel is in greater danger today than it has been since it came into being. Some of Israel's bitterest enemies—Hafez al-Assad of Syria, for example—are now being warmly embraced as American allies. Saudi Arabia is to receive more than $20 billion worth of U.S. weaponry, the greatest transfer of arms in human history. It is more likely than ever that one or another of the Arab states—most probably Iraq—will seek to resolve the present crisis by lashing out at Israel. But regardless of how the present crisis does get resolved, a shooting war—*any* shooting war—will have catastrophic consequences for Israel.

The most serious consequence for Israel, however, already seems to be here: The arrival of U.S. troops can't help but perpetuate a climate of murderous hostility in the Middle East. The American presence will not enhance, but rather will preclude any movement toward accommodation between Israel and the Arab states. The Palestinians are already being consigned to oblivion; only acts of outrageous terrorism will bring them back to public notice and a modicum of official concern. The Arab-Israeli conflict will continue, providing both sides with alibis for failing to address acute political and economic problems.

Finally, there is the question of the kind of society we want to live in. During more than four decades of cold war, we squandered not only our wealth but our humane tradition of freedom and fairness. While we poured trillions of dollars into the achievement of "national security" (but we are not secure), we allowed ourselves to be caught up in a climate of virulent suspicion, hostility, and distrust—a climate in which democracy was what we came to distrust most. The painful lesson we have learned (and Israel has learned it too) is that a garrison state is bound to be a psychopathic nation.

If we want to heal, repair, and transform the world we must say no to violence, and we must begin by saying no to our own violence. All the rest is commentary. □

Eric Yoffie

The current crisis in Iraq does indeed hold forth the hope for a new political order in the Middle East, as Michael Lerner suggests. But bringing that order into being depends on a set of measures quite different from those Lerner proposes.

If the Iraqi threat is successfully repelled, the region will be host to one superpower: the United States. Israel, in the absence of a Soviet threat, will diminish in geopolitical importance. American policymakers seeking to implement a new, post-cold war peace in the region will view the Palestinian issue as potentially destabilizing—a threat to America's newly won influence with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. This realignment will likely produce overwhelming American pressure for some form of a Palestinian state, and for some form of negotiated peace—between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Our job as liberals in the Jewish world is to prepare American Jews for the likelihood of a Palestinian state while insisting—as Lerner does—that Israel be given the strongest possible security guarantees.

But there will be no peace and no settlement of the Palestinian question unless Saddam Hussein is defeated. If Hussein prevails, then Arab states will have no choice but to recognize his dominance. Prospects for a settlement will dwindle, American influence will disappear, and Israel will face the likelihood of an Iraqi attack that could jeopardize its very existence.

What must be avoided above all, given this scenario, is what Lerner advocates: negotiations linking Iraq's withdrawal and disarmament to the broader issues of a Palestinian state and peace between Israel and its

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Eric Yoffie is the executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America.

Arab neighbors. Such a linkage would be the equivalent of declaring Hussein the victor in Kuwait. Not only would this linkage reward Hussein for his aggression, but the subsequent negotiations would have no credibility. The complexity of these issues would require lengthy talks that could easily last for years, and the linkage would therefore be seen as an acknowledgment on the part of the Americans that force had been forsworn. This would ensure that the Arab states would, one by one, abandon the United States and embrace Hussein's leadership.

Lerner's abhorrence of violence is understandable, but in this case misplaced. If the United Nations does not succeed quickly in negotiating an Iraqi retreat, the United States must be prepared, in concert with its allies, to use force against Hussein. For the first time in a generation, there is hope that a measure of justice and peace can be brought to the Middle East. The peoples of the region are entitled to this chance for a new beginning, and the brutal ambitions of Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to stand in their way. □

David Harris

With several reservations and qualifications, Michael Lerner advocates the use of U.S. military power against Iraq. As Lerner readily admits, this was not an easy position to adopt, given his own abhorrence of violence and his suspicion of any modern-day deployment of U.S. forces overseas.

The problem—and it is a very serious one—is Lerner's rationale for the use of that force: to protect Israel's security interests and to compel an Israeli–Palestinian accord on a demilitarized Palestinian state.

Surely it is in U.S. interests, Israel aside, to prevent a return to the status quo ante in the region, whereby Iraq withdraws from Kuwait and simply continues to develop its biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons while maintaining its million-man army. Saddam Hussein's eight-year war with neighboring Iran, his use of chemical weapons against both Iran and Iraq's own Kurdish population, and his brutal occupation of Kuwait, ought to persuade even the most skeptical that he poses a grave threat to the entire region's stability. That regional threat—especially since it could involve weapons of mass destruction—ought to persuade the U.S. and its current allies to ensure that Iraq does not emerge from the current face-off emboldened or internally strengthened.

But to link this problem with the Israeli–Arab conflict is shortsighted and potentially counterproductive to Israel's political and security interests. And after all, Lerner insists he aims to represent Israel's best interests.

Indeed, I find his whole proposal both presumptuous and naive. It is presumptuous because it implies that Israel cannot manage to chart an independent course to achieve peace, but rather needs outsiders to impose a solution fraught with dangers possibly even greater than those Israel faces today. It is naive because it does not come close to doing justice to the reality on the ground.

I recognize the sharp divisions in the Israeli public concerning the peace process, divisions which could lead to paralysis, or at least the impression of paralysis, and may help explain why Lerner feels the need to impose a plan from outside. But I believe the Israeli public to be far more sophisticated. In truth, as Professor Elihu Katz of the Guttman Institute has observed, the Israeli electorate is divided into three, not two, camps: doves, security hawks, and ideological hawks. Each group reflects roughly one-third of the electorate. It is the middle group—the security hawks—who hold the balance of power. Their view is based to a considerable degree on whether it is worth taking the security risks that peace talks require, and on whether territorial compromise is justified insofar as the status quo might prove an even greater risk.

In this respect, Camp David remains instructive, if not fully analogous to the current situation. Israelis instinctively understood that Anwar Sadat was sincere about peace. Today there is nothing aproaching a similar consensus on the current intentions of the Palestinians, much less the PLO. If anything, the PLO and local Palestinian reaction to the Iraqi invasion only makes security hawks, and even many doves, doubt Palestinian intentions still more. Palestinian reaction has thus pushed back still further the elusive goal of Israeli–Palestinian dialogue and negotiations. In my view, the best interests of peace anywhere can only be served when the parties themselves manage to persuade one another of a genuine willingness to seek an accord, and then conclude that reaching the stage of peace talks is worth the risks and additional compromise such talks entail. No attempt to impose solutions from the outside has a serious chance of success—though there surely is a place for U.S. diplomacy to play a constructive role, as it has in the past.

And that returns us to the issue of naiveté. A proposal, to be taken seriously, must be somehow rooted in reality. Lerner's ideas, however, are entirely fanciful.

David Harris is the new Executive Vice President of the American Jewish Committee.

No majority of Israelis, regardless of what the U.S. opts to do against Iraq, is yet prepared to embrace the Soviet (and Arab) idea of an international conference, notwithstanding recent and welcome progress in Soviet–Israeli ties. Nor is any majority prepared to predetermine the outcome to any Israeli–Palestinian talks, much less agree to a demilitarized Palestinian state. Lerner entirely avoids certain central issues, including Jerusalem's final status. And what if the Israelis don't agree to the whole package? Does this then mean that the U.S. ought not seek to weaken Saddam Hussein's regime?

The Israeli–Arab conflict must be separated from the Gulf crisis and dealt with on its own terms. There is no good substitute for launching direct talks, holding elections in the territories, and seeking confidence-building measures that can lay the groundwork for final negotiations. This is the essence both of Camp David and the current Israeli peace initiative. Obviously, the chasm of mutual mistrust and hostility separating Israelis and Palestinians will remain too wide and deep to be bridged in one fell swoop. Thus, the challenge is to overcome those forces that prevent the progress even from beginning. Incrementalism and realistic expectations must be the name of the diplomatic game, not farfetched schemes that can only be nonstarters in the real world. □

YARON EZRAHI

The present global crisis provoked by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait demonstrates that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict cannot be settled except through a collective regional security system. Only such a system can ensure the stability that would allow the Israelis and the Palestinians to compromise and accept the symmetry of self-determination. No such security arrangement is conceivable, however, as long as Saddam's arsenal of deadly nonconventional weapons remains intact. The long-term interest of Middle Eastern countries, as well as the world at large, requires considerably more than the restoration of Kuwait to the Kuwaitis.

Therefore, I fully support Michael Lerner's contention that if nonmilitary measures fail to remove the threat of Saddam's chemical, biological, and, in the long run, nuclear weapons, the use of force to achieve this objective is not only compatible with, but also positively warranted by, the liberal position on the Middle East.

The dramatic response of the U.S. and its allies to Saddam's invasion made Iraq look like a superpower; the image of strength is indeed one of the major sources of its power. Consequently, Iraq is much more of a threat to Israel and moderate Arab countries *now* than it really was at the beginning of the conflict. Having partially created this golem, the U.S. must take special responsibility for the security of those states in the region whose vulnerability increases in tandem with Saddam's stature as the enemy of the free world.

The only immediate linkage between the Gulf crisis and the Arab–Israeli conflict is that a decisive elimination of Iraqi aggressive potential is a prerequisite for regional security and political arrangements that will meet both Israeli and Palestinian requirements. Appeasing or rewarding Saddam for "gestures" that allow him to delay and choose a more convenient time for carrying out his schemes is a prescription for a world "safe" only for endless violence. The coalition of Western, Eastern, and Third World countries ready to check the Iraqi aggression may constitute a rare instance of the legitimate use of arms to protect the non-negotiable and universal values of peace and security for millions of innocent civilians.

While grassroots Palestinian support for Saddam un-



Yaron Ezrahi is a professor of political science at Hebrew University and has long been active in the Israeli peace movement. He was interviewed by phone from Jerusalem.

dermines political support for the peace movement in Israel and abroad, it has not altered the peace movement's underlying raison d'être. Ending the occupation of a whole people remains a vital condition for the long-term security, democratic character, and well-being of Israel.

The frustrations of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation explain perhaps their yearning for apocalyptic military or political events that would magically put an end to their misery. But siding with Saddam, who forces Israelis to view their conflict with the Arabs through gas masks, is a tragic mistake which may have destroyed bridges that have been carefully built over many years by thousands of devoted peace workers on both sides. When my twelve-year-old daughter is drilled at school in the use of gas masks and in the distinction between mustard and nerve gas, I cannot remain indifferent to the Palestinian choice to side with Saddam's demonic militarism over the Sadat-Mubarak diplomacy of peace.

But even if the Palestinians refrain from reversing their position by publicly denouncing Saddam's threats to use chemical warheads against Israeli cities, we will continue to pursue a settlement which will free Israelis from their self-destructive occupation of the Palestinian people. While the disappointing decisions of Palestinian leaders will surely make our task that much harder, the international climate following the resolution of the Gulf crisis may facilitate the process.

Today, however, the urgent problem is not, as some Palestinian leaders recently defined it, the "withdrawal of all foreign forces" from the Middle East. Instead, we need to forge an international cooperative effort to prevent a local aggressor from destroying the emerging prospects for a new global and regional order. □

David Horowitz

My old friend and ex-comrade Michael Lerner has taken a modest but important step out of the utopian fog bank of the ideological Left, and onto the terra firma of the flawed world in which—unfortunately—actual humanity lives and dies. I admire Lerner's courage in following the real love he has for Israel and its people to the brink of what is for him a difficult and painful truth: that the security of Israel depends on America's democracy, its decency, its compassion for the Jews, and its military power.

Not being a utopian leftist anymore, I speak of these qualities only in relative terms. The United States is *more* democratic, its civil order more decent in its treatment of human beings, its compassion for the Jews more sincerely felt, than most of the world's governments—especially those of the Arab Middle East. Moreover, U.S. military power has recovered enough of its former muscle (thanks to the eight years of the Reagan buildup) that it's able once again to intervene on behalf of peoples not strong enough to defend themselves against potential aggressors: the Kuwaitis vis-à-vis Iraq, and the Israelis vis-à-vis the Arab states.

Lerner's real concern for real people—as opposed to the empty moral posturing that passes for compassion on the Left—has forced him for one moment and one crisis to think in practical terms. The result is a dilemma. On the one hand, as a good radical, Lerner would like the world to be totally different from what it is. He would like all the peoples of the Middle East to be living in socialist paradises; he would like some force like the UN to oversee the transition. He would even like such a power to root out the xenophobia, racism, blind hatreds, and jihad mentalities that blight the cultures of the Middle East, and to replace them with good old progressive consciousness.

But on the other hand, Lerner's realism—his genuine connection with the people of Israel—causes him to recognize that the U.S., for the moment at least, is the last best hope for peace in the Middle East and for Israel's survival. Men and women of decency and conscience must support the efforts of the U.S. government and its brave military forces, who have taken on the gigantic risk of trying to stop the aggressor, and maybe of destroying his military arsenal as well.

But why stop there? Why not recognize some other hard truths? If it had not been for the Reagan military buildup, the deployment of Pershing and cruise missiles, the commitment to Star Wars, and the support for the anti-Communist forces in Afghanistan, the Soviet empire might not now be in a state of collapse. Instead of being on our side in the current crisis, the Soviet military machine might now be squarely in Iraq's corner, and where would we all be then?

Finally, while we are on the subject of illusions, why not give up the fantasy that Western imperialism, the ever-ready bogeyman of the Left, is responsible for everything bad in the world? Has the Iranian revolution that expelled U.S. forces and expropriated Western oil been wildly beneficial for the people of Iran, Israel, or anyone else in the Middle East? Did the defeat of the

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David Horowitz is a former editor of Ramparts *and coauthor of* Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the '60s *(Summit Books, 1989).*

U.S. in Indochina bring prosperity, freedom, or social justice to the peoples of Cambodia and Vietnam? Have thirty years of African independence made the nations of that continent less poor, more peaceful, more democratic than they were before?

It is a hopeful sign that most liberals, including the Democrats in Congress, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and the editor of *Tikkun* are on board for the deployment of American military power in the Middle East. They are at odds only about what America should do with that power, now that it is in place. In this debate, Lerner has by far the most realistic grasp of the situation. If the United States were to sit in the sand and pray for Saddam to come to his senses, as many here suggest, we pretty well know what would happen. Long before Saddam saw the light, America's allies and the American public would become weary of the wait and restive at the enormous costs of the military stalemate. A new antiwar movement would spring up on the campuses. Democrats in Congress would invoke the War Powers Act and set deadlines for American withdrawal. A bad compromise would be struck to "end" the crisis. Before many months had passed, Saddam would be free again to pursue his sinister designs on Arabian oil and Israel's existence. He might not yet have the nuclear weapons he has been so avidly pursuing, but he *would* have a new weapon: the incomparable prestige of a leader who had stood up to the whole world and survived.

Lerner is right about the aggressive military strategy America must pursue against the Iraqi threat: it is the only prudent course. On the other hand, he has created a dilemma for himself: if American power is so crucial to the issues of peace and survival, shouldn't he be having second thoughts about his long-term opposition to America's military buildup and to its efforts to help non-Jewish peoples, like the Grenadans and the Panamanians, in their efforts to be free? □

Jerome M. Segal

Michael Lerner's essay raises three basic questions: (1) What should be the objectives of U.S. policy in the Gulf? (2) Should there be linkage between those objectives and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? and (3) How should the U.S. pursue those objectives?

To answer the first question, Lerner would make the dismantling of Iraq's offensive military capacity the central objective. Here I believe he is correct on the broad point that Iraq's future military behavior in a post-crisis world is a central part of the problem. But he defines the issue too broadly, at least from the standpoint of Israeli security. While Israeli security would be enhanced if Iraq were to be demilitarized, Israel is currently in a position to deter and, if necessary, defend against Iraqi aggression. And it will be even better able to do so after the crisis subsides. Israel will emerge with even more extensive weaponry; Iraq will be less able to enlist Arab allies in a war against Israel; and the U.S., having intervened to protect Saudi Arabia, can be expected to do the same for Israel, thus adding an extra layer of futility to an attack.

The real issue is Iraq's prospective nuclear capability. Iraq is now believed to be five to ten years away from having a small nuclear arsenal. This is ample time to pursue nonmilitary, nonproliferation policies. Moreover, no obvious target for a military strike now presents itself, as it did when Israel bombed an Iraqi reactor in 1981. If Iraq carries through its efforts to build a uranium enrichment plant, then possibly such a strike would be necessary, but in the meantime, military action would be premature—and possibly harmful. A nonproliferation strategy requires two main elements: international cooperation which denies Iraq access to necessary technologies and materials; and political changes inside Iraq and within the region such that Iraq abandons its efforts to develop nuclear weapons. A military strike would not advance either objective, and could well defeat both.

On the second question—that of linkage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—I think Lerner is wrong on the specifics, but right about the need for the U.S. to vigorously pursue a settlement along the "land for peace" lines of UN Resolution 242. Hussein himself has hinted that he would withdraw from Kuwait if Israel withdrew from the Occupied Territories. But neither the U.S. nor Israel is prepared to touch that one with a ten-foot pole. If I thought linkage would work, I would be delighted to see Israel offer to withdraw from the territories in exchange for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. But such an offer is not going to happen—and even if it did, it would totally confuse the Kuwait issue and unravel international support for Iraq's withdrawal. Nor is Iraq going to accept its side of the bargain: the complete dismantling

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Jerome M. Segal is president of the Jewish Peace Lobby and a research scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy of the University of Maryland.

of its military hardware. Nor is the U.S. or Israel about to accept a Palestinian state. In its specifics, Lerner's proposal is a nonstarter.

But in a more general sense, Lerner is right to argue that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just important for its own sake, but also could help resolve the Gulf conflict. The Arab states assisting the U.S. would gain in legitimacy; Saddam Hussein, who symbolizes the armed struggle route to Palestinian rights, would lose his appeal; and importantly, Iraq would lose the option of diverting attention from the Gulf crisis with an attack on Israel.

Ironically—and this brings me to Lerner's third question—American policy seems one of de facto linkage of the wrong sort. The Bush administration thus far has shown an unwillingness to move on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the Gulf conflict is over. The administration is right in not wanting it to appear that Saddam Hussein has caused a major change in U.S. policy, but that is no reason not to pursue a two-track policy in the Middle East. The U.S. spent a year in unsuccessful efforts to get the Shamir government to seriously pursue Shamir's *own* proposal for Palestinian elections in the Territories. The U.S. was finally reaching a moment of truth on Shamir's proposal when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Bush should take this opportunity to say that the U.S. will not allow Saddam Hussein to tie the two conflicts together; neither will it allow Shamir to use the Gulf crisis as an excuse for further delay. In particular the U.S. must act vigorously to halt the rapid expansion of the settler population in the West Bank, which is now occurring. We must insist that the Gulf crisis not be used as a cover which allows the Israeli right wing to eliminate the possibility of "land for peace" negotiations somewhere down the line.

The Shamir government is so determined to retain the West Bank permanently that even freezing the current level of settlement will require a major American effort. Jewish voices will therefore have to strongly insist upon such a freeze. If Iraq is forced out of Kuwait there will be a great deal of interest in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it may take much longer to get Iraq out than anyone presently anticipates. If in the meantime the settler population grows by twenty or thirty percent, the delicate balance within Israeli politics may be permanently upset, and the occupation of the West Bank may continue indefinitely.

My policy prescription is this:

- Keep the focus on the international consensus issue of forcing Iraq out of Kuwait.
- Build on the embargo and the current unprecedented level of international cooperation to put in place a special international mechanism which will block Iraq's access to nuclear weapons and which will remain in place even after the crisis has subsided.
- Place the military in Saudi Arabia under a United Nations flag and expand international participation, with a special stress on Soviet involvement.
- Commit only the number of troops required to contain Iraq militarily.
- Plan for a long-term embargo of Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil as the primary vehicle for putting pressure on Iraq.
- Vigorously pursue Israeli-Palestinian peace with an immediate focus on a freeze on settlement expansion.
- Sit tight and keep the powder dry. □

Daniel Ellsberg

Tie him to the mast, it's too late to put wax in his ears: Michael Lerner has succumbed to the siren songs of General Dugan's Air Force briefers, with their "surgical" solution to Iraq's offensive capabilities.

As in the past, the essence of their refrain—the very part that has captivated Lerner—has been that if the president just turns the Air Force loose, the troops of rival services—the Army, Navy, and Marines—can all stay home safely with their families and enjoy the war vicariously by watching dramatic reconstructions: Tom Cruise as Top Gun, *not* as Ron Kovic.

The argument for preventive war against Iraq—which is what Lerner is endorsing here, as part of a larger Middle East policy—is about as persuasive in the present circumstances as it ever gets. And it has, evidently, persuaded a lot of people besides Lerner, including high officials throughout the Middle East, opinion-makers in the American media—and, according to a number of journalists, many of the highest officials in the Bush administration.

For that reason, a U.S.-initiated offensive against the full range of Iraqi command structures and military capabilities has been, without any urging from *Tikkun*, a lively option from the outset for American forces in

Daniel Ellsberg was the State and Defense Department official who released the Pentagon Papers during the Vietnam War. He is currently working on a study of the risks of war posed by international crises.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. It is, in fact, the one to bet on after the buildup is complete—unless growing numbers of Americans, Congressional leaders, and influential foreign states begin to oppose it vigorously; or unless Saddam backs down.

Of course, given the limits of the objectives endorsed by the UN, Saddam could short-circuit the U.S. attack by withdrawing from Kuwait and releasing all hostages, and keep his military forces intact. Administration sources show their real priorities—indistinguishable from Lerner's—by describing this possibility to journalists as "the nightmare scenario."

Saddam would be wise to back down in this fashion, before international forces strike. He may yet back down, with or without face-saving concessions from the Arab states. But he may not. By the same token, he would probably not be wise enough to accept Lerner's hypothetical ultimatum, which would offer a Palestinian state in exchange for Iraq's radical disarmament. What then?

Should we encourage the administration to carry out its present almost-official threats of offensive action "if necessary"? (This is the effective impact, I believe, of Lerner's analysis.) Or should we—as I believe—do all we can to discourage the U.S. government from starting a war against Iraq?

What will happen in the Middle East, if it comes to war, is not the utopian Air Force dream of General Dugan, now shared by the editor of *Tikkun*. The Air Force strategy will be only *part* of the war, the fun part—except that even it won't work as fully, quickly, or antiseptically as the briefers have promised. There will be more blood in U.S. cockpits and a lot more blood on the ground, civilians' and childrens', not only in Iraq but in Israel and Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It is striking that Lerner, like most proponents of preventive war, fails to provide any estimate whatever of this "butcher's bill."

And there will be a ground war too. Whatever the Air Force and *Tikkun* recommend, the other chiefs will not be satisfied to let the Army and Marines sit idly by with folded hands while the Air Force and carrier planes go for the gold. Nor will the commander-in-chief let Iraqi armed forces that survive air attacks—remnants that could be quite sizeable and tenacious—continue to hold on to Kuwait and to surviving American hostages. He will send the heavy tank divisions we have already deployed to carry out what they have been told is their main mission: the liberation of Kuwait, or what the bombers have left of it.

The president probably shares Lerner's reluctance to see a ground invasion of Iraq itself. But he may or may not be able to abide for long the continued hostility, the threats to hostages, and the appeals to holy war and



terrorism by Saddam's successors in Baghdad. If, as is not unlikely, he finally decides to send the tanks and ground troops into Iraq to oust them, then the replay of the Six-Day War (extended by some weeks) will be followed by endless reruns of Vietnam.

"Low-intensity warfare" could then be a long-term prospect for us not only in Iraq but throughout the Arab and Islamic world (perhaps as far away as Indonesia). The U.S. would be helping authoritarian regimes—deeply tainted by their association with this U.S./Israeli attack on an Arab and Muslim country—repress uprisings of infuriated masses.

The last two prospects, to be sure, are just possibilities. There are more: Saddam's threats to destroy oil fields in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, for one; and the even more catastrophic prospects of preemptive attacks, chemical warfare, and global terrorism.

Perhaps all these threats are bluffs, or exaggerated, as some advocates of an American attack claim. Who really knows? Serious consideration of preventive war demands at least some effort to address these ominous uncertainties—as Lerner fails to do. But in the end, after the best calculations, an American-initiated offensive would be a grand experiment, a roll of the iron dice. In view of these risks, the case *against* preventive war—addressed so inadequately in Lerner's discussion—seems to me overwhelming.

How then are we to deal with the real long-run threats presented by the military capabilities, the ruthlessness, the chemical and the possibility of future nuclear capabilities that fuel the ambitions of Saddam Hussein—*and leaders like him the world over?* Here are elements of a program addressed both to immediate and long-run needs:

- Continue the UN embargo and blockade of Iraq—a "porous blockade" that does not exclude essential food and medicine—*as long as necessary* in order to force Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Thus, we deny

Iraq any rewards for its aggression and impose very heavy, ongoing costs in revenue and imports as long as the aggression lasts.

- Reverse the buildup of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia. Remove immediately those units not needed for defensive operations; then replace the U.S. component as fully and rapidly as possible with regional Arab and other allied forces. This would eliminate the hair-trigger posture that now may tempt either side to preempt. It would also reduce the financial and political burden of America's continuing involvement so that the embargo has time to work.
- As the Soviets have proposed: put the multilateral defensive forces in Saudi Arabia and the blockade forces under UN command, under the authority of the Military Staff Committee of the UN Security Council.
- Take steps, as François Mitterand proposed to the UN in September, to achieve, in the wake of an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, rapid resolution of the Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts in an international conference. Follow this conference with a process of mutually agreed regional arms reductions.
- Bring to the top of the international agenda, as Eduard Shevardnadze has urged, the following measures: the tightening and expansion of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, including "as a matter of utmost urgency" an immediate end to nuclear tests; the elimination of chemical weapons; the control of conventional arms sales. Build up a long-term rapid-response UN peacekeeping force in the region.

The first three points include a peacekeeping force in the Gulf and therefore can buy safety from further aggression from Iraq or others in the region for as long as needed, while the comprehensive diplomatic efforts establish a more fundamental basis for common security.

Progress in these various negotiations is hardly guaranteed. Yet with the cold war hardly over, and the spirit of international unity aroused by this crisis, the chances look better than they ever have before. And they look a lot better, overall, than the chances of avoiding catastrophe in a preventive war or series of wars.

Indeed, if progress is not sought and achieved along all these various lines, then even the most successful preventive attack will not buy the long-term security in the region that is its goal. Unless permanently occupied, a hostile and vengeful Iraq, once violently disarmed, would use its oil wealth to rebuild its offensive capability as soon as possible—and to buy or develop nuclear weaponry. This would challenge the Air Force to repeat its "surgery" every decade, like mowing the lawn. And other states would need the same treatment.

That prospect ought to concentrate our minds wonderfully on the pursuit of alternatives. As Shevardnadze said in reference to nuclear nonproliferation: "It is time to trigger off the emergency systems in order to save the situation." If it took Saddam Hussein, and General Dugan, to set off these global alarms, we may yet thank them both. □

Michael Lerner Responds

Mitterrand, Bush, and other leaders are making it clear to their counterparts in all the Arab states that they will press Israel once the Kuwait business is resolved (though for appearance's sake they will continue to reject the *overt* quid pro quo linkage that Hussein and Arafat have advocated). But this is only a question of timing—while publicly denouncing any explicit linkage, Bush privately reassures his allies that he will vigorously pressure Israel once Saddam is out of Kuwait. It's too late to stop linkage—David Harris's desire to totally separate the Gulf crisis from the Israeli-Arab conflict is entirely fanciful—the question is *what kind of linkage*. The real defense of Israel's interests requires us to insist that linkage be based *not* on Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait (which is what Bush, Mitterrand, and others have been suggesting), but rather on the dismantling of the Iraqi offensive military capacity (IOMC). If Harris and other Jewish leaders were not so naive, they would understand that Israel itself has created linkage. It has put the Palestinians back on the world's agenda by starting new settlements in East Jerusalem. The UN's obvious anti-Semitism and outrageous double standards in dealing with Israel do not change the fact that the international community is right to insist that Israel end its occupation of the homeland of a million-and-a-half Palestinians. Friends of Israel need to link a recognition of Palestinian rights with the comprehensive three-part plan I have outlined here.

Meanwhile, Harris, leader of the American Jewish Committee, wants us to believe that "the essence of ... the current Israeli peace initiative" is launching direct talks, holding elections, and seeking confidence-building measures. Where has this man been in the past two years as the U.S. government tried desperately to get Shamir to talk with Palestinians and implement elections? Where was Harris when even hard-liner Yitzchak Rabin supported the Labor Party and withdrew from the coalition government precisely because Shamir was not serious about negotiations? Anyone who really cares

about Israel's long-term interests must recognize that Shamir is playing a self-destructive game—and that the world will soon come down on Israel if his policies aren't changed. The plan I advocate here gives Israel a massive incentive to make that change, whereas the war Bush is planning and Jewish leaders are supporting—defined in terms of Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait—will give no such incentive.

Some of my friends on the Left feverishly denounce my suggestion for what they term a "preventive war." But that is *not* what I am advocating, except in the last instance. What I argue is that by making a preventive strike against the IOMC one part of a three-part strategy (the other two parts being a demilitarized Palestinian state and peace treaties between Israel and the Arab states), we make possible the serious international conference Gorbachev advocates.

The hardliners and "realists" will reject an international conference strategy as long as they see it as just another forum in which Saddam can postpone his day of reckoning while he continues to develop his military capacities. But the dynamics of such a conference would be very different—and its success much more likely—if it were backed by a clearly stated U.S. (or better yet, UN) willingness to use air strikes to dismantle the IOMC. Such a conference would gain enough credibility that it could in fact be used as an alternative to the current headlong plunge toward war. And by defining the dismantling the IOMC as the central issue, we avoid the other danger: that an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait leaves Israel to face by itself a future conflict with an Iraq that is strengthened both politically and militarily.

If there is a way to avoid war and yet not leave Saddam poised to strike against Israel, we should do everything we can to find it! We could set a clear time-limit to the international conference option—a limit that provides less time than it will take for Saddam to further develop his war-making capacities—and simultaneously pursue a still more rigorous economic boycott. But giving peace a chance is practical wisdom under these circumstances—and the three-point program outlined above would give the world some concrete picture of a peace plan that could satisfy most of the relevant interests worth honoring.

In this sense, my proposal is meant to be in the spirit of Peter Gabel's profound insistence that we create a new kind of logic in the world rather than rush off into military struggle. But creating a new world order may *not* be possible in a world intimidated by Iraqi aggression. If Iraq is on the road to developing chemical and nuclear weapons of sufficient power that can upset the world's military balance, it must be stopped. That's why the international conference should be convened immediately—so that this kind of multi-layered plan can be given a chance.

Yaron Ezrahi and Yossi Sarid make clear that the Israeli peace movement will have little chance, in the wake of Palestinian identification with Iraq, of garnering Israeli support for new peace initiatives as long as the IOMC remains a potent threat. I believe progressives in the U.S. will retain little credibility if they can't demonstrate their ability to distinguish between phony threats (e.g., Communist subversion in Central America or Vietnam) and the real threat posed by Iraq. It's not reactionary for Americans to want to live in a safe world—so if the Left allows the Right to seize the issue of law and order, both domestically and internationally, it will make itself increasingly irrelevant politically.

Daniel Ellsberg may have to face a difficult truth: not every situation can be seen through the lens of Vietnam. There are moments in history when the failure to take decisive action (or the failure to be *willing* to take decisive action) against the forces of evil actually results in more pain and suffering later. I oppose Bush's land war because it will result in huge casualties and at best only reinstate the status quo ante. But if the comprehensive plan I propose were advanced and could not be accepted by Iraq at an international conference, then I would support pinpoint, surgical air strikes against the IOMC (even if, as Ellsberg warns, they might have to be renewed every decade) as a way to prevent Iraq from making its nuclear and chemical warfare capacities operational. Those air strikes would be far preferable to either the ground war Bush seems to be planning or the "let's rely on the UN and avoid any military options at *all* costs" prescription that seems to inform the position of many of my colleagues on the Left. My contention, however, is that it may be possible to avoid air strikes once we are serious about being willing to deliver them.

Ellsberg's position received powerful support from Zbigniew Brzezinski, writing in the *New York Times* (October 7, 1990). But Brzezinski is honest enough to admit explicitly that in pursuing "the American interest" (avoiding a preventive air war) something must be sacrificed: the goal of resolving "the region's security problem" (i.e. the Israeli interest in declawing Iraq). In short, abandon the Jews to the Iraqis and save American skins and influence with the Arab states. Yet Iraq may soon develop military capacities that can threaten not only Israel but Europe and the Soviet Union as well. Withdrawal from Kuwait will do little to lessen that threat.

Brzezinski, Ellsberg, and others warn of the high human, political, and economic costs of a war. These are frightening, and they weigh heavily on my thinking.

Indeed, they lead me to oppose a ground war to liberate Kuwait, and favor only in the last instance air strikes to dismantle the IOMC. But these critics seem unwilling to confront the even higher costs in human life that would ensue if a war occurs a few years hence, when Iraq has succeeded in further developing its military capacity. Given Saddam's deep commitment to "liberating Palestine" there is every reason to believe that such a war is inevitable unless he is stopped sooner.

But this does not put me on the slippery slope where David Horowitz would like to see me. That the U.S. needs *some* military capabilities is no argument for the wildly wasteful spending of the Reagan years. Hundreds of billions of dollars that could have alleviated some of America's domestic woes were squandered on fruitcake projects that were irrational then and more so now. It's rumored that when the U.S. first decided to send forces to Saudi Arabia, the Pentagon made a concerted effort to ship to the Gulf many budget-threatened weapons systems, hoping thereby to save them from congressional budget cutters.

It is not inconsistent for me to want America to have the military power to force the peaceful dismantling of the IOMC, and still to oppose the Pentagon's bloated military budgets—and even to oppose the Bush war to liberate Kuwait. America could be a more powerful force for good in the world if its own domestic economy were stronger. And the will of its people to defend the American way of life would be much stronger if they had justifiable pride in an America that was able to take care of its sick, its aged, its needy. The Black Congressional Caucus has each year presented to Congress a budget that would have allowed massive defense cuts, yet would still allow America to remain strong enough to counter a Saddam Hussein.

I detest violence and I hate contemplating its use, even in the last instance. But I cannot tolerate a world that stands by and allows the strong to bully the weak. We at *Tikkun* were denouncing Saddam when he carried out his genocidal gassing of the Kurds; I don't want to have to say "I told you so" when he uses the same weapons against Israel or others. Every peaceful way that can be used should be used to stop him. But a Left that counterposes itself to military action must have a more powerful alternative than UN resolutions and economic boycotts in its pocket. Though peaceful measures must be given enough chance to work, the Left should be prepared at least in principle to take the kinds of limited military steps I've advocated. But if, God forbid, that should become necessary, then they must be tied to the kind of reconstructive plan for the region that will ensure that whatever suffering we cause yields a transformed and more peaceful reality. □

Public displays of support for Saddam Hussein by Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank created a crisis for the Israeli peace movement. But initial anger in the movement's ranks has been followed by a more nuanced response. In this section we present selections from the past two months of debate in Israel, and some background analysis.

Notes from the Israeli Peace Movement

Daniel Ben-Simon

The vigorous rhetoric of the Israeli Left is back. But now that rhetoric is turned against the Palestinians. Years of sympathy, understanding, collaboration, and friendship have come to a bitter end. While Israelis saw Saddam Hussein as a menace, the Palestinians saw him as a hero, a new Saladin to liberate them.

The Left's reaction to Palestinian Saddam-worship was stunningly unrestrained. "We were wrong about you," wrote one of them. "If you want to talk peace, go find yourself another partner." Hardly a day passed without an exchange of accusations between the Left and the Palestinian leaders of the West Bank. The new battle sent shock waves through the political arena. The right-wing parties were elated. Never before had they witnessed such a furious battle between their ideological opponents. The Left was in total disarray. Its leaders admitted publicly that they had been wrong about the Palestinians: they'd misunderstood Palestinian intentions.

Daniel Ben-Simon writes for the Israeli newspaper Davar.

This latest crisis of confidence within the Left came as no surprise to most political observers. The malaise on the Left erupted like a volcano after long years of dormancy. The intifada was one serious blow to the Left. Most Israelis ignored the Left's outcry against the government's handling of the Palestinian uprising. Surveys showed that most Israelis sided with the "iron fist" policy of Prime Minister Shamir. But in early 1990 peace activists were still hopeful. The Labor party endorsed the Baker Plan, which called for a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian delegations in Cairo to discuss "elections modalities" in the West Bank and Gaza. Peace activists secretly hoped that the elections would lead eventually to some sort of Palestinian state. Likud secretly hoped that the Palestinians would reject Baker's peace plan. But when Palestinians refused to play their part and rejected the Baker plan, it was Shamir who finally nixed an Israeli–Palestinian meeting in Cairo. This precipitated the fall of the Unity Government. President Chaim Herzog asked the head of the Labor party, Shimon Peres, to form a new government. Shimon Peres was designated as the future prime minister; Shulamith Aloni and Yossi Sarid (from the Ratz party), two pillars of the Left, were guaranteed top ministerial positions; Yossi Beilin (Labor dove) was to be foreign minister; Amnon Rubinstein (Shinui party) minister of justice, and Yair Tsaban (Mapam party) minister of education. After thirteen years of Likud the Israeli Left was about to become the new dominant political force in Israel.

The six weeks the Left had to form a government was a period of high hopes in the peace camps of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. But Peres was unable to muster the necessary votes, and instead Shamir was able to put together a right-wing government. A few months later Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The international community was horrified by the Iraqi move. Israel was shocked and panic-stricken. Most Arab countries issued strong condemnations. Yet the PLO and most Palestinian leaders backed Hussein. A wave of support for Iraq swept the occupied territories. Yossi Sarid, one of the most outspoken leaders of the Left, was the first to express rage at the Palestinian position: "One should wear a gas mask in order to overcome the poisonous odor of the PLO backing of Saddam Hussein. Their embracing of each other can only stir repugnance and horror." Sarid condemned in the strongest terms the local Palestinians and their leader Yassir Arafat: "The Palestinian leadership made all the possible mistakes in the past. It did it again, now, in the Gulf crisis.... In the last few years the PLO convinced the Israeli public that it is ready to recognize and live in peace with Israel but now it has shattered its moderate image. Perhaps the Palestinians deserve to be occupied but I don't deserve to be an occupier.... Until further notice, as far as I am concerned, let them come look for me."

At the time, the Peace Now movement followed suit. In a public statement published in *Ha'aretz* on August 17, Peace Now blamed the Palestinians for the disappointment they had generated among "peace-seeking people." "Your enthusiastic support for Saddam Hussein and his policy has caused us great disappointment," read the statement. "Support for Saddam means support for the use of force as a means to solve the differences between us.... We believe that only a total rejection of Saddam's methods can restore a renewed confidence between us which will enable us to solve the conflict in peaceful ways." Yaron London, another leading peace activist, published in the mass-circulation daily *Yediot Aharonot* a virulent attack against his Palestinian friends:

> I am not one of those who believes that "in order to know what an Arab is thinking, you must split open his head," but I needed the Iraqis to split open the heads of the Kuwaitis in order to learn what the Palestinians think. Now I know that the vast majority wants a modern-day Saladin: a leader who will unite the Arab world and banish non-Arabs from the Middle East.... When you [Palestinian leaders] ask again for my support for your "legitimate rights," you will discover that your shouts of encouragement for Saddam have clogged my ears.

The Left was not unanimous in its anti-Palestinian reaction. The leader of Ratz, Shulamith Aloni, issued a statement against her colleagues' attacks (reprinted in this issue). Another peace activist who took a moderate stand was Elazar Granot, Mapam's general secretary. "I don't blame only the Palestinians," he told the *Jerusalem Post*. "I recognize the Israeli government's responsibility for the prevailing situation. The fact that in the last two years this government consistently stood in the way of negotiations for peace is critical.... One can imagine how different things would have looked had there been an active process of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians when the Iraq crisis erupted." Nevertheless Granot had to admit that the Palestinian position was a setback to the peace camps on both sides. "It is clear to me that negotiations will now be much more difficult. Enough people have said all along that there is no point in negotiating with the PLO. These very people received a boost from the Palestinian position."

The Palestinians reacted vehemently to these allegations. Faisal Husseini accused the Israeli peace activists of adopting a patronizing attitude: "It is none of your business whom we support in the Arab world." Radwan

Abu-Ayyash, a Palestinian leader, tried to soften his Israeli friends' reactions by explaining that Palestinian support of Iraq stems from a split political personality in search of a political identity: "Palestinians are frustrated and sick of the weak Arab regimes that are not helping us.... We view Iraq as a power that could oblige the Israeli government to make peace quickly with the Palestinians.... The Palestinians had two alternatives: either side with the Marines against the Iraqis or fight alongside their brothers." Abu-Ayyash expressed anger at the allegations that he and his friends have lost their support among the Israeli moderates: "I am so astonished, stunned by the left-wing position in Israel. A peaceful man should double his work rather than just say goodbye. They are not doing us a favor."

The Palestinian support for Saddam offered the Left a rare opportunity to increase popular support among Israelis. For many years the Left voiced frustration over its lack of legitimacy among Israeli voters. "We are tired of [just] being right," a leftist Knesset member told me a few months ago, "we want also to run the show. How many years can a politician live in the dark without losing his mind.... It's my tenth year in Parliament. I have given thousands of speeches.... I feel I want to do things. I don't expect to be a minister, but even as a deputy minister I can do things." He went on to say that he and his friends should alter their "Arab lovers" image, at least for practical reasons.

During the governmental crisis which paralyzed Israeli politics between March and June 1990, the leftist Knesset members signed an agreement to join forces with the Labor party. Now they needed only a few religious votes. Throughout the six weeks during which they held the mandate to reach a majority to form a government, the leftist Knesset members went out of their way to please the religious parties in order to convince them to join the new coalition. They spared no argument to ease the religious parties' fears of the Left's pro-Palestinian tendencies. The Left was ready to adopt "patriotic" positions at the expense of its ideological stands. Even so, the Left failed. It could not compete with the Likud in terms of "patriotism." The failure was hard to digest. "The voters don't trust us," said one. "They fear that we plan a territorial wholesale sellout to the Arabs.... We will have to do something urgent to change this image."

In attempting to understand the Left's latest quarrel with the Palestinians, one cannot overlook their desire for power. By acting the way they did, leftists alienated their Palestinian counterparts, but at the same time they earned popular support among Israelis. "Welcome back to the consensus," wrote a prominent editorialist in *Ha'aretz*. Another editorialist suggested that Yossi Sarid run for the top spot of the Labor party. A leftist activist commented that people smiled at him at the supermarket. "It is a great feeling to be loved by people. ... I never experienced this before and I must say that it's not so bad to belong, at least for once, to the consensus." Even Prime Minister Shamir welcomed the leftists' disillusionment with the Palestinians and added, "Now they know what I always knew about the Palestinians.... They were simply naive."

Needless to say the right-wing parties celebrated the Left's repentance while it lasted. "Now even Sarid knows that the Palestinians are shit," said a right-wing writer. A few leftist activists tried to minimize the damages and called for a "cease-fire" with the Palestinians. Public meetings were arranged, but the Palestinian leaders never showed up. "First make up your mind what kind of partners you're looking for, and only then you can come to us," one Palestinian wrote. Battle lines seemed to have been redrawn.

But by mid-September many of the doves were regrouping, aware of the damage that had been done to their cause. On the eve of Rosh Hashana, Peace Now issued a public statement calling for a continuation of talks between leftist parties and Palestinians. Six weeks after they severed ties with their Palestinian counterparts, peace activists were sending them a positive signal. The public statement, published in many Israeli newspapers, was signed by sixteen Knesset members from Labor, Ratz, Mapam, and Shinui, and included some—such as Yossi Sarid—who had initiated the anti-Palestinian uproar. Now, in early October, tension seems to be easing up. Meetings have been resumed. However, both sides remain suspicious of each other. It seems that the Gulf crisis has turned everything upside down. □

David Grossman

Ever since the demonstrations by the Arabs in the territories in support of Saddam Hussein, and the poll that indicated widespread support (65 percent) for Saddam on the part of Israeli Arabs, the leftist camp in Israel has been speaking in perplexed, pained, and even insulted tones of voice. It was as if a mask had suddenly been torn off the Arabs' faces, revealing their "true" features. Even the bleeding hearts among us began to articulate their despair and

David Grossman is author of Yellow Wind. *Reprinted from* Yedioth Aharanoth.

frustration, their utterances immediately snatched up by the Right, which always knew better.

Of course, the idea that the views of men such as Shamir, Sharon, and Kahane were right in the end—while we were wrong and led others astray—is a bitter pill to swallow. It means that not only have we failed miserably, but an entire *Weltanschauung,* a large and profound set of values, has been emasculated. In this sense, our whole world has virtually collapsed.

Two conspicuous articles in this vein appeared recently, provoking many responses. Yossi Sarid gored the Palestinians with his "Let Them Look Me Up" disquisition in *Ha'aretz* (August 17); Yaron London slammed the door in their faces with his "So Long, Husseini, Nusseibeh, and You Other 'Authentic Leaders'" (*Yedioth Aharonoth,* August 14). I must admit that when I first read these writings, I felt tremendous admiration for both authors for their uncompromising emotional honesty and for their refusal to let the occasion pass—this was doing what true thinkers must, reassessing their values and beliefs against the new reality.

This esteem, I must admit, was coupled with a whiff of envy in view of the huge wave of love that swamped them from all sides. Even Geula Cohen has invited these wayward sheep to return to the flock. Who among us is unfamiliar with the small temptation?—to discard for a while, at long last, the mantle of cold logic, to surrender gleefully to the dizziness of emotions, the catharsis of anger, and to hurl oneself into the deceptive embrace of the consensus, to speak with one's Likud-loving neighbor with heartwarming fervor, to articulate oneself as something other than a cold-hearted rationalist! Leftists, too, have their primitive impulses!

It will be interesting to see where these people, with their reactions, wind up. Yossi Sarid almost managed to square the circle, hanging a U-turn after the proclamations in his article, by returning to his commitment to peace for moral reasons—in an effort which, he claimed, was "so human as to be superhuman."

Fine. But Sarid refuses to speak with Palestinian leaders for the time being. Let them look him up. So with whom will he speak? Will he adopt Shamir's approach, instructing the Palestinians to invite their "daddies," Hussein and Mubarak, to decide their fate? How long does he intend to wait until the Palestinians call? Until he calms down? And has he considered peace with the Palestinians all along as being merely in their interest, or as a vital security interest of Israel?

As for Yaron London, who so smoothly shrugged off his moral commitment to a solution of the conflict ("The Palestinians' contempt [for Israel] exempts us from any moral imperative")—which direction will he take? Why shouldn't he be more conclusive and courageous, and admit that if he has no moral inhibitions toward the Palestinians, if there is no give-and-take whatsoever between ethical considerations and the security argument in its broadest sense, then his declaration swings him far to the Right.

The problem with these articles and other statements by leaders of the Left is not merely their content but also their intonation. Underlying the fiery rhetoric is an almost childish whimper of disappointment and insult over the Arabs' irrationality and flip-flop temperament; which (as Sarid said) caused them to kick the pail just when it seemed to be filling with moderation. The Left, oozing self-pity, decries the self-destructive impulse of the people it "chose" to adopt and their "betrayal" of the joint efforts.

The desperate lament underlying these remarks is immediately picked up by the excitable antennae of public opinion. In any case, there has been a continual slide to the right in Israel. Any move by the Palestinians—even a salutary move such as recognition of Israel—gets revised in order to negate the possibility of dialogue with them. A powerful system is at work, aiming to disqualify the Palestinians as a partner in the Israeli consciousness. Even as prominent leftists publicly flagellate themselves for having supported the Palestinians, it makes no difference, because in the final analysis they are committed to furthering the peace efforts despite the Palestinians. As for public opinion, the damage has already been done. Thousands of Israelis who in recent years marshaled reserves of willpower, restraint, and sangfroid to give peace a chance have suddenly received eloquent legitimation for behavior of the opposite kind: to give up—to surrender to the fatalism that says we have no one to talk to, that we shall always live by the sword.

There are two aspects to the problem of the Arabs' support of Saddam: that of Israeli Arabs and that of the Palestinians in the territories. The Israeli Arabs' attitude is infuriating and troubling; it is a "scarlet letter" for their leaders. At the same time, since we shall probably continue living with them in one country, we will help no one by selling out to anger and disillusionment.

Of course, we must not blame Israel for every manifestation of political naiveté, emotionalism, or hostility within the Arab minority. At the same time, it is obvious that these are the Israeli Arabs' reactions to the way the state treats their brethren in the territories, as well as themselves. The state has done nothing to relieve their sense of frustration, discrimination, and neglect. Vindictiveness toward them at the present time, because of their stance on this issue, will not improve the prospects for coexistence.

As for the Palestinians in the territories, they have not betrayed us. They have never misled anyone. The

vast majority hated us silently even before the intifada, subsequently venting their hatred in the language of stones and leaflets. Today, as their aspirations are dashed and as painful concessions they made in the past two years are increasingly met with apathy and contempt on the part of the Israeli leadership, they hate us even more. ("Hate," by the way, is not the right expression here; we are dealing with a thick stew of emotions including jealousy, self-denial, and a desperate craving for appreciation and recognition by Israel—not only as a people, as an autonomous entity, but also as human beings.)

If the Shamir government succeeds in "suppressing" the intifada, the degradation of the Palestinians will grow and their anomie and sense of insult will reach even greater heights—the insult felt by a beaten, rejected child, the hopeless humiliation of the perpetual loser. Is it then so surprising that they are presently supporting the enemy of their enemy? What else is left to them other than to channel their despair into hostility? How would you, dear reader, respond if placed in their shoes?

Me? the reader replies, taken aback. Me? I would have acted logically.

Sure. Nevertheless, we must admit that we almost always perceive the enemy as irrational. It stands to reason; he wants the opposite of what we want! He doesn't like us! With hardly an exception, we perceive the enemy's motives for being our enemy as erroneous, evil, destructive, and absurd.

The question is whether one makes peace with a "rational" enemy only, or with any enemy.

If indeed it transpires that the Palestinians are not "rational" like us (neither, of course, should we get carried away with assessments of our own rationality), is this a good reason not to wish to make peace with them while placing maximum constraints on their ability to injure us?

Or maybe we should first "educate" them, make them see the light. If so, this protracted occupation may be nothing but someone's secret plan to foster pure intelligence among the Palestinians.

It certainly would have been easier for the Left to support the Palestinians' just demands and communicate them effectively to Israeli public opinion had the Palestinians been more moderate or spoken "our language." Be this as it may, the main argument behind the Left's peace efforts is as valid now as ever; no new and shattering "truth" has surfaced within it. We must make peace with the Palestinians because we have no alternative, and because our security considerations permit us to realize the basic ethical principles that typify us as a people.

It is fascinating to contemplate the disillusionment with which the two sides view each other. Anyone who has had encounters with Palestinians has certainly felt this faint pulse, this sense of similarity and proximity, the almost-like-us sense that unites corresponding strata of Palestinian and Israeli society. Here, too, may be the root of the profound disillusionment afflicting us at present: we thought we could force the issue, make a psychological leap. This proved impossible. It took the Palestinians twenty years to heed the voice of their inner reasoning which instructed them to rebel against us. It will take decades to heal the wounds inflicted by both sides.

Every Jewish or Arab child who has been injured makes the chances of genuine peace, anchored in the hearts of the two peoples, more remote. Every house blown up makes it harder for the entire village to view our presence as anything but hostile. And every Arab proclamation in support of Saddam Hussein awakes all our historical demons and makes us hate the Arabs even more.

No, there will never be great love here, even if peace is established. Peace is not made through great love. King Hussein of Jordan is opening induction centers for Saddam, and we're willing to make peace with him right now. No one sprinkled a magic love potion on Anwar Sadat's eyelids before he set his eyes on Menachem Begin. But look at Hosni Mubarak today. Consider the peaceful rhetoric coming from the mouth of an Egyptian president, only twenty years after Abdel Nasser's speeches curdled our blood!

Mubarak speaks the way he does because he perceives regional peace and stability as being in Egypt's interest. So they were in Nasser's time, too, but peace was not perceived as a real possibility in Nasser's world. It is a real possibility now. Israel helped formulate it and realize it. This reality shapes consciousness. This peace—however chilly it may be—has formulated patterns of consciousness that help keep it alive and will continue to keep it alive. Perhaps, too, this peace helped bring about the almost unimaginable scenario in which an Egyptian army is collaborating with the United States against another Arab state.

We are not responsible for Saddam's thuggery. Neither can the Palestinians justify their behavior merely on account of Israel's actions; they could have behaved differently but, regrettably, chose this as their path. One cannot escape the thought, however, that were we, too, braver and wiser, that had we a more courageous and more original leader than Shamir, we might today be in a totally different position vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the Israeli Arabs, and perhaps even Jordan. The Palestinians' animosity toward us would be no less, but were they to share the political process with us, a process that would, in the final analysis—after years of

trial periods and security guarantees—ensure them a state, perhaps then they would have something to lose. Perhaps they would fear to opt for any possibility that might undermine the foundations of their new chance.

It angers us that by supporting Saddam Hussein, the Palestinians are declaring that they understand only the language of force. However, were we to declare a moratorium on our use of the language of power and the harsh grammar of tyranny, and to begin to speak to them in a new language, it is possible that the more sober and moderate among them would expand and gain in self-assurance and psychological liberation. Thus they would be better able to pursue the genuine (as we define this)—and in the final analysis, more rational—Palestinian interest.

I suppose that even the glorious pan-Arabism to which the Palestinians so ardently aspire at present will dwindle into vain proclamations, as it has in all sovereign Arab countries. No matter what the scholars and Arabists say, none of the sovereign Arab states is eager to merge with any other state for the sake of pan-Arabism. All the Arab states remember the humiliating failure of the Egyptian–Syrian alliance (the UAR). Anyone who speaks with Palestinians regularly knows exactly how deeply they love and identify with other Arab countries. When they get their state, however, one can assume they will vigorously and jealously safeguard their separatism and sovereignty. The Arab world has known leaders who cynically exploit the masses' destructive inclinations and impulses, violence, and collective mania. Bloodthirsty leaders such as Saddam Hussein surface and vanish like pockets of pus. It's always been this way. It was this way in Europe, too, until common sense and subtlety prevailed, inaugurating a measure of stability that worked to everyone's advantage. Some in Israel have a vested interest in persuading and enticing us into believing that the Palestinians are like suicidal whales, so instinctively driven to self-destruct that they can never be true partners in a dialogue.

Let us beware of playing into the hands of this racist outlook. Palestinian spokesmen and some of the Israeli Arabs may have demonstrated political shortsightedness and ethical hypocrisy in the present crisis, but these are not sufficient reasons for not doing everything necessary to attain peace with them and an equilibrium of interests—for our own sake.

Now of all times, at this moment of crisis, as the primeval urges flare, the clear, unadulterated voice must be heard over the momentary anxieties, above anger and frustration. Its message: no more. No more silence toward or cooperation with extremists. It is always easier to be rightist in the political climate that prevails in Israel. It would be easier to surrender to the hatred, violence, and despair that may in the long run become realities. It is for this very reason that we must gird ourselves with the last of our reason and sangfroid, reminding ourselves where Israel's true interests lie. To ensure our physical existence against Saddam Hussein, we have the Israeli Defense Force. To ensure our identity, and, in the final analysis, our physical existence, the voices of the pacifists, the pursuers of peace, however unpopular they may be at this juncture, must be raised again, and without delay. □

Ziad Abu Ziad and Dedi Zucker

Dear Dedi:

I am well acquainted with the distress of those faithless leftists who have attempted, and even today have not declared that they will cease attempting, to speak with the Palestinians. These men and women of little faith have always come to us whining, demanding that we meet them "halfway" in order to show their public that they're right. We, for our part, have tried to meet these demands.

Unfortunately, however, I have always sensed that the peace camp is weak on the Israeli side. Not only is it a minority, but it has always been on the defensive vis-à-vis the Right and doesn't take a step without a full consideration of the extortionism of the Right.

No, this is not the first time that the peace camp in Israel has folded. It is the first time, however, that it has flaunted its ability to knife its Palestinian partners in the back. It's appeased the Right and shown everyone that it too can attack the Arabs.

Right from the outset, it seems, there has been a sophisticated attempt to misrepresent the Palestinian viewpoint. The objective was clear: to present the Palestinians as supporters of the occupation of another people, thereby discrediting their protests against the Israeli occupation.

The Palestinian leadership stated unequivocally, at the onset of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, that it

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Ziad Abu Ziad is the editor of the Hebrew-language Palestinian weekly Gesher. *Dedi Zucker is a member of the Knesset representing the Citizens' Rights Movement. This exchange between Ziad and Zucker was originally published in* Ha'aretz *(August 8, 1990).*

objects in principle to occupation or the use of force to solve problems. Almost every day since the crisis erupted the leadership has articulated this position in interviews with foreign news agencies, in the Palestinian press of the Occupied Territories, and on Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic. Astonishingly, no one in the Israeli media has quoted the responses or even taken an interest in them.

Outside the territories, the PLO has attempted to mediate in the crisis, even presenting on August 5 (on Radio Monte Carlo and in print in *Al Quds* the next day) a comprehensive plan calling on Iraq *inter alia* to withdraw all its forces from Kuwaiti territory by August 10 and to honor Kuwaiti independence.

It is easy to understand why Israel hates and even fears Iraq. It is easy to understand why Israel wishes that someone would smash Iraq's power and give Israel a respite. But why should the Palestinians have to take up a position alongside Israel and the United States against Iraq?

Is what's good for the Jews necessarily good for the whole world? Here we must make it absolutely clear that our desire for Israeli–Palestinian peace is genuine and is rooted in deep conviction. Force will neither solve our problem nor put an end to our suffering. This is our conviction and to it, our commitment.

Dear Dedi, please tell these bleeding-heart leftists that by speaking or meeting with us they are doing us neither favor, charity, nor kindness. Our problem is ours together, and together we have an interest in solving it. Anyone who threatens to terminate contacts has behaved with total hypocrisy all along, lied to himself and to others, and deceived himself and others. Today he has found the opportunity to show his true face and to prejudice the interests that both sides share.

Dear Ziad:

For the past two weeks we have once again been separated by the thing that separated us until the PLO crossed a historic watershed in late 1988. Accompanied by a certain bitterness, we've returned this week to the disputes and arguments that I was sure we had put to rest for good. We have all returned—correct me if I'm mistaken—to 1987.

I am not one of these babies in the Israeli moderate camp who handed you Palestinians a bill of divorce because they thought peace had to be *preceded* by conciliation. Those who believe that friendship, fraternity, and solidarity are a sine qua non for peace do not understand that it's really the other way around.

No, what disappoints me is not the breach of faith. I have learned that the Palestinians' recent action—rapprochement with Iraq and open approval of its leader, whose cruelty outstrips anything you have experienced throughout the intifada—resulted from your particular distress and constraints. I understand the PLO faced a dilemma—its headquarters in Baghdad, its political and military infrastructure unable to exist without Iraq.

I cannot disregard and can even understand your despair and your hopelessness. I know the absence of any chance of a solution motivated your far-reaching steps. I do not think that Israel and, to a certain extent, the United States can absolve themselves from responsibility for the wretched condition in which you and the entire region find yourselves.

Yet none of this justifies a policy that appears today to be a monumental error on the part of the Palestinian national movement.

I've already told you that I do not accept the view that the PLO had only two options: the Cairo–Damascus–Jedda–Washington–Moscow axis or the Baghdad–Tripoli–San'a axis. Is there really no third option? Doesn't the price you'll pay for identifying with Baghdad prove that you should have opted for neutrality? Couldn't you have found a way to refrain from supporting either side?

I will attempt to clarify once again why the Palestinians' behavior upset us so. First, because of the conviction and truth you displayed in late 1988. You declared your recognition of Israel and your choice of political methods for arriving at a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. You know as well as I do that more and more Israelis have slowly but surely come to believe that something has changed among the Palestinians, something has happened that makes it possible for us to hope to negotiate with them. That has been the PLO's outstanding achievement in Israel in the last two years.

But it is permissible and even obligatory to disagree with those who renounce political avenues and choose instead to be photographed alongside the man who espouses more than anyone else the brutal use of military force as a means of settling disputes.

The other matter I wish to bring up is more political. The political price we shall both pay for our Siamese-twin interdependence is frightening and awesome to contemplate. Your dissociation from the United States, after the U.S. had begun to speak directly with the PLO, sets us back two years. You will lose stature in Europe, which has formed a consensus with the United States against Saddam. You have estranged yourselves from Cairo, a step that proved erroneous in Sadat's time, and will prove erroneous today too. Finally, you have lost credibility with the Israeli public.

All this points to one result: the chances of progress toward a political settlement appear more remote now than they did a month ago. Many of the achievements of the proponents of compromise are no longer valid.

You must agree that we have returned to 1987.

I told you this week that nothing is irreparable. You must be aware, Ziad, despite all my criticism and the strong disappointment I feel today, I have not abandoned my basic view: every people is entitled to autonomous national development. This is as surely in my interest as it is in yours. Nor have I abandoned the belief that dialogue between us—even in these difficult times—is a prerequisite for a political solution. □

Shulamith Aloni

It has been a rule of thumb among peoples since time immemorial that when rivals are not destroying each other, their representatives sit together, even though they are enemies, and discuss ways of terminating the hostilities and building peace. If the situation in our region were to change tomorrow in such a way that Saddam Hussein, that monstrous and atrociously cruel man, were to invite Israel to negotiate with him for Middle East peace, would we turn him down? Would we insist that the Iraqi people first appoint new representatives?

If we are duty bound—as we have always insisted—to talk peace with any enemy, if we truly believe what we say about the right of any political entity to choose its leaders and representatives, why has Arafat outraged us so? In what way are he and his cohorts worse than other creatures of the night with whom we sat as friends and with whom we are prepared to sit as enemies for the purpose of collaboration toward a peace settlement? How has Arafat, by kissing Saddam Hussein, become worse than Saddam Hussein himself?

Of course, I had hoped when Iraq invaded Kuwait that the PLO would announce its rejection of any occupation. Arafat failed to do so. But Shamir and the Israeli government announced their opposition to any occupation ... or have they done exactly the opposite by designing their own "constraints" and torpedoing the Baker plan?

The PLO leadership has not let me down. I had no love affair with them. We are engaged in a grim political conflict, many years long, that has generated anomie, fear, and despair. What concerns me is the State of Israel, its well-being, its security, and its character. For the sake of all these, I have to speak with any enemy. For the cause of being a free people in my land, I must step away from the shackles of occupation.

For this purpose we must negotiate with the PLO. Not because they are nice, for they are not; not because I trust them, for I do not; but rather because this dialogue is the road of salvation from a worse fate we must avoid: death, expulsion, devastation, loss of humanity, and the possibility that equitable sovereign existence will become untenable.

Thus we should keep our phone lines open and, preferably, in use. The universe abhors a vacuum. Lassitude is out of the question. If we do not act, the void will be filled by the likes of Rehavam Zesvi, Moshe Levinger, and those who would build the Temple, occupy the Temple Mount, and resume the sacrificial cult—all bound like Isaac to the altar of bloody warfare.

Intellectual integrity forces us neither to view Arafat as a friend nor to reject a dialogue with the Palestinians. They in their despair and stupidity have momentarily allied themselves with the Butcher of Baghdad, but with them, as with other murderers, we shall sit for negotiations if Israel's survival and security interests so warrant. □

Shulamith Aloni is head of the Citizens' Rights Movement (Ratz) in Israel and a member of Knesset. The following is from the Hebrew-language newspaper Yedioth Aharonoth, *August 27, 1990.*

Yossi Sarid

I do not favor cutting off the dialogue with the Palestinians, nor do I believe that the Palestinian issue has disappeared or should disappear from our agenda. But the vocal support of Palestinians for Saddam Hussein, coupled with the changed international situation created by Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, has created a new situation in Israel.

For us in the peace movement, the central goal has always been to create a peaceful Middle East. We always understood that the Palestinian issue was only one part of the problem facing Israel, namely the task of finding

Yossi Sarid is a member of Knesset from the Citizens' Rights Movement (Ratz) and a leading figure in the Israeli peace movement. The following is the substance of a phone interview conducted in early October 1990.

a way to live in peace with our Arab neighbors. But before the current crisis, it seemed as if no movement would take place on the international level, and that the most likely arena for a first breakthrough would be in our relationship with the Palestinians. Now, partly as a result of the action of the Palestinians themselves, it seems more likely that the first breakthroughs may occur in our relationship with other Arab states, and the Palestinian issue may be dealt with as a by-product of negotiations with other states of the region. It seems possible to imagine that after the Gulf crisis has been resolved there will be new opportunities for addressing the issue of peace between Israel and some of the Arab states of the region, including Syria.

The outcome of these negotiations may prove less promising from the standpoint of the Palestinian people, because the Arab states of this region do not always show the deepest care for and commitment to the needs of the Palestinians.

This does not mean that we in the peace camp should abandon the dialogue with the Palestinians. But in light of Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein, it is a waste of time to try to convince the Israeli public that this is a good time for this dialogue. It's ironic that the Palestinians went in the direction they did at this time, because the leadership of the intifada had talked about using this third year of their uprising to help prepare the Israeli public for peace.

By rallying to Saddam Hussein, the Palestinians left us in the peace movement with two alternatives: either to challenge them very loudly in public or else to try to justify their position. But the second alternative was not a serious option, since their position is intolerable and impossible. I'm sick and tired of trying to explain the PLO position. I have no empathy toward their current leadership, though I still have empathy toward the Palestinian people.

People ask me whether I can understand their position. My answer: Sure, I understand their position and why they arrived at it, just as I understand the position of Israeli Prime Minister Shamir or right-wing Knesset member Geula Cohen. But understanding doesn't mean that I accept it. As far as I'm concerned, the Palestinian position is totally unacceptable and that fact is not modified in the slightest by understanding it.

If we had been forced to defend the Palestinian position, the peace movement would be through. But in fact what happened was that we were courageous enough to speak up and speak our minds. As a result, after the crisis, we will be in a better position. The public will see that we were courageous and sincere and that will give us added credibility in the next stage. So the peace movement is far from through. This has not been a comfortable time or a good time—we are facing a major crisis and dealing with the impact of a major mistake on the part of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, I think the peace movement has an important role to play in the period ahead.

I also think that it is important that you at *Tikkun* are calling for the dismantling of the Iraqi Offensive Military Capacity. If this does not happen, and if Saddam or Iraq emerges from the situation largely intact, the situation will be far more dangerous for the Middle East in general and for Israel in particular. If Saddam's military apparatus remains intact, all the moderate forces in the Arab world will be in deep trouble (including Mubarak in Egypt) while the fundamentalists and extremists will become more powerful and dominant in Arab affairs. And Saddam himself hopes to make Iraq a superpower with sufficient clout to compete with other superpowers, or at least to make Iraq a powerful enough force that Iraq will enter into the deliberations of other superpowers when making decisions any place in the world. This would be a grave danger for Israel. For the sake of Israel, Saddam must be crushed either militarily or politically. And you at *Tikkun* are right to focus on the offensive military capacity—the Iraqi military infrastructure must be crushed. If he is not crushed, Israel will be left alone to fight a war with Iraq.

I believe that we will very soon have a better idea of the direction in which the Gulf crisis will be resolved. After the crisis, we will need to reassess exactly where we are, and what the next moves should be for the peace forces. For that reason, I think it very important that you go ahead with the *Tikkun* conference scheduled for the last week of June 1991 in Jerusalem. I hope that people who support the peace movement will come to this gathering so that we can explore the possible options, debate them, and crystallize our strategy for the period ahead. □

Beyond Egalitarianism

Judith Plaskow

An interesting paradox is emerging in non-Orthodox Jewish communities. The very success of egalitarianism—the gains in equal access for women to educational opportunities and fuller participation in Jewish religious life—has generated new questions and uncertainties about whether egalitarianism is enough. Over the last twenty years, barrier after barrier has fallen before women. We have found ourselves being counted in *minyanim,* going up to the Torah, leading services, becoming ordained as rabbis, and studying Talmud alongside boys and men. These new opportunities, however, have brought women up against the *content* of the tradition, and in doing so, have pointed to the need for changes far deeper and more frightening than the process of simply making available to women what all in the community acknowledge to be of value.

A rabbinical student finds herself studying a text that renders invisible her existence and experiences as a woman. A woman is called to the Torah and reads that daughters can be sold as slaves (Exod. 21:7-11) or that a woman's vow can be annulled by her father or husband (Num. 30). Women seeking to expand our Jewish lives discover that a tradition that seems to have a blessing for everything offers no Jewish forms for marking menarche or menopause. Ironically, it is only in gaining equal access that women discover we have gained equal access to a male religion. As women read from the Torah, lead services, function as rabbis and cantors, we become full participants in a tradition that women had only a secondary role in shaping and creating. And if we accept egalitarianism as our final stopping place, we leave intact the structures, texts, history, and images that testify against and exclude us.

Many non-Orthodox Jews are now stuck in a position of acknowledging the justice of women's claims to equality, but not knowing how to bring about deeper changes. Or feeling content that in some institutions the goal of equality has been achieved. Or feeling uncomfortable because even where the goal has been achieved, something is not quite working. If none of the steps toward equal access is easy, at least each is definable and measurable; one change opens to the next (e.g., learning opportunities spur the desire to use one's learning), and each is concrete and generally linked to a specific context of struggle (e.g., the Conservative movement, a particular synagogue). Beyond egalitarianism, the way is uncharted. The next step is not nearly so obvious as fighting for *aliyot* or ordination. Beyond egalitarianism, Judaism must be transformed so that it is truly the Judaism of women and men. It must become a feminist Judaism: not a women's Judaism or a Judaism focused on women's issues, but a Judaism that all Jews have participated in shaping. But how do we move from here to there? How does egalitarianism become the starting point for a fuller process of transformation?

I would suggest that there are at least five stages that any community has to move through on the path from egalitarianism to feminism or genuine equality. My treatment of these stages will be schematic, both because of limitations of space and because the content of any stage will be determined by the needs and problems of particular communities.

• The first stage is *hearing silence.* Indeed, the impetus to move beyond egalitarianism stems from hearing the silence of the Jewish tradition and of particular Jewish institutions and events concerning the history and experience of women. Silence is difficult to hear. When a silence is sufficiently vast, it fades into the order of things. We take it for granted as the nature of reality. When I went through three years of graduate school without reading a single word written by a woman, it took me a long time to notice. After all, men are theologians; whom else should we study? Women have a long history of reading ourselves into silence. From childhood bedtime stories to the biblical narratives, from male teachers to male books on male Judaism, women learn to people silences with our own shadowy forms.

It is only in gaining equal access that women discover we have gained equal access to a male religion.

Rebekah, Bruriah, and other individual women, a class on women in the Bible or a panel at the Y, are not disproofs of women's silence in Judaism. These are names and occasions we need to turn to *after* we have listened to silence, not in order to fill or deny it. Otherwise we miss the jolts against whose background particular women and events emerge: "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Exod. 20:14) (who is the community being addressed?); the absence of Miriam's prophecy or the record of Huldah's teaching (the hints in normative sources that there is so much more to women's leadership than the sources choose to tell us); a talmudic discussion of whether a girl penetrated before age three should receive her full *ketubah* (*Ketubot* 11a,b) (would women scholars ever have asked

Judith Plaskow teaches religious studies at Manhattan College. She is the author of Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective *(Harper & Row, 1990).*

this question?); *a contemporary discussion of this talmudic debate that assumes this is a reasonable question.* Women were agents throughout Jewish history, fashioning and responding to Jewish life and carrying its burdens. But women's perceptions and questions did not give form and content to Scripture, shape the direction of Jewish law, or find expression in liturgy.

• The second stage is *making a space to name silence.* Both hearing and naming silence can refer to the large silences of Jewish history or the smaller silences within any particular movement or community. Hearing silence is often a private experience. Whether a community will move beyond egalitarianism is in part determined by whether or not it creates the space for people to name the silences they hear. Often in particular egalitarian communities women's silence is interpreted either as accidental or as personal choice, or it simply leaves people resentful or befuddled. "We just don't happen to have many women who feel competent to lead Torah discussions." "I don't know why more men than women speak. A woman is leading the discussion; anyone can participate." The historical and structural impediments to women's speech thus get dismissed or overlooked, and the community is absolved from responsibility.

Communities need to set aside the time for members to speak the silences they hear. This might happen in an open meeting specifically called for the purpose. Participants might be asked to name the places where they feel silenced or hear women's silence. Discussion must take place initially without judgment and without challenge or cross talk, simply as an opportunity for people to speak their pain and their experience. Sometimes it helps to go around and give each person a chance to say something. Certainly, no one should speak for a second time until everyone who wants to has spoken once. The list of silences would provide a concrete agenda for a community to address.

• The third stage is *creating the structures that allow women to speak.* What these structures are in particular contexts will emerge from the list of silences. In congregations where men dominate the Torah discussions, it might be decided that men and women will call on each other in alternation. In a Talmud class where women feel that the text ignores their questions and experiences, it might be agreed that women will lead the discussions for a certain period, with the understanding that the class is there precisely to hear women's questions of and responses to the text. In any context in which women are apparently free to speak but seldom take the opportunity, a program on gender differences in socialization, discourse, and learning styles may help both men and women to understand the personal and institutional barriers to women's participation, and to analyze the gender style of their own institution and events.

Crucial to allowing women to speak are women-only spaces—not women-only spaces that are auxiliaries to male ones, but spaces in which women meet to discuss and explore their experiences as women. Men can listen to women, but, by definition, they cannot be the ones to end women's silence, and there are many forces that prevent women from finding their voices in situations in which men are present.

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Women's discussion groups, Rosh Hodesh groups, retreats, and spirituality collectives are spaces in which, to use Nelle Morton's phrase, women "hear each other into speech." These spaces are sources of energy, empowerment, and creativity that potentially enrich the whole Jewish community.

• The fourth phase is *taking the authority to fill in silence*. Once silence is named and space created, there is nothing to do but to take courage to speak. This is what is happening all over the country as women compose new blessings and liturgies, create rituals to celebrate important turning points in our lives, research our history and write new midrashim, reclaim our sexuality and explore our concepts of God. This is the phase where we create the *content* of feminist Judaism, and its time-frame is open-ended, its agenda sufficiently broad to include every facet of Judaism.

Much of this exploration and creativity, however, is taking place outside the boundaries of particular Jewish movements or institutions. Whether feminist innovations will ultimately be integrated into the tradition depends to some extent on the earlier phases I have discussed. It is difficult for women to dare to take the authority to speak. But that authority will be acknowledged and welcomed only when members of the larger community open themselves to hearing silence and thus recognize the need for the inclusion of women's voices. Thus, to take one concrete example, through midrash, storytelling, and historiography, women are creating women's Torah. But women's Torah will be accepted and taught as Torah only as Jews acknowledge that at least half of Torah is missing. Will Hebrew Union College or the Jewish Theological Seminary confront the contradiction of educating women in institutions in which Torah is still defined entirely on male terms? That depends on whether they hear the silence built into their curricula.

• The last phase is *checking back*. Speaking into silence entails enormous risk. It involves changes that are uncharted and whose direction is finally unpredictable. Not everything spoken into silences will be true or worth saying, and not everything said will finally feel Jewish. Any change that a community takes in the direction of transforming Judaism will necessarily involve feedback and evaluation. Did a particular liturgical or curricular change work? Whom did it empower? Did it create new areas of silence? Did it open new areas of Jewish experience and exploration? Did it feel Jewish? Why or why not? What is our operative understanding of "Jewish," and does it need to be expanded? Would we want to continue our change or experiment again? Would we want to teach the change to our children?

While such evaluation is crucial, it is equally crucial that it *follow* speaking into silence rather than precede it. Too often, questions concerning the appropriateness and boundaries of change are the first ones raised when feminists begin to alter tradition. Judgment is demanded in advance of any real experimentation. Will it be Jewish? is asked as a way of maintaining silence and continuing the status quo. But once we hear the silence of women, it becomes clear that repairing that silence will take all the creativity Jews can muster. Experiments in form, in content, in new relationships between women and men will all be necessary to make Judaism whole. There is time to decide the shape of the Jewish future—but that time is after those who have been silent have spoken. □

D'VAR TORAH

Landed Ethics

Michael Signer

After the High Holidays and Sukkot provide the setting for reflection on our personal religious journey, we are encouraged to continue this quest for meaning by entering the cycle of the weekly Torah portions of Sefer Bereshit, the book of beginnings or origins, also called Genesis. Bereshit's engaging stories and characters invite us in. Its sources weave together a narrative which reaches from the ordering of the cosmos through the ancestors of the Israelite tribes to our own perplexing family dynamics.

Bereshit lacks the heavy legal component of the other four books of Torah. We miss it, later on. There is humanity here, a profundity of insight into self, that nothing else in the Torah can match.

This disjunction was noted by Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes—Rashi—who opened his commentary by observing that the Torah really should have begun with Exodus 12:2, which proclaims the first commandment to Israel. If Judaism is about obedience to divine commandments, why then does Torah not commence with an orderly exposition of those laws, rather than with the order of cosmic creation? According to Rashi, the answer is to be found in the book of Psalms: "He revealed to His people His powerful works in giving them the heritage of the nations" (Psalms 111:7). The narratives of Genesis and the Torah must be the "mighty works" of God which are revealed to Israel in order to provide Israel with the "heritage of the nations."

The stories of Genesis form the pathway to discovering God's relationship to humankind. They provide the context for the laws. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the recently departed halachic

Michael Signer teaches Jewish history and Medieval studies at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles.

authority of American Orthodox Jews, affirmed that merely observing the commandments without acknowledging or understanding the nature of God and the covenant as described in the book of Genesis did not constitute a satisfactory form of religious life.

All human possession of the earth depends upon behaving ethically—the people must grow to deserve the land.

Rashi's reading of "the heritage of the nations" is all too relevant to our own times. If the gentile nations accuse Israel of stealing the lands of the seven Canaanite nations, Israel should respond, "All the earth belongs to the Holy One who created it and has given it to whomever is upright in his eyes. By God's will it was taken from them and given to us." Human origins, Israel's origins, are grounded in an ethics of possession. All human possession of the earth depends upon behaving ethically—the people must grow to deserve the land. Rashi's close reading of the text of Genesis 1:1, through the prism of classical midrash literature, took *ha'aretz* (the earth) to refer to the land of Israel, where the Rabbis believed the process of creation began. The harmony of the covenant between God and Israel is measured by the behavior of the Jewish people in the land. In this, Sefer Bereshit foreshadows the ethical standards of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and the Prophetic books.

For Rashi, as for earlier and later authorities, failure to retain physical possession of the land does not mean abrogation of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Quite the opposite—once again Bereshit is crucial to proper understanding. The narratives about the Patriarchs and Matriarchs move along an axis of entry and return to the Land. Relationships between parents and children are never harmonious. Yet departure from the land, alienation from a parent or child, is never without hope of return. Abraham and Isaac dwell temporarily in Egypt and return. Hagar and Ishmael are cast out of Abraham's tent, yet are protected and promised continuity for their family. The children of Jacob remain alienated from him (and each other) throughout most of their father's life. Yet on his deathbed they assemble before him to receive a blessing.

The last verses of Sefer Bereshit describe a mixture of despair and hope, our legacy ever since, with great beauty. Jacob and Joseph have died outside the land. We know from Sefer Shemot, the book of Exodus, that his descendants not only fulfill his request, but also return the bones of his son Joseph. We know from Deuteronomy that they will enter the land after forty years of wandering—and then go into exile once again. The promise of the land remains unfulfilled. Their righteousness was not sufficient to possess it. The covenant survives, however. Like the epic figure of Bereshit, they will try, and fail, again.

Sefer Bereshit provides a context for reading not just the Torah, but the entire *Tanach*. An ordered cosmos, life stories and strivings, provide the spiritual nurture for observing the commandments and participation. To be challenged by an ethics of possession of the land of Israel may not always result in success. Hope lies in continuity, sometimes in forms we might never have contemplated. The covenant of Sefer Bereshit is grounded in our willingness to re-read its stories and claim them as our own, and try ever again to begin. □

PERSONAL ESSAY

Ghost Stories

E. M. Broner

I. MY MOTHER IN THE MIRROR

Superimposed upon my face in the mirror is my mother's. I am about to comb my hair, but here she is, brushing hers, her thick, wavy, white hair.

We quarreled about hair.

"Don't wear your hair so short and flat, Mom," I said. "It's too mannish."

"Don't wear yours so wild," she would reply. "It's too girlish."

In the mirror, our arms go up and down in unison.

"Monkey See/Monkey Do," says Mom.

She pulls the hair forward from under her ears and forms spit curls.

"The return of the 1930s," I say.

Actually, her hair looked very nice the last time I saw her.

"What dress is that?" I asked my brother. "I don't recognize it."

"He didn't like the one I brought," said my brother, "and said he had an extra."

"An extra?" I ask.

"Somebody must have brought two to choose from," says my brother.

"Gives her color," I say.

There she is, eyes closed, her glasses resting on her nose.

The glasses will rest there forever.

She's in somebody else's dress, with her hair brushed from her forehead, high and fluffy.

E. M. Broner has written five books, among them Her Mothers *and* A Weave of Women. *Both books were reprinted by Indiana University Press in 1985. She has completed the novel,* The Repair Shop, *whose first chapter appeared in* Tikkun *(Volume 2, Number 2).*

"It's becoming that way, Mom," I say. "Keep that style."

Now, in the mirror, she brushes, parts her hair on the side, her two hands making a wave.

"I liked it better the other time," I tell her crankily.

I find hair in my comb.

"My hair's falling out," I tell my mother.

"My hair was always strong," she says. "Like my teeth."

"Do you like this length?" I ask her. "I just went to Barney's to have it cut."

"Barney's!" she says. "How can you afford Barney's?"

I flinch. I can never, ever, now or hereafter, tell my mother how much it costs at Barney's.

"I go to the barber in the neighborhood," she says.

We are in her bedroom. I'm cleaning out closet and dresser.

"Where's my face moisturizer?" she asks.

"I took it, Mother," I say.

"What else did you take?"

"The costume jewelry," I say.

"You gave it to me for Mother's Day," she says, "and—so fast—it's gone."

"I took hankies and scarves also," I tell her, looking in the pile I made for myself.

She sees a black plastic garbage bag.

"You threw out my stockings!" she exclaims. "Perfectly good, no-run stockings. And my panties, my bras."

"No one wants used underwear," I tell her.

"Plenty of people, believe me, would have appreciated stockings without runs, underwear laundered and folded," she says.

Could she be right? And about the girdle? Do people wear girdles?

She looks through the mirror at the dresser top.

"You didn't take my Rose Petal cologne," she says.

"I don't like the scent," I say.

"You're the only one in the land that criticizes roses."

Suddenly, she reaches out, lifts the cologne, presses the nozzle and sprays me.

"Don't! Don't!" I try to protect myself. "I like something more subtle."

"I never could smell you," says my mother. "Now you smell just like me."

My mother is putting on her lipstick, a bright red. She colors the top lip and presses her lips together. Then she takes a dab from her lips for her cheeks.

I take out my tube and outline my lips.

"I don't like that shade on you," says Mother. "You look like a ghost."

"Mother," I say, "How's this?"

I wrap her pretty scarf around my neck. I fasten her earrings on my lobes. I push her bracelet onto my hand. I take a new pair of her stockings, still in the package, and roll them up my legs.

"Try my powder," she says.

"I don't wear powder," I tell her.

"I can't see you too clear," says Mother. "I've left my glasses."

"I'm going now, Mother," I say, and lift my package of her belongings.

"Wait," she says. "It's getting cold. Take that warm coat."

"Whose coat is that?" I ask, about the old-fashioned dark wool with red fur collar, hanging in the garment bag.

"Aunty Nuni's," says my mother. "I hate things to go to waste. When she left, I went right over to the house and took her coat out of the closet. 'I'll wear it for you, my sister,' I said. Give a look in the pockets."

I put my hands into the pockets. Black leather gloves.

"Stay warm," says my mother.

The mirror is clear.

II. Mother Visit

I used to speak long distance, coast-to-coast, to my mother at her retirement village and, later, nursing home. Now we sit side by side every Friday night and Saturday morning.

I brush the crimson velvet cushion next to me, to clear it of coats, prayer books, announcements.

"Do you have enough room, Mama?" I ask.

"Plenty," she says.

Sometimes she comments briefly on the service.

"Wonderful singing. On the other hand, the sermon's too long."

People will try to sit in my pew.

"This seat is taken." I always say.

She used to speak at greater length. She's grown terser, less patient.

As we begin preparing for the Mourner's Prayer, she's already pushing me out of my seat.

"Don't be the last to rise!" she says. "It makes a bad impression."

Sometimes I have to repeat a question.

"What will I do with the kid?" I ask. "The kid's in bad shape. Tell me, Mother."

"You can't ask me any more," she says. "You have to handle it by yourself."

"That's mean!" I say. "Unfair!"

"That's where I am," says mother.

In the autumn, I was expecting her favorite nephew, Daniel, good to her, bad to me.

"Daniel's coming for a visit," I say.

"Tell him hello for me," says Mother.

"I'll kill him," I inform her.

"Don't kill Daniel!" she pleads.

After the visit with Daniel, mother and I meet at our regular time and place.

"I didn't kill Daniel," I tell her. "I was nice to him."

First I feel her hand on my arm, then patting my shoulder, blessing my head.

"That's my good girl," she says.

In the course of the winter, another cousin, Benny, dies. I have to bury him.

"Say the Kaddish for poor Benny," says Mother. "You're his only living relative."

"I can't!" I cry. "You, Dad, Cousin Benny! I can't hold everybody!"

She's quiet a moment.

"We don't take up so much room," she says. "We can all squeeze into this space."

She's happiest when it's a crowded Sabbath: a Rosh Hodesh, New Moon, plus a baby-naming, plus the calling of a bridal couple to the altar, ending with a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

"Today I got my money's worth," says Mom.

She and I are coming to the close of our mourning. I will have to relinquish her space to other congregants.

But, if I am her good girl and rise in mourning for cousin Benny, and refrain from killing cousin Daniel, will I hear whispered blessings ruffling my hair, my life? □

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Hostage Philosophy: Levinas's Ethical Thought

Martin Jay

The Levinas Reader, edited by Seán Hand. Basil Blackwell, 1989, 311 pp.

How does an octogenarian Jewish philosopher from France, little known outside of specialist circles until recently, come to merit that most honorific of publishing tributes, a "Reader"? How does he join the "Reader" elite, alongside such intellectual luminaries as Julia Kristeva, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jürgen Habermas? What, moreover, is the intended audience for these often demanding and esoteric texts; who is the Levinas reader likely to be?

Emmanuel Levinas has been known to serious students of European philosophy for sixty years, ever since the publication of his influential study of Edmund Husserl, the work Jean-Paul Sartre said had introduced him to phenomenology. Some of his other writings, such as the demanding *Totality and Infinity,* have been available in English since 1969, and there are several recent collections of scholarly essays devoted to his thought. Moreover, the 1978 translation of Jacques Derrida's warm if not entirely uncritical evaluation of Levinas meant he was cautiously assimilated into the discourse of post-structuralism as well as that of phenomenology.

And yet, because of the difficulty of his French prose and the indirect quality of his reception, Levinas has always remained a somewhat shadowy presence in the English-speaking world. But this situation is certain to change with the appearance of *The Levinas Reader,* masterfully edited and annotated by the Welsh scholar Seán Hand. Levinas is poised on the threshold of occupying the role that no one has really filled since the death of Martin Buber: that of the Jewish sage able to speak to the universal concerns of modern (or perhaps better, postmodern) men and women. Why, to repeat our opening question, has this apotheosis occurred?

Born in Lithuania in 1906, Levinas came to France after the First World War to study philosophy, particularly as it had been developed by Henri Bergson and his followers. In 1928 and 1929, however, he spent time in Freiburg, where he attended lectures by Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In the 1930s, when he assumed French citizenship and worked for the *Alliance Israélite Universelle,* Levinas served as a critical champion of the phenomenological ideas he had absorbed in Germany. During the Second World War he was a prisoner of war but avoided being deported to the death camps. After its end, he returned to Paris and the directorship of the *Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale,* as well as a series of academic posts culminating in a professorship at the Sorbonne in 1973. Diligently pursuing his scholarly and religious interests at once in the universalist camp of the university and the sectarian one of the talmudic seminary, he slowly emerged as a powerful and respected figure in French intellectual life, discussed admiringly by a range of commentators from Maurice Blanchot and Lyotard to Paul Ricœur and Luce Irigaray.

His French audience found in Levinas an extraordinarily subtle thinker who provided an original and challenging reading of the legacy of phenomenology strongly inflected by his Jewish beliefs. From Husserl and Heidegger he derived an understanding of the importance of lived experience prior to the intellectual reflection of the Cartesian *cogito.* He had first studied temporality with the Bergsonians, but his thinking was vastly enriched by Heidegger's explanation of its role in the drama of human finitude. And from the phenomenologists Levinas came to appreciate the costs of a philosophy of essential form based on the distant contemplation of a disembodied subject.

But in his radical critique of Heidegger's and Husserl's obsession with the ontological issues of Being and totality —an obsession he traced back as far as the Greek origins of Western philosophy—Levinas's particular Jewish identity explicitly came to the fore. For Levinas, the ultimate questions are ethical rather than ontological. The dominant focus of his thought became humanity not as immanent in Being, but as Being's transcendence, its beyond, its fracture. Or more precisely, it is humanity as the recipient of ethical commands from elsewhere that has concerned him. Levinas's abiding preoccupation remains less knowledge in the guise of descriptive statements of what is, than injunctions in the form of prescriptive imperatives about what ought to be.

Although Levinas has been careful to abjure the role of preacher, he gives a strong account of what might be called the ethical *a priori* underlying all moralizing. The fundamental ground of ethics is not, he claims, the abstract formalism of Kant's categorical imperative or the reciprocal "I-Thou" relationship of Buber's theology of dialogue. It is instead the submission of the self to the other, the principled suppression of self-interest in order to honor alterity (otherness). Ethics is thus rooted in asymmetry and hierarchy, in which other is always superior to self. The responsibility for the other is generated by what Levinas calls the *encounter* with his or her face, an encounter which is less directly visual than aural. We do not "know" the other by reference to his or her image, but rather enter a relationship of communicative proximity with him or her. Manifest in the intersubjective act of saying and listening, rather than in obedience to the already said, ethics demands that we put ourselves unconditionally in the place of the other without expecting anything in return. "Under accusa-

Martin Jay is professor of history at UC Berkeley. His most recent book is Fin-de-Siècle Socialism and Other Essays *(Routledge, 1988).*

tion by everyone," Levinas concludes, "the responsibility for everyone goes to the point of substitution. A subject is a hostage."

The goal of ethics is thus not fusion with the other, nor is it even egalitarian reciprocity. It is instead the assumption of our own heteronomy, the willing abandonment of our ego's sovereignty, without cravenly accepting abasement or servitude. It is a never-ending openness to alterity, which embraces infinity without yearning for the closure of totality or the harmonious resolution of dialectics. Ethical conduct thus involves a nonerotic love for our neighbors that looks for nothing in return. As such it is uncompromisingly disinterested, in the etymological sense of not being "among beings" (*inter esse*), but rather being open to what transcends them. Ultimately, ethics thus means openness to God, who is not so much the divine creator as the ethical lawgiver. Although we can have no direct encounter with God, no I-Thou interaction with the supreme Other, He is present in the Third, the other, who is always in our midst, yet signifies something beyond.

Not surprisingly, Levinas is critical of humanist self-aggrandizement. Freedom as the autonomy of the acting self, the self of projects and initiatives, is a pernicious mirage. Sartre's famous identification of the subject with the "for-itself" should be supplanted, he argues, by the "for-the-other," a state best exemplified by maternity. What he calls our "difficult freedom" paradoxically requires accepting our ultimate dependency on the other. Modern anti-humanism, Levinas approvingly writes, "clears the place for subjectivity positing itself in abnegation, in sacrifice, in a substitution which precedes the will. Its inspired intuition is to have abandoned the idea of person, goal and origin of itself, in which the ego is still a thing because it is still a being." Instead of the active, Faustian self so much a part of the Western tradition, Levinas calls for a more passive self, which is not the shepherd of Being, as Heidegger counseled, but rather the caretaker of the other.

The austere rigor of Levinas's ethical paradigm is exemplified by his suspicion of aesthetic pleasure, especially in the form of static visual images. Such images redirect our attention to the existing world of what is, rather than to what should be. Calling the Mosaic proscription of graven images "truly the supreme command of monotheism," he trusts only in the literary art of a Proust, Leiris, or Blanchot, whose work opens up questions of absence, temporal deferral, and the permanent exile from Being. He is likewise hostile to religious attempts to achieve ecstatic fulfillment in the here and now, preferring the formal law and ritual of Orthodoxy to the mystical communion of, say, Chasidism. Only the unbridgeability of the gap between divine command and human obedience can preserve the fundamentally ethical transcendence that is the essence of Jewish revelation.

The fundamental ground of ethics is the submission of the self to the other, the principled suppression of self-interest in order to honor alterity.

If one were to simplify Levinas's argument into a series of antithetical pairs, the following would readily appear: immanence/transcendence, presence/absence, totality/infinity, vision/hearing (or touch), interest/disinterest, ontology/ethics, truth/justice, reciprocity/asymmetry, distance/proximity, substance/relation, active/passive, ego/alter, being/becoming, philosophy/religion, and said/saying. In all of these cases, the first term is deemed problematic and generally identified with Hellenism, the second is praised and seen as Hebraic. Although these dichotomies cannot always be automatically mapped onto each other—listening to God's word, for example, is called active when Levinas discusses the tradition of midrashic interpretation—they all tend to line up in the same direction. Even when he tries to overcome one of them, for example in his claim that there is a "passivity prior to the passivity-activity alternative, more passive than any inertia," Levinas still chooses the higher passivity over activity.

Not surprisingly Derrida, for all his admiration for Levinas, felt compelled to deconstruct his binary oppositions. Derrida followed Joyce in asserting that "Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet." However much one wants to, it is impossible to step outside the Hellenic metaphysical tradition entirely; even not-philosophizing, Derrida insisted, is still on some level philosophizing. Levinas's answer, contained in the essay entitled "God and Philosophy" in this collection, draws on what he calls a state of "insomnia"—in which the self is awake but not intentionally engaged with the world—as the way to get beyond philosophy. But it is not clear if this state is invulnerable to a further deconstruction, especially when we note how entangled in the web of philosophizing—with its truth claims and totalizing discourse—Levinas's own work is. Although he points to ethical commands outside of theoretical statements and gives them pride of place, his writing itself exemplifies how deeply imbricated the two are. Levinas's work is after all a kind of descriptive metalanguage which tries to prioritize prescription over description.

Whether or not Levinas's argument is damaged by criticism of this kind, criticism his later work struggles to take into account, it has not hindered the recent upsurge of interest in him. The reasons for his popularity may by now be a bit easier to discern. To the extent that the Enlightenment project of emancipating individuals from their state of heteronomy is now widely discredited, that humanist hubris toward the rest of creation is damned as "species imperialism," and that intellectual claims to know totality are denounced as inherently totalitarian, Levinas is very much a thinker of our time. Too rigorous to be confused with the sort of mystical New Age irrationalism we have wisely learned to distrust, his thought nonetheless provides a provocative challenge to many of the most fundamental assumptions of conventional "progressive" thought.

So too the current fascination with ethical questions, coupled with continued doubts about the possibility of rational justifications for moral systems, has fostered a climate favorable to considering Levinas's ideas. And at a time when the oculocentric bias of Western culture is on the defensive in many fields, Levinas's celebration of hearing and touch over sight strikes a responsive chord. Reading Levinas's challenge to the hegemonic biases of

Western thought may cause us, as Derrida famously said, to tremble, but it seems we do so more and more in tune with the *zeitgeist*.

There may well be still another source of Levinas's appeal: the political implications of his work. In a 1984 interview with Richard Kearny not included in the *Reader,* Levinas ruefully acknowledged that "as soon as there are three, the ethical relationship with the other becomes political and enters into the totalizing discourse of ontology." Here he adds, "I think there's a direct contradiction between ethics and politics, if both these demands are taken to an extreme.... Unfortunately for ethics, politics has its own justification." At a time when the redemptive project of political emancipation, especially that of the Left, is shipwrecked, the escape from politics back into ethics has seemed very attractive to some. When the young Maoist *enragé* Pierre Victor, who was Sartre's constant companion in his last years, turned back to the religion of his fathers and reassumed the name Benny Lévy, his conversion was reported to have come through reading Levinas.

Levinas, to be sure, has not himself been entirely indifferent to political issues; *The Levinas Reader* contains several examples of his concern for Israel's fate. Arguing against the equation of Zionism with conventional nationalism, he claims that the existence of the state of Israel can only be justified if it becomes an unapologetically religious entity based on talmudic law. It is, in fact, legitimate only as a vehicle to realize the justice enjoined by that law. Zionism, Levinas argues, has a genuinely messianic role based not on securing a holy land, but on fulfilling a scriptural obligation.

And what of the nonobservant Jew who lives in Israel? Levinas's answer is consistent with his uncompromising stance: "Modern humanist man is a man in a State. Such a man is not merely vulgar; he is religion's true antagonist within the State of Israel itself." And what of the non-Jews who find themselves under Israeli rule? Here Levinas's position becomes even more intransigent and, alas, more troubling. He earnestly insists that the highest ethical imperative is responsibility for the other, and that "the traumatic experience of my slavery in Egypt constitutes my very humanity, a fact that immediately allies me to workers, the wretched, and the persecuted peoples of the world." But when he was asked in the wake of the Sabra and Shatila massacres, "for the Israeli, isn't the 'other' above all the Palestinian?" his reply was chillingly closed-minded: "My definition of the other is completely different. The other is the neighbor who is not necessarily kin, but who can be. And in that sense, if you're for the other, you're for the neighbor."

Here the infinity of alterity, the transcendence of mere being by ethical commands, the hostage-like substitution of self for other, are abruptly circumscribed by the cultural-cum-biological limits of permissible kinship alliances. Ontological considerations of who people *are* interfere with the ethical injunction that we *ought* to treat all others with responsibility. As Derrida rightly argued, the binary opposition between *is* and *ought* is harder to maintain than Levinas contends. And in this case, the trembling that results from being Levinas's reader is not quite so pleasant an experience.

Paradoxically, however, two criteria that Levinas ascribes to Greek thought, reciprocity and symmetry, are the only way to check the descriptive (Hellenic) tendency to place limitations on the Jewish subordination of self to other. For only when I look for reciprocity, when I can see the same in the other, the neighbor in the stranger (even the stranger outside my kinship circle), will the likelihood of future Sabras and Shatilas diminish. Only when the realm of the polis is understood as the site to adjudicate differences, and not unethically to suppress them in the name of totalizing sameness, can the dignity of the other be genuinely upheld.

Although Levinas's profoundly moving reading of the Hebraic tradition has revivified that tradition for an international audience of Jews and non-Jews alike, it may nonetheless be worth pausing before we plunge too eagerly down the path of his "difficult freedom." For along with the Hellenic concern for Being, truth, and universality, there are also ethical-cum-political injunctions in the Hellenic tradition worth taking seriously. The costs of forgetting the Jewish dimension of Western culture Levinas has brilliantly demonstrated; the no less dangerous costs of suppressing the Hellenic is a lesson we have to go elsewhere to learn. □

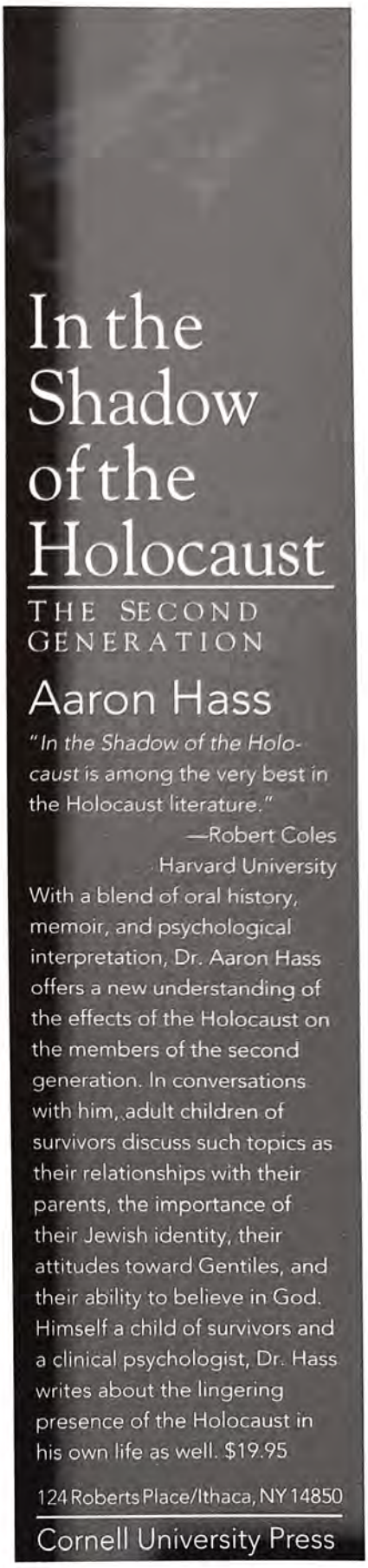


Photo Opportunities

Miles Orvell

And Their Children After Them by Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson. Pantheon, 1989, 262 pp.

Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans by Alan Trachtenberg. Hill and Wang, 1989, 326 pp.

Try this experiment: cut a photograph out of a newspaper or magazine, eliminate the caption, show it to a group of people, and ask them to supply an interpretation of the image. Let's assume you have started with a subject not immediately recognizable—no political figures, no sports stars, no local heroes who recently have been in the news. The variety of readings the image provokes will amaze you.

Certain photographs can be superficially coded by virtue of unmistakable gestures: a man weeping, a child saluting, two smiling women shaking hands. But it is impossible to assign a narrative that will explain, with any certainty, the moment's frozen emotion. Other images seem actively to resist these efforts at interpretation: a car traveling through a landscape; a group of people in a swimming pool; two women wearing masks, strolling on a boardwalk; a bent flower. And it seems to make no difference whether the photo is from an ad or not. And yet photography—a communication medium that is very often ambiguous without a verbal context—has become in our time the standard of objectivity.

As our simple experiment implies, photographic images are invariably presented in a context that *already interprets them for us*. Thus images that are otherwise illegible become literal affidavits of "reality" by virtue of the special coding that governs their presentation. That coding is most obvious when the image is captioned; but it is equally present when the image appears in a series, a journalistic story, a museum, or an archive catalog.

In all these ways photography is a nonobjective, nonliteral medium, and its special nature requires that consumers of images practice a deliberate decoding of the means by which the image has been aesthetically shaped and freighted with significance. In other words, the serious reader of photographs is necessarily and inevitably inquiring into ideology: the structure of conscious and unconscious intentions that governs any act of communication. That inquiry is the motivation behind both Alan Trachtenberg's *Reading American Photographs* and the Pulitzer prize-winning *And Their Children After Them,* by Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, two works that explicitly engage past photographic subjects from the point of view of a political present.

Trachtenberg is best known for two books: *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol,* an American Studies classic that looked at a single artifact through a multifaceted cultural prism, and *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age,* a wide-ranging work of historical interpretation. *Reading American Photographs* combines the virtues of the concentrated subject with that of the broad cultural perspective, and it results in the most sustained and rigorous study of American photography yet produced.

Photographs, for Trachtenberg, are "opaque facts" that must be interpreted in context. To recover meaning is to reconstruct authorial intention, but it is also inevitably to read the image through the lens of our contemporary social lives. The historian is always, and in Trachtenberg's case deliberately, engaged in political activity. What interests Trachtenberg is not so much the unadorned individual photograph as the image that is presented in a series—in an album, book, or photostory. Eschewing an encyclopedic ap-



Let Us Now Frame Famous Families: Michael Williamson reshoots Walker Evans's portraits of Fred and Sadie Ricketts as they hang in the home of the Ricketts's daughter Margaret.

Miles Orvell, professor of English and American Studies at Temple University, has written widely on topics in American culture. His most recent book is The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1941 *(1990, University of North Carolina Press).*

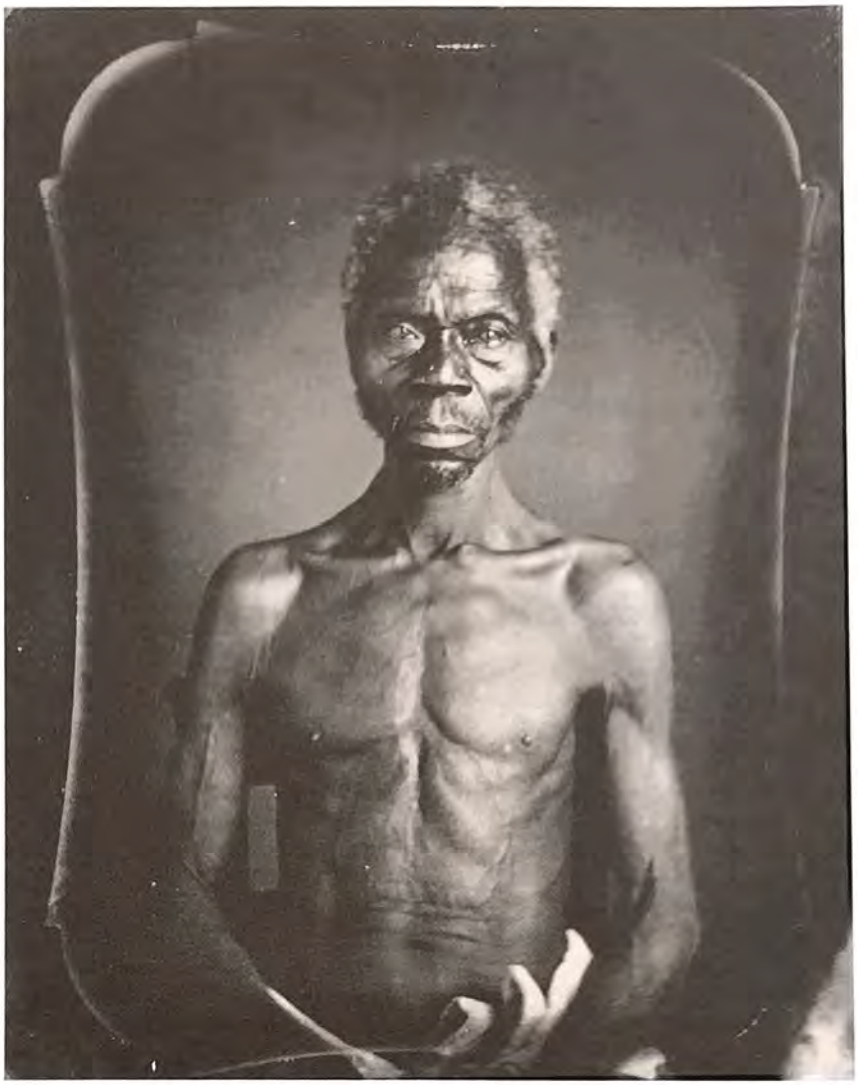
proach, he chooses as his principals Mathew Brady, Timothy O'Sullivan, Lewis Hine, Alfred Stieglitz, and Walker Evans, photographers who have, in one way or another, taken "America" as their subject and who thus have contributed to a deliberate and ongoing national discourse.

The best illustration of Trachtenberg's method is his long chapter on Mathew Brady and the nineteenth-century portrait. Portrait photographers before Brady labored under an assumed constraint, inherited from such artists as the eighteenth-century English painter Joshua Reynolds, who declared that portraits were necessarily inferior to history painting and landscape: "A history-painter paints man in general," Reynolds said. "A portrait painter, a particular man, and consequently a defective model." Brady overcame this supposed limitation by placing the individual portrait within a deliberate series, thereby successfully *generalizing* the portrait and raising it above mere literal representation.

Brady recognized the importance of the new medium as an historic record and an inspirational mode. In 1850 he published *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans,* a book that featured twelve lithographed renderings of daguerreotypes, together with brief biographies by C. Edward Lester. It was, as Trachtenberg writes, "the first ambitious photographic project to take America itself as subject and theme."

The philosophical premise of the *Gallery* was that the appearance of the individual (as preserved by the artful photographer) was an index of character; that the expression of the face carried in all its particulars the map of the moral and psychological faculties; that inner spirit and outer form were as congruent as hand and glove. Moreover, Brady conceived that the example of such illustrious faces drawn from a range of political, military, artistic, and scientific achievement would create models that would serve to elevate the moral, spiritual, and practical life of the republic.

Reading Brady's *Gallery,* Trachtenberg invokes the model of the Roman bust, with its similar embodiment of public virtue: "Like Roman statues, the *Gallery*'s faces project a public space, a space for viewing men in the guise of republican virtue: *gravitas, dignitas, fides.*" But the most explicit



J. T. Zealy's daguerrotype of Renty, a slave from the plantation of B. F. Taylor, Columbia, SC.

political gesture the *Gallery* makes is through Brady's particular choice of the illustrious, who collectively embrace "Democrats and Whigs, North, South, and West, farmer, planter, and entrepreneurial classes." Together they prominently affirm a "national gesture" at a moment when discord was clearly threatening the Union. "Combining panegyric with chronicle," notes Trachtenberg, "the words and images [of the *Gallery*] comprise a single composite biography of an ideal citizen."

But, as Trachtenberg soon makes clear, it was only an illusion of unity that the *Gallery* promoted. Suppressed amid the series of illustrious, powerful, white male figures were the facts of slavery and the presence in the U.S. of African-Americans.

Trachtenberg deepens his argument by observing that in 1850, the same year in which Brady's *Gallery* appeared, the famous Harvard natural scientist, Louis Agassiz, commissioned from J. T. Zealy a series of daguerreotype portraits of African-born slaves at a plantation in South Carolina. Agassiz's purpose in requesting the photographs was to study the physical characteristics of the slaves in an effort to ascertain whether there were significant differences between whites and blacks that might lay the ground for a belief in the superiority of the white, and therefore justify the enslavement of blacks.

Zealy photographed the slaves naked, showing them powerless to conceal their genitals. He allowed the slaves none of the shame that others might feel in the same condition. Moreover, contrary to the ruling convention of portraiture that required the individual to look away from the camera in order

to achieve a more elevated, timeless expression, the slaves gazed directly into the lens (though by whose direction and with what emotion we cannot say). The effect on the viewer, as Trachtenberg aptly describes it, is confusing: "erotic response mingling with moral disgust and outrage" that these human beings have been "trapped within a system of representation" as firmly as they have been trapped within slavery. At the same time, however, the pictures embody, subversively, a power to shatter the very conventions they represent: eye to eye, we experience an appeal, as Trachtenberg puts it, to "a shared humanity."

Once we accepted the visual and verbal representation of "truth" with a naiveté that bordered on delusion.

Trachtenberg concludes the Brady chapter with a discussion of Walt Whitman, the most photographed of nineteenth-century poets and a supporter of Brady's effort to photograph the exemplars of the republic. But Whitman emerges as the antithesis of Brady, by virtue of both his own unconventionally posed self-portraits and his view of photography as an inclusive, democratic medium. In contrast to Brady's aristocracy, Whitman's notion of the polity envisioned the criminal and the slave alongside the scientist, statesman, and general; the female equal to the male. In fact, according to Trachtenberg, Whitman allows us to see that "portrait conventions which bore the ideal of American republicanism were equivalents to actual social barriers that segmented the Republic and mocked its declared ideals."

Trachtenberg concludes his study with a warmly appreciative chapter on the Great Depression photographer Walker Evans, whose work is read as an extension of the objectivity of the Brady legacy. At once factual and personal, Evans's images come as close as photography can come—without captions—to embodying a clear political viewpoint. In contrast to the aestheticizing tendencies of the modernist twenties, which removed photography from the social sphere, Evans restored the image to "everyday culture," photographing with a simplicity and eloquence that have made his thirties images virtual icons of the era.

Not surprisingly, Evans's photographs have elicited a good deal of commentary in recent years, including the ballyhooed "discovery" that Evans rearranged some furniture in creating his most famous images of southern tenant farmers' homes. (It was in fact generally the practice of thirties photographers to direct their documentary subjects.) For the last fifty years, Evans's presence has dominated the "vernacular" style—visible in the work of such strong photographers as Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Wright Morris, and Chauncey Hare. That style is even more evident in the work of Michael Williamson, co-author (with Dale Maharidge) of *And Their Children After Them.*

In fact, Maharidge and Williamson set their book up as a kind of sequel to one of the great works of documentary (and imagination) to come out of the 1930s, the collaboration between Evans and James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.* Agee (a journalist, novelist, film reviewer, and screen writer) and Evans lived with three Alabama tenant farmers and their families during the mid-thirties and then constructed out of that experience their complex record, published in 1941. Maharidge and Williamson set out to recapitulate and update that record by locating the very same three families (and their descendants). The update challenges us on many levels: as a reading of history, a reading of a classic text, a rewriting of a classic text and, most importantly, an ethical act.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men presents a set of photographs by Evans along with a four-hundred-page text by Agee that can be variously described: as a documentary, antidocumentary, local history, study of manners, political treatise, essay on education, or examination of the techniques of writing and recording. Above all, it is a work of exemplary and even excruciating self-consciousness, aware at every moment of the betrayal of the other that is implied in any act of representation. When it came out in 1941, interest in the Depression had already given way to world war, and the book, though well reviewed, went virtually unnoticed. Only since its reissue in 1960 has it achieved the status of a classic—though, as with other classics, whether or not it is actually read is another story.

The families Agee and Evans observed were unknown in the thirties (hence the irony of the title, based on a biblical text). Since then, however, they have suffered a more complete irony. As a result of the writing and picturing of their lives in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* their anonymity was erased; now they have been reinterviewed, rephotographed, and rewritten from the standpoint of their relative celebrity.

We're drawn into *And Their Children After Them* by our curiosity to know what has happened to these people so vividly represented by Agee and Evans, especially as the question of their *destiny* was a central theme in the 1941 book. What we learn from Maharidge is a mixed tale of nervous breakdowns, suicide, incest, and—in some cases—material success and achievement. In updating the personal record, the authors attempt to locate the lives of these families and their descendants within the larger history of cotton farming in Alabama, including the effects of technology, ownership patterns, and racial and class conflict.

Maharidge proclaims at the outset that the authors "in no way intended to imitate, parody, or otherwise denigrate" Agee and Evans. But that is precisely the result of their work. *And Their Children After Them* is, in fact, an imitation: witness the design and layout, the apparatus at the beginning and the end, the borrowed section titles, the placement of pictures relative to text. And surely it's a parody, though an unconscious one, when Maharidge adapts Agee's technique of introducing verbatim long quotations from schoolbooks, or when he mimics Agee's stylistic mannerisms—ranging from the flattest of prose to the baroque. Unfortunately, Maharidge's special effects succeed only as flights of banality, as when he describes the intense heat of the South: "sweat not just dripping into your eyes but washing down over your face." And, finally, the authors denigrate Agee and Evans by speaking condescendingly of their personal lives. The point is not that Evans and Agee were paragons of virtue, but that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was written with a candor and self-critical spirit that

is well beyond the reach of Maharidge.

The pictures are no better: as Maharidge has "rewritten" *Famous Men,* Williamson has "rephotographed" it. He uses a familiar kind of time-lapse photography (the scene in the thirties juxtaposed with the same scene today). But then, incongruously, we also have bizarre and lurid close-ups of feet, a church steeple shot against a lightning storm, hyperdramatic night shots, a man's mouth showing only three teeth. It's as if Williamson couldn't decide who he was, photographically: Walker Evans, or Evans's nemesis, Margaret Bourke-White, whose garish and sensationalistic images of poverty in the thirties Agee and Evans deplored. Sadly, it will be difficult to read Agee and Evans now without thinking of Maharidge and Williamson, just as one can't listen to Rossini without seeing William Tell overtaken by the Lone Ranger.

Tellingly, what Maharidge and Williamson fail to appreciate in Agee and Evans is their acute consciousness of the burden of representation as an ethical, political, and artistic act. Evans carefully edited the images in *Famous Men* so as to emphasize the dignity of his subjects, while Agee agonized over the inevitable invasion of their privacy.

We are presently, as Robert Scholes argues in his recent *Protocols of Reading,* living in an "age of interpretation," in which "we are now perhaps excessively aware of the gap between any event and its entry into textuality." But this has not always been the case. During the 1930s we accepted the visual and verbal representation of "truth"—the factuality of the photograph, the objectivity of the verbal report—with a naiveté that bordered on delusion: hence the originality of Agee and Evans in challenging that whole premise.

It is now a truism not only of literary and visual studies, but of our political life as well, that the facts of any given case are almost irrelevant. What matters is how those facts are interpreted to us and by us. Press secretaries tell us what their candidates "really" mean, while polls tell us what we ourselves "really" think about the candidates. And so we are in a great circle game of whispered sentences and dubious outcomes.

We may deplore this state of things, but we cannot at this point easily escape it. As both these books make clear, we need to devise strategies to deal with the foregrounding of interpretation in our intellectual and political affairs.

The reason why photography has assumed such a central role in cultural discussion is that it raises the vexing problems of representation in a relatively pure form. As consumers of photography, we need to maintain a degree of skepticism (whose root meaning, incidentally, is *to look*) that will allow us to see through and around the image, recognizing it as a deliberate act of communication in a political, social, and aesthetic context.

Our dilemma, however, is that we must arrive at this recognition without at the same time becoming so cynical that we render ourselves effectively immune to acts of visual communication. Despite the glut of images (including those on television) that surrounds us, we maintain our skepticism at the risk of short-circuiting our response to the world. Somehow, between skeptical vigilance and political engagement, we need to fine tune our reading of visual media: we must at least acknowledge the inherent ambiguities of photography if we are to allow the medium its power to witness the world. □

Breaking and Entering: Women and Sacred Learning

Margo Peller Feeley

Words on Fire: One Woman's Journey into the Sacred by Vanessa L. Ochs. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990, 328 pp.

When I was eighteen, I shared a tiny room in Jerusalem with an Orthodox girl from Brooklyn who was sweetly vague about her disappearances during the day. My life was an open book: I attended Ulpan—intensive Hebrew language school—in the mornings and begged lessons from rabbis in the afternoons. Brought up in Excelsior, Minnesota (not exactly a bastion of Jewishness), I was eager to make up for lost time. Meanwhile, my roommate, whom I'll call Rachel, was receiving anxious letters from her parents insisting she return home; she always found an excuse not to. After a few months, Rachel's parents flew unannounced to Israel, seized upon her person, and spirited her back to Far Rockaway, where she was instantly married off.

What rumors had moved those parents to virtually kidnap their daughter? That she was trafficking in drugs? Converting to Christianity? Meeting Palestinian boys on the sly? No. They suspected—and it was true—that she was studying Talmud.

What happened to Rachel certainly gave me pause. Was the end of all that scholarship to be—shudder—marriage? I continued to study Hebrew and importune my rabbis, but they didn't have much time for me. Ironically, they were busy hustling funds to start Or Sameach, Aish HaTorah, and the Diaspora Yeshiva, institutions which were to cater to young people (mostly male) of the Return to Judaism movement. Finally I took off for Gateshead Seminary in the north of England under the mistaken notion that it was a women's yeshiva. It turned out to be a training school for hausfraus. Enough

Margo Peller Feeley has published literary criticism and short fiction. In October she began a three-month residency at Dorland Mountain Arts Colony to work on a novel.

already, I thought. I packed up and went back to the University of Minnesota to study literature.

"I went to Jerusalem to study Torah," reads the first line of Vanessa L. Ochs's just-published *Words on Fire.* I noted these words with a sense of déjà vu and great curiosity: are the sacred texts of Judaism now more accessible to women than they were to Rachel and me, at our different levels of study, twenty-five years ago? Well, yes and no. . . .

Ochs's book is not easy to label: part autobiography, part memoir of a sabbatical year in Jerusalem (1987), part survey of opportunities there to study Torah, part essay on the relationship of holy and profane. It will remind many readers of Samuel Heilman's *The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem,* although this is distinctly a woman's pilgrimage.

Ochs's is "one woman's journey into the sacred," in the sense that Dante's *Inferno*—or the Jewish equivalent, *Machberot Emmanuel Haromi* (the notebooks of Emmanuel of Rome)—is one man's journey into the spirit world. The book speaks to and for anyone who feels bound to the Wheel of Life but yearns for at least occasional deliverance. For the archetypal dark night of the soul, substitute Ochs's sleepless night with one of her young daughters:

"During the period I studied Torah, I was never free of the clutter of familial dailiness—keeping house, dressing kids, fixing lunches, putting calamine lotion on their chicken pox. Not the setting Hermann Hesse or Somerset Maugham would have chosen for a spiritual experience."

Just as Dante and Emmanuel have guides who encourage them and make introductions, Ochs has her friend Esther, an Orthodox woman who has abandoned or postponed a career in theoretical physics to marry a yeshiva scholar and have many children. "Yes, Vanessa!" she exhorts her skeptical friend. "Women *can* and *do* study Torah!" (She herself finds time to *lern* after the last baby is asleep.) Esther provides Ochs with the list of esteemed women from whom, in the final count, she learns more deeply than she is able to in any institution.

Ochs begins her Torah study at the woman-only Michlelet Bruria, where the language of instruction is English:

> I didn't feel comfortable studying with the Orthodox, particularly because they separated the sexes for study. Nonetheless, like many non-Orthodox Jews, I did feel the Orthodox were the "real thing" and had a monopoly on authenticity. They were like the tea essence, the concentrate from which others could prepare their drink. If I was finally to study Torah, I wanted to do it "right." I wanted to make sure I didn't end up in one of the yeshivas created in the last twenty years to educate newly religious young people who have minimal backgrounds in Jewish

Yeartime for the Intifada

David Gewanter

At dusk, Jerusalem glows like a nursery tale,
windows lit for its lost children.
Other boys and girls play in the alleys—
one tosses a rock straight up for joy

like a firework before it bursts;
tomorrow he'll heave a brick,
project of his life—

Among the spices on my shelf, this cup of wax:
a *Yartzeit* candle, for marking a death-day;
which grandparent's, I forget. *Yeartime.*
The dictionary gives rhymes for pronouncing it,

Dart site (German)
Court site (Yiddish);
a huddled joke about Aryans and Jews—

The boy throws a rock straight up for joy
(like a missile at Hofburg, aimed at tanks
rolling across its own silo) . . . tomorrow
his parents will hold his body and weep.

The spirit of man is a candle of God
—in a Proverb. But the boy dreamed
his wick would burn so God could see him. . . .

Nipple, leaking its fuel—
he might caper in the flame this year
if a candle is set, if that
is how his people celebrate their dead.

David Gewanter is a consulting editor of Tikkun. *He lives in Berkeley.*

study and practice. I didn't want to study with people who wanted quickie soul transformations or easy proofs of God's existence. I wanted to learn, not be rehabilitated.

But learning is difficult at Bruria: instruction is minimal and in the *bet midrash* (study hall) no student really knows what she is doing:

> There was something about throwing the uninitiated into a Talmud class that was like registering open admissions students in an advanced physics seminar. Sure, they had a right to be there, but they would still find it impossible to catch up without the prerequisite skills.

Bruria, in fact, has fallen on hard times. Ochs tries another institution: the coeducational, untraditional yeshiva, Pardes. There she studies Talmud with a more experienced *hevruta* (study partner), Raphael, and makes some progress in textual skills despite her initial worries over studying with a male: will there be sexual tension? (he's cute); will there be competitiveness? ("I would prove my intellectual toughness. I would show him I was a heavyweight just as soon as I could read the words on the page".) She finds that they are a good match: after a few sessions gender differences signify not at all. Her real problem is with the excruciating slowness of the pace —in her many months at Pardes, she never leaves the plagues in Exodus: "One frog, many frogs. I didn't care. This stuff was endless. No wonder it kept yeshiva boys off the streets well into adulthood and implanted masks of dullness on their faces."

Ochs's estrangement from the sacred texts of Judaism stems partly—she frankly admits—from her own limitations and Western style of education, and partly from the sages' views on women expressed in those texts (try "the words of the Torah should be burnt rather than be taught to women" —Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Jerusalem Talmud, Sota 3:4). Yet that very estrangement spurs her on to find additional ways to learn:

> Esther had been telling me that some of my most important Torah learning would come to me through individuals. I heard her, but didn't catch her point, for the kind of soul-to-soul transfusion of knowledge she had in mind was not a model of learning with which I was familiar.

As the Hindu proverb says: When the pupil is ready, the teacher will come. Ochs acquires new mentors whom she brings to life with a novelist's eye and a disciple's passion: Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg, a Scottish-born Cambridge-educated Torah and George Eliot scholar, who applies literary criticism, psychology, linguistics, and law to the portion of the week to "crack the text open, to let multiple levels of meaning escape"; Yehudis, a chasid *malgré elle* and a feminist refugee from the diamond district who lectures on Judaic studies for visiting foreigners; Malke Bina, the shy renegade who teaches Talmud to women twice a week in Rehavia and is about to become educational director of a radical new school her students hope to create called the Women's Institute for Torah Studies; Nehama Liebowitz, the legendary teacher of the Bible; and finally Nehama's most successful student, the Talmudist Chana Safrai, director of the Judith Lieberman Institute, which offers programs at the highest level of Torah study for Israeli women.

For me, "spiritual person" conjures up a pasty-faced individual who subsists on a macrobiotic diet that would not sustain a gerbil, all the while chanting mantras or meditating endlessly; but Ochs makes her spiritual guides sound so interesting, vital, and downright delightful, I wanted to hop on a plane and go back to Jerusalem to study with them myself. (Oh role models! Where were you when I needed you?) Indeed, Ochs experiences the spiritual as a kind of seduction: she gets so involved reading a legend in an English translation of the Yiddish *Tzena Urena* (an anthology of biblical commentary known as the "women's Torah") that she misses her bus stop:

> When you enter the spiritual zone, where the moon talks to God, where earthly waters quarrel with heavenly waters, and the letter *alef* complains that it, and not the letter *bet,* should have commenced the Torah—then all the daily stuff around you starts to appear extraneous and distracting, cheap vanities and plastic shadows



ISSUES ON THE

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> of the real thing. I caught myself enveloped totally by sacred lore. I had yearned for such an experience, or at the very least, I yearned to know whether I had the capacity for such envelopment. As soon as I became aware of the powerful draw of the text, I pulled away in panic, a sardine finding the one hole in the fisherman's net. Don't give yourself up to it, don't risk absorption, stay safely, cynically teetering on the surfaces of Torah.

What rumors had moved those parents to virtually kidnap their daughter? They suspected—and it was true—that she was studying Talmud.

Her balancing act is partly resistance to being consumed by the fire of the holy, partly reluctance to commit herself to a life governed by Jewish law or devoted to Torah scholarship, and partly a deep distaste for the sexism in the Torah. Contrasting her own ambivalences with the loyalties of a woman who was born and raised Orthodox, she observes:

> Yael was not oblivious to the problems for Jewish women, but they were like a small tear on the hem of her Sabbath dress. While she might finger the tear and lament it, she would not throw away the dress. With what could she replace it? For me Torah was like a dress with a disfiguring stain. I couldn't wear it, I couldn't throw it out. It would hang in my closet, and I would look at it, sadly.

Ochs's vision is not comforting, but it seems braver and more honest than the apologetics by Jewish so-called feminists who explain that the stain is in truth a decorative design.

Jewish women, in fact, have always struggled for the morsels of Torah that are offered on a platter to Jewish men regardless of their ability or motivation. My roommate Rachel, brilliant and learned, ended up working in her father-in-law's pickle business to support her husband, a lackadaisical and indifferent Torah scholar. Although occasionally the rabbis have made exceptions for exceptional women to study on their own,

> imagine how few women scientists and mathematicians there would be in America if there was a ruling stating: Women cannot study physics and algebra in school. But if by some quirk they've picked up advanced scientific and mathematical skills by reading forbidden books or by spying on their brothers doing their lessons, they may continue to study on their own.

Indeed, like Yentl in the Isaac Bashevis Singer story, all of Ochs's mentors were initially trained at home by their own fathers: "Each learned woman I met credited her mother for love and encouragement, but the source of sacred knowledge was always the father." Without such an early advantage, women can hardly climb to the top of Jewish scholarship:

> You do not reach adulthood and then start thinking about preparing to be a Talmudist, let alone a major decisor. The making of a Talmudist, like the making of a classical ballerina, begins in childhood.

Why learn Talmud at all? Ochs ponders.

Because, as she comes more and more to understand, that's where the power and prestige are: only the talmudic expert is in a position to interpret texts and legislate issues for the current generation. Chana Safrai goes so far as to say that any woman who wants to effect real change within Judaism *must* know Talmud and the processes by which laws evolve. Learning must be connected to halacha (Jewish law). The catch is that the only learning that "counts" is learning acquired in the very elite male establishment that is so paranoid about women. As classics professor Dr. Molly Myerowitz demands in her essay "Lost at Sinai" (itself highly praised but rejected by every Jewish journal to which it was submitted):

> Give me the front door of the yeshiva and kolel, give me the ultimate bastion of male superiority and exclusiveness in traditional Judaism. Split ritual but make scholarship open to all and on equal terms. Until then, there is no possibility of a female scholar to rival the males on their own terms. The entrance of females through the back doors of academia or of Conservative ordination can only ... enable the Talmudic elite to perpetuate their superiority by regarding women scholars and rabbis with bemusement as shams.

The Women's Institute for Torah Studies and the Judith Lieberman Institute are two traditional yeshivas that —unlike Michlelet Bruria or Pardes— are run *for* women *by* women. The Women's Institute for Torah Studies, for English-speaking women, provides two levels of study: part-time courses in Bible, prophets, Talmud, midrash, or Jewish philosophy, and a *kolelet*, a program of full-time paid study for advanced young women "who could be groomed as future leaders of women's Torah education." Too late for Rachel or me, but maybe our daughters....

The goals of the Judith Lieberman Institute, housed in a single room, are first, to enable Israeli women to master the sources, and second, to consider the role of women in the past and present. There are several hundred part-time students, but the core is thirty to forty Torah "commandos" who attend twenty-two hours of weekly study in Basic Sources: "These are the women who are being taught first not to fear the text; then to master and criticize; to ask new questions, to seek new answers; ... to reweave a new fabric, a cloak that women, too, might wear easily."

Metaphors of clothing appear throughout the book: Ochs refers to the male disguise Yentl must wear in order to study Torah after her father dies, and to the various head coverings and long skirts she feels compelled to don when entering certain Orthodox circles. There is the passage comparing Torah to a dress with a disfiguring stain, a dress that can neither be worn nor discarded. A question that may occur to many readers is: Why not buy a new dress? I understand that in Jerusalem the Orthodox boutique is virtually the only one in town, but in America it is possible to shop around. Many people

think that the universities offer more rigorous and efficient courses in Talmud than traditional yeshivas. Ochs never really questions the premise that learning under the auspices of the Orthodox is somehow the most "authentic":

> The only options for advanced study of Talmud were within the Conservative or Reform movements. Those were satisfactory options for Conservative and Reform women. But if an Orthodox woman studied in those institutions (as several have chosen to do), neither she nor her learning would be respected by her own community.

Given the institutionalized sexism in Orthodoxy, it seems unlikely that the learned woman would be respected *wherever* she got her learning. Readers may also wonder whether Ochs does not seek out extreme forms of Orthodoxy (such as Chabad or sects Mea She'arim) in order, finally, to reject it as her way of life.

I like the sensibility of the author: her honesty about her own limitations, her attempts to transcend them, her ambivalence, her refusal to give pat answers. I admire her ability to give shape, form, and meaning to an experience so recently lived. Ochs does become less estranged from Torah as she becomes more familiar with it. On the personal and social levels, that familiarity engenders a new claim, a new right, and finally a new kind of estrangement—outrage. Whereas at the beginning, she regards the words of rabbis not altogether hostile to women's learning with grateful wonder, at the end she sounds a revolutionary note. Referring to the ongoing attempts of women to read from the Torah or simply pray together in the women's section at the Western Wall—despite the assaults of pious men—Ochs proclaims, "I do believe that women must open Torah wide and seize it for themselves." □

Out to Lynch

Jonathan Rosenbaum

"All I know for sure is there's already more'n a few bad ideas runnin' around loose out there."
—Sailor to Lula in Barry Gifford's *Wild at Heart: The Story of Sailor and Lula*

I couldn't care less about changing the conventions of mainstream television.
—David Lynch, November 1989

From *Birth of a Nation* to *Fatal Attraction,* puritanism and political naiveté have frequently turned out to be a winning combination in American movies. The recent popularity of David Lynch, however, puts a new spin on this formula. Sailor's line—repeated in Lynch's new movie based on Gifford's novel—in a way summarizes Lynch's work to date: an œuvre that has recently expanded from paintings, movies, and a weekly comic strip to include two new TV series ("Twin Peaks" and "American Chronicles," both coproduced by Mark Frost), an opera, a pop record album, commercials for Calvin Klein, a coffee-table book due out next fall, and undoubtedly other enterprises as well. Like his puritanical predecessors Walt Disney and Hugh Hefner, with their endless capacity for generating mutually promoting spinoffs, Lynch seems well on his way to becoming one of those multinational entertainment conglomerates that are currently clogging the cultural scene. What seems to set him apart most strikingly from other puritanical political naïfs, multinational and otherwise—individuals obsessed with "dirty secrets," who regard "dirt" as a matter of sexual propriety rather than sexual ethics—is that he is perceived and celebrated in some quarters not as an integral part of this country's present ideological mainstream but as a serious artist subverting the American soul from within.

There's certainly no question that Lynch is an original talent, and that "Twin Peaks," whatever its built-in limitations regarding format and overall coherence, represents something both fresh and slightly transgressive in primetime TV. It also can be argued that a progressive coarsening in Lynch's work since the 1970s has corresponded fairly closely to a rise in his popularity and overall critical reputation. (This coarsening was exacerbated by his parting of ways with Alan Splet, the brilliant sound designer who worked on all his films up through *Blue Velvet,* whose subtle and delicate grasp of aural textures added much density and complexity to Lynch's conception.) Significantly, when the *New York Times* belatedly reviewed his first and most accomplished feature, *Eraserhead* (1976), two years after the film's release, its reviewer found it "murkily pretentious," "interminable," and "sophomoric," with no redeeming virtues at all; roughly a decade later, a Lynch cover story in the Sunday *Times Magazine* called the same movie "an astonishing feature debut." Even the most cursory comparison of *Eraserhead* with *Wild at Heart* reveals an artistic decline so precipitous that it is hard to imagine the same person making both films; but it is the latter movie that won the Cannes Film Festival's *Palme d'Or.*

It's clearly too early to reach any

Jonathan Rosenbaum is the film critic for the Chicago Reader *and the author of* Moving Places: A Life at the Movies *(Harper & Row, 1983) and, in collaboration with James Hoberman,* Midnight Movies, *to be reprinted in 1991 by DaCapo Press.*

final conclusions about Lynch's work, but not too early to consider the particular allure and cachet that it currently has. Sailor's line can be said to summarize Lynch's works, not only because they contain more than a few "bad ideas" running around loose, but also because that is paradoxically their most seductive aspect. It's a statement based on disavowal: "out there" rather than "in here" is the operative phrase, the open sesame that makes everything else possible. Disavowing any responsibility for bad ideas becomes the prerequisite for Lynch's having and entertaining them and for the audience's sharing them. As long as they're "out there," running around loose and free, they can be enjoyed voyeuristically as a purely external spectacle, without any conscious capitulation to ideological meaning. A notion of internalized holiness and propriety combined with externalized evil and degradation adds up to a form of unquestioning xenophobia that fetishizes "the other" without wishing to understand it, much less cope with it.

Strategic absences in works of art often function like mirrors, reflecting the desire of the audience, and the absence of any social analysis in Lynch effectively becomes a form of invitation. Leftists who want to see the ugliness and depravity of middle America laid bare in *Blue Velvet,* "Twin Peaks," and *Wild at Heart* are amply rewarded. What they fail to realize is that some middle Americans are titillated and delighted by the same guiltless Lynchian spectacle. These Americans don't see their own image, but another vision produced by the xenophobia and paranoia that liberals see when looking at them: white trash, perverts, criminals, lunatics—a lot of "bad ideas" running around loose out there, waiting to be both savored and ridiculed.

There's no doubt that a certain amount of subversion of film form exists in Lynch's work, at least if one places it alongside the mainstream models it deliberately evokes: *Peyton Place* in *Blue Velvet* and "Twin Peaks," *The Wizard of Oz* and Elvis Presley movies in *Wild at Heart.* (On the other hand, the attempt by some critics to link this formal subversion with Luis Buñuel's surrealism is a different matter entirely; indeed, it can only be done by disregarding Buñuel's radical politics.) Part of this simply stems from the fact that Lynch, who is fundamentally a painter in orientation, uses the narrative come-ons of his mainstream models without having their strengths in storytelling—the "dirty" small-town secrets depicted by *Peyton Place,* the magical adventures on the road promised by *The Wizard of Oz,* and the anticipation of violence and rebellion elicited by Elvis movies—and without worrying too much about motivations, loose ends, or solutions to the other mysteries posed by his characters and plots. It might be added, moreover, that camp and postmodernism had altered his narrative models long before Lynch ever got to them, by cutting them loose from their original contexts and setting them adrift as part of a stock repertory of pop icons.

But Lynch's conscious uses of camp—which, even more than his surrealist imagination, seem the key to his recent success—are a different matter entirely. It's debatable whether any of the kitschier conceits of *Blue Velvet*—such as the double-edged notion of robins as harbingers of love and/or as nasty predators—qualify as conscious camp. It seems much likelier that Lynch was dead serious about motifs like the robin but, after discovering that his fans hooted appreciatively at the naiveté of such notions, realized that they constituted a bankable asset, and started employing them more deliberately in "Twin Peaks," and then more extensively in *Wild at Heart.* In the latter, Oz and Elvis are evoked periodically, not to enhance or comment upon the two leads, Lula (Laura Dern) and Sailor (Nicolas Cage), but literally to supplant them whenever Lynch's invention and involvement flags.

Lynch's camp entails another disavowal: it simultaneously offers an "hommage" to a cherished icon and ridicules that icon. It proclaims that the icon still has affective power *and* that it no longer has or deserves its original affective power. The same adolescent mixture of worship and derision, piety and irreverence can be found in its most distilled form in many rock videos, and it might be argued that it resembles in some ways the jaundiced attitudes of many younger Americans about contemporary politics. (Reagan and Bush may be jokes, but they are jokes that one votes for, or at least tacitly supports.) It grants to every position and attitude a built-in escape clause: accuse it of being cynical and corrupt, and it flaunts its innocence; accuse it of being innocent and naive, and it smirks or jeers.

On the surface, there appears to be no one around at the moment in American movies who is more "wicked" and transgressive than Lynch. But consider how much his work's apparent refusal of politics fits right in with the etiquette of the contemporary pop mainstream. (By contrast, Alan Moyle's formally unadventurous but bracingly collectivist, activist, and uncynical *Pump Up the Volume,* which seems to be dividing audiences as much as *Wild at Heart,* is the real taboo-breaker—so much so, in fact, that even many mainstream reviewers who have been supporting the film have been going to great lengths to avoid and conceal its political thrust.) Yet placed within a puritanical rather than a political context, the sheer irresponsibility of Lynch's vision gives an undeniable lift to some viewers. There's something thrilling about the wild amorality of a dark, surrealist imagination producing little shocks by unleashing its bad ideas inside "wholesome" dream images of middle America. And according to certain liberal arguments that are being made on behalf of these kicks, there's something intrinsically liberating, perhaps even progressive—and at the very least kinky—about these rude challenges to mainstream complacency. But the leap that's implicitly being made between "liberating" and "kinky" on the one hand and "progressive" or "subversive" on the other is a leap that can only be taken with one's eyes closed—the way, alas, that many people prefer it.

A little further down the same page in Gifford's novel where Sailor expounds upon "bad ideas," he has something else to say that is *not* included in Lynch's movie: "My experience, the more people get to know each other the less they get along.... It's best to keep people to bein' strangers. That way they don't get disappointed." The social defeatism expressed in these words lies at the heart of the Lynchian world, although the surface expositions of *The Elephant Man, Blue Velvet,* "Twin Peaks," and *Wild at Heart* (the movie), with their campy or at best half-hearted displays of piety, hope, love, and innocence, periodically seek to deny it.

Gifford sees the social meaning implicit in Sailor's first statement and labels it as such by adding Sailor's defeatist coda. Lynch leaves this second statement out because it might interfere with the movie's apparent freedom from ideological meaning—a notion of aesthetic bliss that might be called the Lynch-pin fallacy. And some liberals who are drawn to this apparent aesthetic freedom, but who feel obliged for puritanical reasons to grant a higher purpose to their pleasure, wind up calling it subversive.

Lynch's work should be contested, if at all, not for puritanical reasons but for political ones. Yet puritanism is buried so deeply within American political thought, infusing so many attitudes on the Left as well as the Right, that this is easier said than done. As George Orwell noted in the course of recording his distaste for Salvador Dali, "Obscenity is a very difficult question to discuss honestly. People are too frightened either of seeming to be shocked or of seeming not to be shocked, to be able to define the relationship between art and morals." And this difficulty becomes compounded when people partially praise shocking work not because of its effect on themselves but because of its projected or imagined effect on others, a process which enables liberals to think that this film will have a progressive effect on middle America. Moreover, Lynch's puritanism, like Hugh Hefner's, is difficult to attack unpuritanically because its defiance of certain taboos means that criticizing it can seem to be an assault on freedom of expression. Theoretically, one can support that freedom while criticizing the uses that are made of it. But in practice, at a time when widespread impatience with the Bill of Rights is already jeopardizing free expression it is often difficult to make such fine distinctions without being misunderstood.

One hears that there are plans afoot to rerelease *Eraserhead* sometime next year. This black and white film—painstakingly crafted as a low budget independent venture over five years of patient effort—has been available on video for a few years, and prior to that had an extended life as a midnight movie staple, but many of Lynch's recent fans still haven't seen it. Conceivably the most original first feature by an American filmmaker to have appeared during the seventies and certainly one of the most remarkable, it is inevitably handicapped commercially by its lack of any secure genre affiliation. Nor does its difficult story line offer any camp or postmodernist escape clauses. While its grim fatalism and its biological determinism (a sense of "dirty secrets" that is more cosmological and philosophical than social) make it every bit as conservative in its implicit social philosophy as the studio productions by Lynch which follow it—a subject that J. Hoberman and I have already explored at some length in our book *Midnight Movies*—its meditative style is such a radical departure from Hollywood narrative norms that it can't be accused of pandering to anyone.

The same adolescent mixture of worship and derision, piety and irreverence can be found in its most distilled form in many rock videos.

Ignored by most critics of experimental films, art films, and exploitation films—despite the fact that it has certain traits in common with all three categories—and treated dismissively by most mainstream reviewers at the time, *Eraserhead* found its limited audience only through the patience and dedication of its distributor, who kept the movie playing as a midnight attraction for many weeks long before it developed anything resembling a cult. Today, given both the demise of most midnight movie venues and the pressures on commercial pictures to perform at the box office immediately, a film as singular as this one without any obvious marketing handle (such as Lynch's name) would have almost no chances for success at all.

Lacking any conventional sense of plot or character, *Eraserhead* revolves around a dreamy and sappy young man named Henry Spencer (Jack Nance) living with an undernourished, twiglike plant in a dark, squalid furnished room in an urban industrial wasteland. Invited to a grotesque family dinner by his former girlfriend Mary, he discovers that he's fathered an illegitimate monster that resembles a wormlike fetus; Mary and their yowling, premature offspring move into Henry's room. The creature becomes sick and its persistent cries eventually cause Mary to flee in the middle of a rainy night. Henry unsuccessfully tries to nurse it back to health, and when he fails, eventually destroys his progeny and, by implication, himself and the entire universe in the process.

A bleak tale, to be sure, but most of the movie unfolds less like a story than like a sardonic metaphysical meditation on the contents of Henry's mind: a landscape of fantasy textures, mysterious processes, and industrial noises held together by dovetailing obsessions about sex, machinery, biology, botany, astronomy, and theology, all of them expressed nonverbally. And insofar as the movie *has* a story, it is nearer to nightmarish absurdist comedy than to angst-ridden tragedy. The closest European art-movie equivalents are not Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni, but Orson Welles's *The Trial,* the black and white sequences in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker,* or (for its musically timed and comically abstract uses of silence and sound) Jacques Tati's *Mr. Hulot's Holiday.* Informed by a mesmerizing formal beauty and a highly distinctive form of black humor, with meditative rhythms that turn its slender plot into a perpetual series of discoveries and revelations, *Eraserhead* is a *sui generis* masterpiece that most spectators and critics never quite know how to take.

The same thing can't be said for any of Lynch's subsequent movies, whether he's worked as a hired hand (*The Elephant Man* and *Dune*), generated his own material (*Blue Velvet* and "Twin Peaks"), or adapted someone else's material for his own purposes (*Wild at Heart*). It could be argued, moreover, that Lynch's increasing visibility and popularity is largely a function of the fresh contexts in which his work has appeared. Compared to *Eraserhead, Blue Velvet* is like TV soap opera, and compared to *Blue Velvet,* "Twin Peaks" seems formally unadventurous and fairly tame in terms of subject matter; but compared with other TV serials, "Twin Peaks" looks like a bolt from the blue.

Still, we live in a culture where it's important for watered-down work to reach a mass audience: twenty million households watched Lynch's initial two-hour "Twin Peaks" when it first aired. In "Twin Peaks," this watering down entails, among other things, obligatory (if lame) narrative justifications for most of the bizarre visual and rhythmic patterning. If a fluorescent light sputters over a corpse in a morgue, there's a line of dialogue that tells us this is due to a faulty transformer; if a gigantic elk's head inexplicably covers the table in a small room, we're eventually told that it fell down from the wall.

Reportedly, a wild *Eraserhead*-like dream sequence in the third episode (also directed by Lynch)—involving a dancing dwarf and dialogue recorded backwards—was used as a twenty-years-later epilogue to the pilot when the latter was released on video in Europe. This sense of arbitrarily placed parts is even more pronounced in the various lunatic cameos and walk-ons that punctuate the narrative of *Wild at Heart:* how much would be lost or gained if Jack Nance and his demented speech about dogs turned up in New Orleans instead of Big Tuna? It might be said that many of the eccentric minor characters in *Eraserhead* are indistinguishable from the film's mood and atmosphere and that those in *Blue Velvet* are used to *establish* mood and atmosphere. But in *Wild at Heart* they're like guest-star appearances in an ongoing surrealist vaudeville. It's close to the camp tactics of John Waters at his most linear and primitive, who simply piles on the shocks at random to pull back an audience's drifting attention. For a mainstream audience whose pleasure at the movies appears to be becoming increasingly dependent on the quantity and degree of such shocks, Lynch's scattershot cornucopia of lurid bits can be interpreted as a simple business move: giving that audience what it seems to want.

Lynch has never shown even the slightest interest in social realism. He blurs the line between the fifties and the present in all his films since *Blue Velvet* and makes a botch of all the Southern accents and class distinctions in his adaptation of Gifford's novel; but one can reasonably argue that his only true subjects are inner landscapes. Yet insofar as inner landscapes are at least partially dependent on external realities, one should note that Lynch's moral universe is made up of mutually exclusive categories: holy fools and scumbags, Madonnas and whores. The shared empty-headed bliss of Lula and an elderly black man in overalls at a filling station nodding to an old-fashioned big band tune, is a kind of communion founded on innocence. Similarly, the sleazy side of Lula (who is half Madonna, half whore) achieves another kind of communion with scumbag Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe) when she finds herself succumbing to his crude advances.

The ideological consequences of these divisions are fully apparent in the opening scene. While Glenn Miller's "In the Mood" plays, Sailor and Lula are accosted by a black man named Bob Ray Lemon, who leers at Lula and refers to her as a "cunt," baits Sailor, adds some cumbersome and naturalistically implausible exposition about why he is doing this, and draws a knife. Sailor very promptly and graphically bashes the man's brains out on a banister and the marble floor, then melodramatically lights a cigarette and makes an Elvis-like gesture: he points accusingly at Lula's mother (Diane Ladd), who instigated the incident.

The fact that Sailor kills someone named Bob Ray Lemon is alluded to in the novel, but the circumstances and details are omitted; given both the name and the Southern setting, it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that Gifford's Bob Ray Lemon is white. Why, then, does Lynch make him black? Presumably, because a black man leering at a Madonna-like Lula and then getting brutally murdered by the hero adds drama and, for some spectators, additional pleasure to the scene. And why does Lynch end the scene with two separate camp gestures that succeed in drawing laughs? Presumably, to release any guilty tension set up by the preceding drama and pleasure. The separate escape clauses disavowing both seriousness and social content work hand in glove, or better yet, hand over fist; pandering to racism becomes aesthetic boldness, an appeal to "pure" sensation, and—if one subscribes to the unlikely hypothesis that a political innocent like Lynch is hoping to outrage liberal sensibilities—a form of subversion.

"In dreams begin responsibilities," Yeats wrote, but not, it would seem, in the dreams that Lynch asks us to share. In a puritanical culture heavy with guilt and fear, there is something irresistible about the danger and bravado of taboo-breaking that is unbounded by conscience or analysis—a roller-coaster ride into the notions of depravity that a repressed adolescent might have. Seen without irony, *Blue Velvet* resembles the lurid, confused imaginings of a sheltered twelve-year-old boy wondering what sex between his parents might be like; seen with irony, it can be taken as something more grown-up—the cynical scoffing of an adult about his own childish notions. By concentrating rigorously on his childish notions of biology, Lynch's formalism in *Eraserhead* can be said to analyze the ideological superstructure of the hero's adolescent viewpoint. But when he exercises more shock-ridden aesthetic tactics on what purports to be a real world in *Wild at Heart,* he's playing into the hands of our worst racist fantasies.

Perhaps the most painterly thing about Lynch is his interest in iconic figures rather than characters. Indeed, the closest things to fleshed-out characters in his work—Henry (Jack Nance) in *Eraserhead,* the amateur detective in *Blue Velvet* (Kyle MacLachlan), and the FBI agent (MacLachlan again) in "Twin Peaks"—also happen to be the three clearest self-portraits, all of them satirical and comical but just as clearly appreciative and affectionate. The evolution from hapless, unemployed Henry, to faltering college boy Jeffrey Beaumont taking a walk on the wild side, to superhero federal agent Cooper, an all-American genius and mystic sleuth, offers plenty of food for thought about where Lynch thinks he's heading. To claim that he's ideologically innocent and naive about his xenophobic fantasies seems reasonable enough; so are many of us, much of the time. But to claim that he's ideologically neutral—or even worse, progressive—is to succumb to that same innocence and naiveté. □

Is There Life After Free Speech?

Barbara Garson

In September 1964, Berkeley students headed back to campus from a freedom summer in Mississippi, from a stint with the grape strikers in Delano, or from earning the next term's expenses in their uncle's factory or their mother's office. They (we) came back infused with a profound, perhaps romantic, feeling for the decency, competence, deep egalitarianism, and just plain goodness of ordinary Americans.

On the trip back to school, some of us were already wondering, "Why do I work three months for the grape strikers and then study agribusiness nine months for the growers? Am I really going to spend my adult life breeding square tomatoes or programming computers to speed up workers?"

Just as we were learning how wonderful it could feel to work, full-time, to make the world better, we returned to discover that we were now forbidden to pass out leaflets or collect quarters, even part-time, near campus for civil rights groups, farm workers, or any of our other causes. So the largest university in the United States, though public, had come down squarely against what we thought of as "the people"—and against us too, of course.

Out of this conflict came the Free Speech Movement (FSM), which, after a year of exhilarating agitation, won the right for all campus groups, left, right, or religious, to distribute their literature. Out of this conflict also came—or was coming—our movement's ideology. Was it syndicalism, socialism, some kind of "participatory," "economic," or "deepened" democracy? Whatever its name, our revolution would limit the power of the elites to whom the university felt so beholden, and put ordinary people in charge of their own lives. Though nameless, this vision seemed, at the time, clear enough to guide our actions.

In the first half of his documentary, *Berkeley in the Sixties,* Mark Kitchell uses film clips and reminiscences of representative FSMers (now in their fifties) to narrate the events and capture the cleanliness, naiveté, honesty, and democratic spirit of the Free Speech Movement. It's close enough to how I remember it to make my heart leap up. But the sixties didn't stop with the Free Speech Movement and neither does the film. The second half follows some FSMers off campus as they organize Stop the Draft Week and the demonstrations for People's Park.

In real life, many things that happened later in the sixties seemed to me to discredit the FSM or distort its meaning. I could barely cope with them. For instance, a few months after the free speech victory, some kid sat down outside the campus with a sign that said FUCK. Notifying the press even before the police, the university president invented the "Filthy Speech Movement" and used it as a pretext to try and take back the freedoms we'd won.

Less dishonest but more distressing were the increasing number of flower children or street people who roamed the Bay Area talking about "the establishment" and "the revolution." To us, the establishment meant the bankers and large growers who had pressured the university to shut us up. But to the



Barbara Garson is the author of All the Livelong Day: The Meaning and Demeaning of Routine Work *(Penguin, 1977) and* The Electronic Sweatshop *(Penguin, 1988). In 1964 she was the editor of Berkeley's* Free Speech Newsletter.

flower children, "the establishment" turned out to mean their parents, the cops, or sometimes anyone who drank beer. "Don't they understand?" I'd splutter. "How can you make a revolution if the enemy is all grown-up Americans?"

I also felt misrepresented by antiwar activities like Stop the Draft Week, though some of the organizers were genuine FSMers. "How can they plan a demonstration that shoves us smack up against normal, drafted teenagers? Don't they understand who their revolution is for?"

The children who've passively breathed in our social consciousness feel the world's pain, without the activist faith that kept us going.

But I can't rail at *Berkeley in the Sixties* for distorting the FSM. Here's Mark Kitchell, a youth of the eighties, asking longingly, "What made you people feel so good, so honest, so purposeful?" There could hardly be a more sincere and respectful attempt to tell our story. If, after scanning thousands of feet of film, Kitchell couldn't find a single clip to illustrate our revolutionary vision, then it's time for me to stop saying, "Don't you understand?" and admit that we never really explained.

It's true that no matter how articulate we'd been, our opponents, who happened to own the newspapers and TV stations as well as the banks, agriculture, and industry of California, would have made a hippie-dippy, Rubinesque (as in Jerry) mish-mash of anything we'd espoused. But the truth is that we (I) never had the strength or clarity to create the images that Kitchell needed for his film.

So I can't blame him for not showing the complete FSM vision, and I can't be angry when he lets his cameras follow a few FSMers into hippiedom, Panther-pandering, and other sorry places. After all, a few did go off in those directions. And the rest of us didn't have the heart or the stomach to wade in and bring them back.

I myself retreated to a GI coffeehouse near the Fort Lewis army base in Tacoma, Washington. That way I could put in my antiwar service working *with* American soldiers instead of *against* them.

And here's where I think Kitchell may have missed a dramatic possibility. He tried to show the evolution of the sixties through a couple of prominent FSMers, Frank Bardacke and Jack Weinberg, who narrate their epigonic efforts to recapture that organizing thrill through People's Park and Stop the Draft Week. Kitchell might have learned more about the sixties by asking them, "What are you doing *now*?"

Frank organized cannery workers in Watsonville, California, who won one of the most important strikes of the eighties. (I get my information through his mother.) The Hispanic women who composed most of the strike's leadership and rank and file refused to go back until they got health insurance for their children. A phenomenally well-organized community gave them the strength to hold out. Meanwhile, Jack was a steel worker all those years. He was involved in rank-and-file caucuses until the layoffs of 1984. When you see how lively two fifty-year-olds look after decades of organizing in Gary, Indiana and Watsonville, California, you understand the sustaining power of the FSM. I wonder about the others.

Poor Mark Kitchell. He must have gotten many other reviews from people who insist on talking about their sixties instead of his movie.

So what about the film? Was it well made, is it worth watching? *Berkeley in the Sixties* is good enough that I wanted my daughter to see it. "You'll even catch a glimpse of your father." And it was good enough that after ten minutes she said "OK, so I see why you keep talking about 'when we were in Berkeley ... '" Yet when the FSM segment was over, I suggested we turn off the video. "It gets kind of messy from here on."

I don't normally censor my daughter's movies, but I was afraid she would come away with the feeling that "that was then, this is now"—the sixties had inevitably spun themselves out.

We FSMers, vaccinated as we were with our populist optimism, will merely analyze the errors that the film suggests. Then we will bob back up in our unions, our classrooms, our PTA's. But the children who've passively breathed in our social consciousness feel the world's pain, without the activist faith that kept us going. To them, *Berkeley in the Sixties* may say, "it's all cyclical, it never works out."

But in the end, I thought she should see it anyway. □

FEMALE DISSIDENTS

(continued from p. 12)

of party bosses over women's incomes and mobility was absolute, and official women's Party organizations, long shunned by women dissidents, never addressed the problem.

Abortion is, at present, the number-one women's issue in Czechoslovakia, as well as in other former East Bloc countries. Although Žáková actively worries whether abortion will even be abolished, Šiklová is not so pessimistic. She agrees that the political atmosphere is presently anti-abortion, but she thinks attitudes will come full circle in due time. In Croatia, I see an anti-abortion poster on the wall. Pictures of dead fetuses are juxtaposed with photos of dead corpses from a concentration camp. In Hungary every political party except the Fidesz, a party for the young, and the Free Democrats has come out against abortion. In Czechoslovakia, Civic Forum, not wanting to offend any part of its broad constituency, takes no formal position.

Debate over abortion is also contaminated by past communist rhetoric. Since the state sometimes encour-

aged abortion as a form of birth control, many men and women now regard abortion as part of the state's barbaric and inhumane policies. Just recently a poll showed how deeply abortion polarizes the Czech population: only 52 percent of women and 40 percent of men approve of abortion without serious restrictions. During the 1970s, male dissidents, particularly in Hungary, fought the state for abortion rights. Their concern, however, was to challenge the state's right to intrude upon private life. Now that many of these men are members of Parliament in Hungary or the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia, they either ignore the issue or straddle it by advocating better contraception. Women, explains Joann Gowan, a Berkeley graduate student writing a dissertation on Hungarian women, were never the issue; the state was.

At some point the ideological push to keep women at home will bump up against a harsh economic reality: the need for two-income families is everywhere obvious in Eastern Europe. Some parties, such as the Free Democrats in Hungary, address this issue by fighting for an elusive "family wage," which would allow male workers to support their families alone. The reality, however, is that men—even, frequently, those whose wives work—are already killing themselves working two or three jobs.

Meanwhile, feminists are beginning to take the initiative. A hip youth-oriented magazine entitled *Respekt* publishes the poetry of Anna Wagnerova, who identifies herself as a "feminist poet." Dissatisfied members of the former official women's union have created a Club for Modern Women. Their goal is to create a network of groups that offer legal advice, domestic help, babysitting, language lessons, and psychotherapy for women who are currently at home with their children. They are lobbying President Havel to create a special ministry for women and the family and plan to create a women's center, as well as a school for displaced homemakers, in Prague. Šiklová and other women have also begun a new women's journal called *Maxima: Journal for the Intelligent Woman,* which aims to air women's problems and reprint feminist writings from the West. "When we were dissidents," Šiklová says, her eyes flashing with intensity, "the men needed us and treated us well." Now she sees the danger, as Sonja Licht, a Yugoslavian feminist sociologist put it, of "male democracies" ignoring women's needs. "Women in Czechoslovakia think an emancipated woman is someone who can speak up at a Party meeting. Many believe they are already emancipated, but they are not."

In Yugoslavia an active feminist movement has already begun. In Hungary, there is a small feminist research center within the American studies program at Szeged. A small group of women in Budapest meet weekly to discuss women's issues; an even larger group of men and women meet to organize against the anti-abortion forces, some of which, I am told, are funded by pro-life organizations in the U.S. In East Germany, the international edition of *Newsweek* (July 2, 1990) reports that the painter Angel Hampel is "disappointed in what has happened since November.... In her Dresden studio, which is cluttered with scythes, sickles, knives, spikes, and other graphic symbols of violence, hang pictures of suffering female figures. It is women, she predicts darkly, who will bear the brunt of a changing society and her art is about the 'hopelessness of their condition.'" In July Hampel opened an exhibit of her work which she described as "very, very angry."

In many ways, women's problems are at the heart of a changing political culture. In his book *Anti-Politics,* the internationally acclaimed writer and dissident George Konrad of Hungary explained that the private sphere was the one place where people could retain their soul and resist the intrusiveness of the state. The importance of the private sphere—the realm of experience most strongly shaped by women's influence—made women's role essential to every form of personal and collective resistance to communism. Now that communism has collapsed, the importance of the private sphere has naturally diminished. "Soon," Konrad tells me with a smile, "with the opposition in politics, we will need a new anti-politics." But as the space between the family and the state, or civil society, widens and pulls men into public life, women are being literally and figuratively left in a less valued sphere of life. Long associated with the home, even when they worked, women are simply not seen as part of Eastern Europe's new civil society.

The problems facing Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries often seem overwhelming to the outsider. How they will be resolved is an open question. For now, the center-right coalitions have the greatest power to gain national credibility and dominate political discourse. Within five years, some intellectuals predict, a renewed social democracy, perhaps with a new name, will organize to address the problems of those caught in the maelstrom of social and economic change. "For now," Šiklová concludes with a sigh, "we will simply have to suffer through this conservative time." □

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

(continued from p. 16)

the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day.... Bit by bit ... along with others, she had

claimed herself. Freeing yourself is one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another."

The realms of the political are not simply places for private interests to be expressed or protected, but have their own intrinsic value. Or so Aristotle thought. People who participate in politics, he believed, become morally and politically educated because of their participation. They learn to think in public and as public beings, to make public claims and give reasons that appeal to shared predicament and tradition. In acting politically they confront those beyond the immediate sphere of family or neighborhood; they encounter difference through deliberation and thereby develop the judgment and practical wisdom unattainable except by living a public life. If Aristotle is right then "representative democracy," not "political freedom," is a contradiction in terms. For if politics is a "partnership in virtue" (in Aristotle's phrase), how can I delegate someone to be virtuous for me? (It would be as absurd as going to a gym and having someone else do workouts for me.) No one can act for me or in my name, not because he or she will misrepresent my interests, but because such delegation is a renunciation of what is distinctively human about me. That, I think, is one of the lessons, perhaps even the foremost lesson, to be learned from Havel, Michnik, and the events in Eastern Europe.

I do not want to romanticize politics or slight Havel's suspicion of it. To say politics is the only thing that matters is fanaticism. Nor do I want to romanticize events in Eastern Europe or Havel himself, who warns us against doing either. Still less do I want to exaggerate the significance, let alone the content, of the *Times* articles. They are too often superficial, the complaints by political leaders too often self-serving. Politicians are too quick to blame public opinion rather than themselves. More often, they portray themselves as victims of media control, pointedly overlooking their frequent collusion with the media to create an exclusive political discourse of experts and insiders.

I do want to suggest that the *Times* is right about our cynicism and the corruption of our political discourse. Even something as momentous as the Kuwait crisis will not long obscure the truths brought home to us by events in Eastern Europe and Havel's presence here: the American policy elite, once so anxious to claim credit for democracy's advance in Eastern Europe, is clearly becoming uncomfortable. If the first step in ending political cynicism and corruption is for those responsible to *recognize* they are responsible, then the *Times* articles are a healthy sign.

It may even be that some members of Congress in attendance responded to Havel as they did because they saw their best selves in him, and that too would be a healthy sign. Perhaps he reminded them of what leadership could be and why public life mattered beyond the demands of political survival, moral posturing, and the sovereignty of oil. Here was a man of principle for whom tolerance represented not the passive acceptance of differences or grudging pluralism but an active generosity of spirit and a recognition of his own partiality, in the double sense of incompleteness and one-sidedness. Here was a cautious visionary who saw politics as a calling and a responsibility of the highest order, without idealizing it or denying that he cared for other things more.

The overwhelming response Havel (and Mandela) elicit when they invoke our founding myths and otherwise moribund political language may also be a healthy sign. It may be that the democratic experiments in Eastern Europe (as well as the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the failed revolution in China) can reconnect us with neglected legacies of our own democratic past (with Daniel Shays, the Anti-Federalists, and the Populists for example) and alert us to the continuing democratic experiments in our midst (neighborhood associations, women's health collectives, public interest research groups, and the sanctuary movement) which exist outside established centers of power.

In a press conference Havel said, "For twenty-one years we have lived outside of time. The students gave our history back to us." If we are good enough students it may be that Havel (and the Czech students), Michnik (and the workers of Solidarity), Mandela (and the black people of South Africa), and the single figure in Tiananmen Square halting a column of tanks will give us back some of ours. □

PROFANING THE SACRED

(continued from p. 24)

alternative conditions I mentioned at the beginning and is, indeed, throwing "an anxious over-the-shoulder glance toward them." It is aware of what poet and essayist John Haines recently called "the perceived position of the poet within [our] society, which might be stated: 'Society behaves as if I did not exist. Therefore I will write as if society did not exist.'"

The problem, however, is that anyone truly concerned about justice can't feel very fulfilled writing, *or living,* as if society did not exist. He or she may, instead, wind up publishing and perishing both at once—or just becoming part of that "procession of ironists and dandies and reflexive talents" Seamus Heaney describes.

And isn't it something to weep about when art—which ought to be defined as the one human enterprise that must move someone *else*—becomes the blurbed-

up, self-inflated product of your own and your network's distorted and dishonest hyena-cries? When, day after day, we are exposed to the affront of books reviewed, openly and without explanation or apology, by the writer's lover, ex-husband, best friend, colleague, or soon-to-be employee, who then engages in the further dishonesty and duplicity of referring to his or her most intimate chum as "Mr. Brown," "Ms. Peterson," "Dr. So-and So"? When, just two weeks ago, for example, at a party in Cambridge, a poet whose latest book recently received a rave review in the *New York Times* from one of his best friends could look me in the face, without shame or embarrassment, and say: *It was an inside job*?

Now, if I might return once more to the "triggering" question of this essay, the question *Should I write?* is a question—very different from the question *Should I become a writer?*—that writers are often asked by the many people in this country who attend writers' conferences, and who are, understandably enough, looking for ways to affirm themselves in a culture which everywhere we look, strives to make them into nineties men, eighties women, Pepsi generations, yuppies, yippies, or some other easily identifiable "category" that can be pandered to and manipulated by its relentless marketing machine. A culture, in other words, which—while it has mastered the rhetoric of a perverse and consumer-oriented kind of individualism—does everything it can to annihilate and frustrate the genuine human tendency that is individuation.

And the question, I think, is no harder to answer than the question "Should I sing in the shower?" or "Should I dance naked in the living room?" The first answer being that, if you needed to ask the question in the first place, you probably shouldn't. (The less snotty answer being *of course you should*—provided, that is, that it gives you pleasure and that there's nobody else in the room trying to sleep.) Because writing has always been one of the few ways we have of arriving at that wonderful, though sometimes terrifying, place described by Matthew Arnold:

> Below the surface stream, shallow and light
> Of what we *say* we feel—below the stream,
> As light, of what we *think* we feel—there flows
> With noiseless current strong, obscure and deep,
> The central stream of what we feel indeed.

But now let's look for a moment at the harder question: Should you *become* a writer? Should you develop, or aspire to, the same relationship to language that a doctor has to the body, a shoemaker to leather, an architect to space and material, a hairdresser to hair, a haberdasher to shirts, a farmer to the earth?

To help answer that question, I'd like to trace, for a few minutes, a kind of "archetypal" journey of a young writer, somewhat similar to but not identical with my own.

You are young, or fairly young, and have gotten, like Dante, lost on your life's path. Something has taken you, at least momentarily, out of life—or at least out of the manically active, linear road we often mistake for it—and into the more melancholy world of language, introspection, searching, contemplation. Maybe it was a death in the family or some other emotional abandonment—an alcoholic father, a manic-depressive mother, an abusive uncle, a dead pet, a deaf brother. Something, to put it simply, has wounded your sense of *justice,* has jolted you out of the Coca-Cola vitality of your times and into the sweet, melancholy, black-on-white curlicues of paper and ink. Though you don't yet know it—and if you're lucky, you may not for quite some time—you're on your way to becoming a writer. Because something in you that hasn't found any other way of curing what Robert Frost called that "lump in the throat" now wants out. Indeed, probably *has* to get out if you're going to survive emotionally. In fact, you're probably in that classic position best articulated by that great poet of the artist's spiritual awakening, Rilke, in a beautiful essay entitled "Worpswede." "There comes," he wrote:

> later for youth or maiden that lonely period filled with deep trembling melancholy, when they feel unutterably forlorn, just at the time of their physical maturing; when they feel that the things and events in Nature have *no longer,* and their fellow-men have *not yet,* any sympathy for them. Spring comes, even when they are sad, the roses bloom, and the nights are full of nightingales, even though they would like to die; and when at last they would smile once more, the autumn days are there, the heavy days of November, which seem to fall without cessation, and on which a long sunless winter follows. And, on the other hand, they see people, equally strange to them and unconcerned, with their business, their cares, their successes and joys, and they do not understand it. And finally, some of them make up their minds and join these people in order to share their work and their fate, to be useful, to be helpful, to serve the enlargement of life somehow, whilst the others, unwilling to leave the Nature they have lost, go in pursuit of her and try now, consciously and by use of their concentrated will, to come as near to her again as they were in their childhood without knowing it. It will be understood that the latter are artists. . . .

So you begin, and—next thing you know—it's a kind of obsession. In fact, it's *all* you want to do. Like a malcontented spouse longing for his or her lover, you are always thinking of it, scribbling away in bathrooms and buses, stealing off during your lunch hour, walking along the river bank with some relentless rhythm or story marching like an invading army through your body and head. You would, in fact—like almost every man with a mistress or woman with a lover—like to just run off and marry her, to have her with you always—you want to *become* a writer. And if you're not terribly cautious, or wise—or blessed with those great gifts of talent, tenacity and, ultimately, *courage* that would actually make it a wise choice—you may wind up doing that.

In any event, you've now got the bug—or the bug's got you—and whatever best-laid plans you or your family may once have had for you—law school, dental school, dairy farming, plastics—are soon tossed overboard like old clothes, since there's now only one item you want to wear: the mantle of the muse.

But, once out of the dream-state and into the fire, you're in for a nasty surprise: That cold, mean, cruel, unjust, competitive world you had so hoped to utter your way out of is right there with you—possibly, in fact, meaner, crueler, more unjust, more competitive than any into which you might have more easily, and far more securely, plunked yourself. For I think I can say with utter candor, having myself been *through* law school and several professions before coming to literary life and teaching, that—by comparison with the clamor for the small snippets of money, attention, and reputation that takes place in the literary arena—three years of law school rapidly comes to resemble three weeks in an ashram. In fact, entering literary life in search of a kinder, gentler world seems to me somewhat like traveling to South Africa in search of a good multiracial bar.

Here, for example, are the words of the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry, in an essay written in 1937:

> In spite of all we can do, and whether we will or not, literature comprises a sort of politics and competitiveness, numerous idols, a devilish combination of priest and tradesman, of intimacy and publicity, indeed, of everything needed to frustrate its first-born aims, which are generally very remote from all this, being noble, delicate, and profound. The literary atmosphere is hardly favorable to the cultivation of the enchantment I was speaking of: It consists of vain contentions and is troubled by the same ambitions, lures, and impulses that fight for the surface of the public mind.

And here is Pablo Neruda, in one of his *cien sonetos de amor* (*One Hundred Love Sonnets*) which speaks of the relationship of literary life to two possible places of shelter from it—namely, love and writing itself. This is from a beautiful translation by Stephen Tapscott:

> Among the broadswords of literary iron
> I wander like a foreign sailor, who does not know
> the streets, or their angles, and who sings because
> that's how it is, because if not for that what else is
> there?
>
> From the stormy archipelagos I brought
> my windy accordion, waves of crazy rain,
> the habitual slowness of natural things;
> they made up my wild heart.
>
> And so when the sharp little teeth of Literature
> snapped at my honest heels, I passed along
> unsuspectingly, singing with the wind,
>
> toward the rainy dockyards of my childhood,
> toward the cool forests of the indefinable South,
> toward where my heart was filled with your
> fragrance.

Now, what Neruda is acknowledging here is that, if justice is what you're looking for, the place to find it is certainly *not* in literary life (which it is all too easy to mistake for literature), but in those two great repositories of a possibly juster world, love and imagination. And no writer I can think of more wanted a kinder, gentler world than did Neruda. "I am fighting," he wrote:

> for that ubiquitous, widespread, inexhaustible goodness. After all the run-ins between my poetry and the police, after all these episodes and others I will not mention because they would sound repetitious, and in spite of other things that did not happen to me but to many who cannot tell them any more, I still have an absolute faith in human destiny, a clearer and clearer conviction that we are approaching a great and common tenderness.... And this hope cannot be crushed.

It is precisely this, I think—this "ubiquitous, widespread, inexhaustible goodness"—that, I would suggest to you, is the only thing *worth* becoming a writer in pursuit of.

It is worth becoming a writer, I think, if you have the courage to go on, as the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai puts it, after receiving your Master's Degree in disappointment at human injustice, to begin your Ph.D. thesis in hope. It is worth becoming a writer if—rather than disillusioning yourself about the high ethics, gentility, or ultimate justice of literary *life*—you can keep your eye and heart on the hoped-for justice of

great writing itself, and try and make some of it.

For once you start weighing your tenure in a department over your species' tenure on this planet; your connections within the profession over your connections to such timeless and difficult virtues as goodness, justice, and compassion; once you prefer being famous to being fair; a literary school to the great human, homogenizing school; having your face on the cover of *American Poetry Review* to having your body and soul beneath the covers of a warm, decent human being's bed, you may be well on your way into literary life but, I assure you, you are well on your way into the dungeon as well.

But I also don't want to suggest that the pairs of seeming antitheses I have outlined above demand, or suggest, a universe so neatly and conveniently bipolar, so easily arranged. What we all want, of course, is to be famous (as in *read*) *and* fair, tenured *and* tender, part of the literary school *and* the human school, perpetrators of a juster universe as well as beneficiaries of it. What we long for is to find, as Wendell Berry suggests, what we have in *common* with the rest of mankind, rather than what may have originally set us apart and off into the orbit of the written word. The struggle, perhaps, lies more in the tension than in its resolution, though it is the resolution we all hope for—and the tension we must *live*. And, in this sense above all, my words in this essay are addressed very much to myself, for it is a struggle I see myself as presently very much in the thick of, the struggle of trying to synchronize my life as a writer with my values as a man.

So—*Should you become a writer?* Well, yes, maybe you should. But whether or not you become a writer, or you merely write, or you never write again, I think the imperative is the same: to hold, as Yeats implored us, reality and justice in a single thought, to remember that writing is still a unique way of testifying to what E. L. Doctorow calls "the moral immensity of a single soul."

So I will close, now, with three final small snippets of slightly contradictory "vocational" guidance—the first from an essay entitled "The Poet" by the Nobel Prize-winning Italian poet Eugenio Montale; the second from the final stanza of Yeats's "Meditations in a Time of Civil War," and the last from where I began this talk, Vaclav Havel's address to Congress.

Here, first, is Montale:

> The poet can also be different. He can have an uncontroversial past, so much so that no one mentions it anymore. In such cases he's rich, owns a car, earns a great deal and doesn't shirk from writing in prose. He is a species of poet who is disappearing and would require a separate study.
>
> In the literary zoo there are still a few specimens of the poet who doesn't talk about his poems, doesn't collect clippings, and works honestly at another profession. I wouldn't suggest that we put him in a cage and exhibit him to the public, for then he'd become vain and would pass automatically into the class of poets I've already described. I don't know if he deserves to be honored, but he certainly deserves not to be disturbed.

And here is Yeats, from the last stanza of his poem, written in 1923:

> I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
> Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
> In something that all others understand and share;
> But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth
> A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,
> It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,
> The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
> Suffice the aging man as once the growing boy.

For Yeats, or so he would have us believe, "a company of friends, a conscience set at ease," would only have made his longing, ambitious soul pine all the more. But for those of us not as driven, not as gifted, not as blessed and cursed with the always divided and questing heart of this great public and private man, it may not be a bad place to begin.

And, finally, it is Vaclav Havel who may have suggested to all of us a place from which to continue. "I am not the first," Havel said of his decision to accept the burden of political responsibility,

> nor will I be the last, intellectual to do this. On the contrary, my feeling is that there will be more and more of them all the time. If the hope of the world lies in human consciousness, then it is obvious that intellectuals cannot go on forever avoiding their share of responsibility for the world and hiding their distaste for politics under an alleged need to be independent.... When Thomas Jefferson wrote that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," it was a simple and important act of the human spirit. What gave meaning to that act, however, was the fact that *the author backed it up with his life*. It was not just his words; it was his deeds as well. [italics mine]

Havel's words, and his deeds, should give us all—as writers and as human beings—something to think about.

Whatever else we may choose to do or not to do by way of a career, whatever small increment of justice we may or may not be able to add to the world, there is plenty to ponder in them—and plenty to write about, should we find ourselves at one and the same time so blessed and cursed. □

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

(continued from p. 27)

efforts, I'm a Jew, I tell her. She responds with a serene smile and tells me it's OK. Has the Pope given a dispensation?

We have gone to a recital of Handel's *Messiah* at Duke Chapel. It turns out this is the hot ticket of the Christmas season, and the chapel, a magnificent twentieth-century replica of King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England, is jammed, oversold. We find two forlorn folding chairs and drag them up front. The concert is marvelous, musically sophisticated; it is a spare rendition, clean, pure. I am happy, even though the conductor holds back the choir with Protestant restraint and I want them to belt it out. I want it all to overflow; the solo voices and the choir and the orchestra running into each other. I want to be lifted out of my cold metal chair and transported from Durham, North Carolina to another place, all in a blissful state of musical ecstasy. It does not happen.

At intermission, we stand to walk outside, and I turn around to look at the audience, dwarfed by the soaring nave of the chapel. With a start I realize that there is not one black face in this mass of a thousand people. Nor in the choir, nor the orchestra, nor among the four soloists.

A few days later I ask a friend about this and I receive a stern lecture about the role of black churches as a political power base in the South: no black would come to Duke Chapel, it is a white church. But it wasn't a service, I protest, it was a concert. My friend shakes her head, You don't understand, she says, it's a white concert. I mumble that I didn't know that Handel was considered white.

The old system of the South, with its "white only" and "colored only" signs (and those of the North: "no Jews or dogs"), is gone, but it only made explicit what was understood and accepted, however grudgingly, by those shunted aside. Perhaps, as the daughter of Jewish immigrants who fled a society that rejected them (and that would have killed them had they remained), I am especially sensitive to these matters of acceptance and exclusion; it has specific, horrific reverberations for me, even though my own passport never had a large red J stamped on it.

It is perverse that I, raised as an Orthodox Jew for whom a church was strictly off limits, feel so comfortable in them. Many of our friends who are far less Jewish in background and practice refuse adamantly to accompany us to concerts in churches, as if they will be tainted just by sitting in a pew. (They never go to a synagogue, either, but that is another story.) The *Jesu Christu* of a Bach cantata sounds better to me in the space for which it was written. The book of psalms, neatly lined up in the book holders on the backs of the pews, the little kneeling benches that knock against my ankles, do not bother me. I do not see them as religious objects, but as architectural artifacts. It is perhaps this absence of emotional resonance, this clear, empty, uncomplicated space—so different from my convoluted response to things Jewish—that is appealing.

Despite myself, an old, familiar bile rises in my throat when I enter a synagogue. Old resentments, festering and unresolved, reassert themselves. Yet I return again and again to the sights and sounds of my childhood. What I am seeking is not a discarded past, but a place for myself, now, in the Jewish community. I recognize my desire for what it is: like the prodigal son, I have returned to the patriarch for forgiveness. I am also playing a little game of tag with Judaism—catch me if you can—with rules known only to me. If I am reluctant to give an affirmation of belief and to accept rules not of my own making, I still want to know that I can come home. □

SEX AND THE SPIRIT

(continued from p. 35)

other than sexuality, this is not considered repressive or manipulative.

But when it comes to sex we have difficulty with a disciplined approach. We want to believe that we can avoid an "anything goes" morality, that we can develop mature, adult relationships and restructure more loving communities without the boundaries and restrictions suggested by tradition. But the wisdom of centuries (and not just in Judaism) tells us otherwise: if we want enduring relationships and communities, clear structures are essential. We do not need to go far back in time to learn that lesson; recent events, from the world of cults to that of evangelical Christianity, show us that sexuality and spirituality are an excitingly dangerous combination. In sexual matters, most of us slip back into childhood or adolescence unless given strong support—including

firm limits—to grow otherwise. So relying on individuals of widely varying maturity and self-consciousness to build relationships of "mutuality, responsibility, and honesty," as Plaskow hopes, is an admirable ideal, but not practically workable.

We do have a strong alternative. Traditional Jewish views of women's sexuality and spirituality speak to us of the hidden power of the holy—of what is kept holy by the containment and refinement achieved through discipline and spiritual practice. Guidelines, rules, and laws are not a matter of suppressing impulses and denying passion, but rather a means of teaching us the way we should walk (literally, *halacha*) to become mature adults.

We must acknowledge that we are attracted by the power of sexuality not only for our own pleasure but for the holiness that we, as Jews, know it holds. But we need to use that power wisely. Sexuality has too often embodied a vague hope of connecting ourselves with God or the Godlike. Plaskow writes,

> When we reach out sexually, with our total selves, we may find that the boundaries between self and other dissolve, and we may feel ourselves united with larger currents of energy and sustenance.... [The] all-embracing quality of sexual expression ... is the closest many people can come in this life to experiencing the embracing wholeness of God.

Yet, while traditional Jewish literature affirms the connection between sexuality and spirituality, it does not get very excited about "all-embracing qualities," or feelings of unity with "currents of energy." These are expressions of the life force, to be sure; but they are not regarded as unusual achievements in sexuality, nature, or community. What then is the goal? Here I can only speak for myself, as I try to reflect on my own experience and the stories of women of our heritage. I seek the focused intensity, the white-hot point of contact with God that can emerge from a life dedicated to holiness. I want to be able to tap the reservoirs of passion and vitality, courage and clarity that I know are available there.

More than this: I believe dedication to holiness is what we must have if we are to mend the world. Diffusing our passions, exploring them, testing them in various encounters is of little help if we want to overthrow evil and create "a new heaven and a new earth." Focus, clarity, and the intensity of holiness are what we require in our sexual and our spiritual lives, in our communities and in our relation to the world. And these sprout forth when at last, despite all obstacles, we commit ourselves to a person, a community, a teacher, and a way of life. □

MY INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

(continued from p. 40)

modern materialism for *The Figure of Beatrice* (Charles Williams). The full meaning of concretely embodied experience is not limited to the literal but is polysemously symbolic. Beatrice is Blake's City, yet a Woman; the New Jerusalem, beautiful as a bride adorned to meet her husband.

Love, that topic that Marxists can't handle: the topic this post-Marxist addressed in *Love's Body*: the topic Zukofsky addressed in *"A"*-9. Zukofsky's *"A"*, his "poem including history." *"A"*-1 begins:

> The Passion According to Matthew,
> Composed seventeen twenty-nine,
> Rendered at Carnegie Hall,
> Nineteen twenty-eight,
> Thursday evening, the fifth of April.
> The autos parked, honking.

"A"-9 is the secret history of the crisis (inner and outer, political and personal) in the lives of the generation preceding mine (Louis Zukofsky, 1904–78). It is a secret history, a *trobar clu,* a closed trope, a tour de force of hermetic modernism, open if at all only to those who know that *"A"*-9 is metrically and musically a reprise of Cavalcanti's (Dante's friend Cavalcanti) canzone *Donna mi pregha,* a lady is asking me a question. The question is: What is Love? It is the same canzone of Cavalcanti that obsessed Pound, who did two translations of it and placed one of them at the very center of the first half of the *Cantos, Canto* XXXVI. *"A"*-9 is a diptych, composed of two exactly equal and symmetrical parts: two answers to the question printed as if they were one (*"A"*-9, concealing the fact that they were composed ten years apart, the first part in 1938–1939, the second part in 1948–1950). Concealing the great turning point, the hinge of fate ("minds thinking in terms of destiny and necessity"), the revision of historical identity in the life of Zukofsky.

The first part of *"A"*-9 recapitulates the contradictions —between prose and poetry, between avant-garde and masses, between two soi-disant avant-gardes, the political and the poetical—that I have experienced in my life. It is nothing less than an attempt to set the economics of Karl Marx, *Das Kapital,* to the music of Cavalcanti. It is that tour de force promised by Zukofsky to Carl Rakosi in a letter of 1931: "The only thing left for me to do is to make a canzone out of economics, which I'll do some day, wait and see." He wasn't able to do it till 1939.

In the 1930s the Soviet and the Fascist ideas came to the parting of the ways. *"A"*-9 is a reply to Pound's *ABC of Economics* (1933), in which the Social Credit theories of C. H. Douglas are expounded. We can use Poundian aesthetics in order to see the superiority of Zukofsky's economics; both poetically and politically superior. We are trying "to construct a method of thought from the imagist intensity of vision" (Oppen); scrutinizing capitalism through the lens of poetry. And the result in *"A"*-9 is Marxism made over into something rich and strange. In a letter to Pound (June 7, 1935) Zukofsky writes, "There is more material fact and more imaginative poetic handling of fact in that first chapter of Marx than has been guessed at in your economic heaven." In that first chapter of *Das Kapital* Marx says "If commodities could speak, they would say. . . ." In *"A"*-9 this becomes "So that were the things words they would say. . . ." And they speak of the labor theory of value ("the measure of all use is time-congealed labor"); use-value vs. exchange-value ("use hardly enters into their exchanges"); surplus-value; the fetishism of commodities (things taking on a queer life of their own); the alienation of labor ("the labor speeded while our worth decreases"); the crisis of capitalism ("times have subverted the plenty they point to"). Summarized in the concluding envoi:

> We are things, say, like a quantum of action
> Defined product of energy and time, now
> In these words which rhyme now how song's exaction
> Forces abstraction to turn from equated
> Values to labor we have approximated.

Why clothe the poetry of *Das Kapital* in a recondite imitation of Cavalcanti? Why alienate the masses with esoteric *trobar clu*?

> —Our world will not stand it,
> the implications of a too regular form.

Pound distinguished three elements of poetry—*phanopoeia,* the casting of images upon the imagination; *logopoeia,* the dance of the intellect among words; *melopoeia,* the music. The dance of the intellect among the words, turning *Das Kapital* into a dance. But the deepest is the *melopoeia,* the music. The music of Cavalcanti in *"A"*-9, the music asking, What is Love? The music mutely, mutely, tells us that the Marxist theory of *labor* must be grounded in a theory of *Amor.* And that for a musical, or adequately political, theory of Amor we have to go back, believe it or not, to Cavalcanti and Dante.

Love, the unmentionable subject of part I of *"A"*-9, is the only subject of Part II. The two parts together thus constitute an effort to supplement the doctrine of Labor with a doctrine of Amor, or to move from Labor to Amor. As in *Life Against Death,* and *Love's Body.* But in *"A"*-9 Part II the new force called in to remedy the defect in Karl Marx is not Freud but Spinoza and Wittgenstein. Turning from book to book, revisioning historical identities—we have the record of Zukofsky's wandering in the wood in the second half of his life in *Bottom: On Shakespeare,* begun in 1947. *"A"*-9 Part II was begun in 1948. (1948-50 the beginning of my post-Marxist wandering, after the defeat of the Henry Wallace Third Party campaign for the Presidency, 1948.)

In Zukofsky poetry is in the driver's seat: the question is, what is Love? And for an answer we turn principally to Shakespeare:

> All of Shakespeare's writing embodies a definition . . . the definition of love as the tragic hero. He is Amor, identified with the passion of the lover falling short of perfection. . . . The more detailed precision or obscurities of this definition of love in early Renaissance writing are beside the point. Its origins and changes are many and complex: Greek mysteries, Ovid (as compared to whose work Shakespeare's conjures with a difference), Oriental and Arabian sources, Provençal extension and intensities, Continental and English philosophy of the 13th century, configurations of Cavalcanti, Dante and other Italians.
>
> About thirty-five years after the publication of the First Folio, Spinoza may have been looking into similar matter: ". . . love is of such a nature that we never strive to be released from it. . . ."

All of Shakespeare's plays are glossed as disclosing what is enclosed, as in a *trobar clu,* in Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and the Turtle," which Zukofsky calls "probably the greatest English metaphysical poem." "The Phoenix and the Turtle" as quoted towards the end of *Love's Body*:

> So they lov'd as love in twain
> Had the essence but in one;
> Two distincts, division none:
> Number there in love was slain.
>
> Reason, in itself confounded,
> Saw division grow together;
> To themselves yet either neither,
> Simple were so well compounded;
>
> That it cried, "How true a twain
> Seemeth this concordant one!
> Love hath reason, reason none,
> If what parts can so remain."

Zukofsky is reaching far into the future: anticipating

not only *Life Against Death* (1959), but also *Love's Body* (1966). The point to be arrived at is the coincidence of opposites—"Love hath reason, reason none."

Out of Shakespeare, to the music of Cavalcanti, with the aid of Spinoza and Wittgenstein, Zukofsky makes a new *trobar clu,* a new hymn to the Mysterium Amoris; summarized in the envoi:

> No one really knows us who does not love us,
> Time does not move us, we are and love, searing
> Remembrance—veering from guises which cloak us,
> So defined as eternal, men invoke us.

And yet....

Perhaps Zukofsky's error, if it is an error—the author of *Love's Body* is in no position to say; the physics and politics of Amor is still the undiscovered New Atlantis for which we set out—

Perhaps Zukofsky's error was to take Wittgenstein instead of Freud as the representative of modern thought who "appears to have traveled with the flame of 'The Phoenix and the Turtle.'" With Wittgenstein and without Freud, Zukofsky ends up with Love's mind—"Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste." Love's mind rather than Love's Body: "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind." Without Freud there can be no psychopathology of modern life, no sociopathology of the twentieth century, the insanity in politics and in economics; the filthiness of filthy lucre, in order to surpass Pound's effort in *Canto* XIV to depict the obscenity of money in purely Dantesque terms.

Even Spinoza is no substitute for Freud. Spinoza is indeed a Communist and philosopher of Love's Body: "Whatever things conduce to the communalization of human society (*ad hominum communem societatem conducunt*) or cause men to live in concord (*concorditer*) are useful." "Men can desire, I say, nothing more excellent for the preservation of their being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all should compose, as it were, one mind and one body." But that is not what Zukofsky is seeing in Spinoza. Spinoza's doctrine of perfection—"REALITY and PERFECTION I understand to be one and the same thing"—haunts *"A"*-9—"desired perfection," "reason the perfect real," "any compassed perfection"—and aggravates a contradiction in the poetics which Zukofsky shared with Pound. Zukofsky interpreted Spinoza's notion of perfection as reinforcing a traditional notion, sanctioned by the authority of Dante, of movement as movement toward perfection, and therefore as *defect.* Zukofsky cites Dante: "Everything that moves, moves for the sake of something which it has not, and which is the goal of its motion.... Everything that moves, then, has some defect, and does not grasp its whole being at once." Amor, in Zukofsky's explication of Shakespeare, is identified with the "tragic hero, the passion of the lover falling short of perfection." Activity then, whether in art or in life, is the manifestation of "desire longing for perfection" (*"A"*-1); equated with Spinoza's "love towards a thing immutable and eternal." Perfection itself (par excellence the music of Bach) is static: Zukofsky says, "Properly no verse should be called a poem if it does not convey the totality of perfect rest." Perfection: call it Beauty, Art, Poetry. The poem including history then has two voices: "desire for what is objectively perfect" and "the direction of historic and contemporary particular."

The poem including history has to be action poetry. It is part of "an impulse to action" (*"A"*-9, first line); it is poetry responding to Karl Marx's challenge, "the philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways but the thing is to change it." There is an historical agenda. Vita Nova; new life, new thinking. A poetic kind of thinking: renewal is the revivifying power of metaphorical troping. The poem participates in the movement of history. The movement is everything, the kinetics, the energy. It all becomes a matter of energy, unblocking energy (that frozen landscape of the cold war, the hardened stone of Dante's sestina). Charles Olson, another coming after Louis Zukofsky, who attempted to appropriate the legacy of Ezra Pound and divert the energy into "progressive movement," in his famous manifesto "Projective Verse" lays out "the *kinetics* of the thing. A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it to ... by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge." The advice is, keep moving.

If there is movement in history there is violence and struggle (Sorel's "philosophy of proletarian violence"). Not necessarily class-struggle; there is also *la battaglia delli diversi pensieri*; and even *la battaglia d'Amore.* Pound called his work an "explosion in an art museum," and dedicated, even in the 1930s, his *Guide to Kulchur* "To Louis Zukofsky and Basil Bunting, strugglers in the desert." But in the same *Guide to Kulchur* he speaks (with reference to his own *Cantos*) of "the defects inherent in a record of struggle."

We need a new philosophy of movement, and it is not to be found in Spinoza. We need a philosophy of process, not of substance. A philosophy of energy, and therefore also of Amor: it is Amor which moves the sun and all the stars. It will not be a philosophy of perfection, but of struggle; and violence; and death. All part of the process; creative destruction. As Freud taught us, a philosophy of Amor must be also a philosophy of Death; including all that

Hegel objected to as omitted from the philosophy of Spinoza: the pain, the patience, and the labor of the negative. Omitted from Spinoza, for whom there is no death. "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death." "A thing has nothing in itself through which it can be destroyed, or which can negate its existence." Negation is the work of the death instinct, without which we cannot live, according to Freud. According to Spinoza negation is impotence, i.e., defect.

Nature, *Natura Naturans,* is not an orderly Spinozistic or Dantesque cosmos; Nature is Heraclitean Fire. And the fire and the rose are one. And so, in spite of Dante, heaven and hell are the same place. Augustine said that the torments of the damned are part of the felicity of the redeemed; but he thought of these as two separate peoples, two cities. Modern, or is it post-modern, thought begins with Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell." Not the longing for perfection, but *Selige Sehnsucht*—

Das Lebendige will ich preisen,
Das nach Flammentod sich sehnet.

A poetics, then, not of perfection (Art, Beauty, etc.), but of incarnation. As in Mandelstam, another defeated revolutionary; who identified with Dante as defeated revolutionary: "A heroic era has begun in the life of the word. The word is flesh and bread. It shares the fate of bread and flesh: suffering." Not perfect but open, that is to say broken, form. Against Beauty as such. Like the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:2:

> No form nor comeliness . . . no beauty that we should desire him.

Rejecting Spinoza's equation of reality with perfection, and perfection with power; to be is to be vulnerable.

The death instinct, like a rejected love, takes its revenge on all immortal longing for perfection. *"A"*-9 Part II goes dead:

> goaded
> Voice holding the node at heart, song, unfaded
> Understanding whereby action is aided.

Go dead voice. In each of the stanzas Zukofsky places a flower, as in a cemetery. *Et in Arcadia ego.* Immediately after the dead voice comes the envoi:

> Love speaks: "in wracked cities there is less action,
> Sweet alyssum sometimes is not of time; now
> Weep, love's heir, rhyme now how song's exaction
> Is your distraction—related is equated,
> How else is love's distance approximated."

After *"A"*-9 Part II, the political commitment completely drops out of the life of Zukofsky. His voluminous journal, 1947–60, contains not a single mention of Marx or Lenin; or of Stalin for that matter. *"A"*-10, placed after *"A"*-9 but composed in 1940 ("wracked cities"), is a record of political disillusionment. In *"A"*-11 Zukofsky finds his Vita Nova. *"A"*-11 is inscribed for wife Celia and son Paul. The love that Zukofsky discovered is what Blake calls "soft family-love" (and puts next door to "cruel Patriarchal pride"). In his retreat from the public to the personal, from the political to the domestic, Zukofsky was traveling the path traced by many members of his generation. But not by me. The body in *Love's Body* includes the body politic. Though not a sestina, *Love's Body* is obsessive: *nondom amabam, et amare amabam; quaerebam quib amarem, amans amare.* I need Augustine's Latin: "Not yet loving, but loving to love; seeking an object for my love, in love with love." A *trobar clu* perhaps; a hermetic game of hide-and-seek with esoteric erudition; very far from the masses which constitute the body of love, Whitman's en masse.

There is no blame. There is no defect inherent in a record of struggle. The assignment remains, to not cease from exploration. There is no blame. We all survive as best we can; always after shipwreck; improvising our own raft; revisioning our historical identity; to tell another story. As the Japanese Zen Buddhist lady eye-doctor said, "Going to Paradise is good, and to fall into Hell is also a matter of congratulation." All shall be well. After being shipwrecked you become a "Sea Marke." Charles Olson includes in his *Maximus Poems* the poem called "The Sea Marke" by the navigator-explorer John Smith, and set by him as the epigraph for his last book *ADVERTISEMENTS for the unexperienced Planters of New-England* (1630). The Sea Marke, some actual buoy afloat to mark the spot of a previous shipwreck:

The Sea Marke

It reads (Smith died,
that year):

Aloofe, aloofe; and come no neare,
the dangers doe appeare;
Which if my ruine had not beene
you had not seene:
I onely lie upon this shelfe
to be a marke to all
which on the same might fall,
That none may perish but my selfe. □

MEDIEVAL HEBREW NARRATIVE

(continued from p. 43)

dience in itself, and the ultimate punishment or reward that inevitably follows. The underlying subject of these stories is the logic of justice, which moves these stories

at its own pace, inexorably but often unpredictably.

Justice leads them as well in the direction of the novella, toward lengthier narrative forms that can more fully develop the possibilities inherent in improbable punishment, excessive reward, and confused human motivation. This movement can be seen best in a narrative that—though it is hardly known even to most scholars—is one of the great masterworks of all Hebrew literature. The narrative is called *Ma'aseh Yerushalmi,* "The Tale of the Jerusalemite."

The Tale of the Jerusalemite was probably first composed to be part of a collection of exempla, to judge from the moral that comes at its conclusion: "A son should always obey his father's commands, and must never break an oath." Like many exempla, the Tale of the Jerusalemite begins with the transgression of this rule: its nameless protagonist, the Jerusalemite, makes an oath to his father never to go to sea. Once his father dies the son, a pious student, is persuaded by some sailors to retrieve a fortune his father has left him abroad. As soon as he goes to sea, he is punished: the ship carrying him is wrecked and the Jerusalemite is almost drowned. Washed ashore on a strange island, he discovers, to his great dismay, that the island is inhabited by demons.

Ever resourceful, the Jerusalemite manages to win the favor of Ashmadai, the king of the demons. He becomes Ashmadai's counselor and eventually marries his daughter, by whom he has a son. However, the Jerusalemite begins to pine for his abandoned family. Ashmadai's daughter with great reluctance agrees to let him visit his "human" home for one year after which, the Jerusalemite solemnly promises her, he will return to live with her forever. But once he arrives home, the Jerusalemite announces that he will never return to the island of demons. When the agreed-upon year passes and he does not return, his demon wife and son and an army of demons arrive to bring him home. She summons him to a court, and the judges decide in her favor, since the Jerusalemite had after all promised to return. When he refuses to yield, she kisses the man goodbye and strangles him as they embrace.

Scholars have shown that the Tale of the Jerusalemite is one of the earliest written versions of the folktale of a man who marries a demoness. But it's more than a folktale: it has two remarkable *literary* features. The first of these is that the narrative's language is packed with the diction of the talmudic academy and its world. Probably composed in Babylonia in the ninth or tenth centuries at the height of the Geonic period, the narrative brims with recondite allusions to halacha and rabbinic tradition. Nearly every detail and description in the tale is rabbinically correct, even that of the court to which the Jerusalemite is finally brought. The Jerusalemite himself is repeatedly called a *ben torah*. A traditional designation for a student of Torah, its use in the story also points to an identification with the yeshiva world of the Babylonian geonim.

The tale's second remarkable feature is that the demons in it turn out to be even more Jewish—that is, rabbinically Jewish—than the Jews that the Jerusalemite has left behind in the "human" world. Indeed, when the Jerusalemite first arrives on their island, he initially believes that he has landed among Jews, because he hears children studying verses from the Book of Exodus; only later does he learn that the children are demons, too. When Ashmadai, the demon-king, hires the Jerusalemite to be his son's tutor, it is to teach him Torah. And Ashmadai's daughter herself, at the trial to which she calls the Jerusalemite, invokes halachic precedent on her own behalf; the other demons too are capable of quoting not only scripture, but Talmud.

Yet the demons possess more than mere fluency in rabbinic tradition; they also have a kind of native piety that the Jerusalemite himself lacks. Though he is learned, his religious behavior is legalistic rather than moral. In the story's course, he repeatedly proves himself a betrayer of promises and oaths: first, his father's oath; later, a promise to Ashmadai; finally, the agreement he makes with Ashmadai's daughter to return to her. Each time he pleads extenuating circumstances, but by the tale's end the Jerusalemite has lost all credibility in the reader's eye. As one of the demons remarks early on: "Precisely because he is a Torah scholar . . . even the crimes he committed unintentionally should be treated as though they were done willfully." It is hard not to hear in these accusations against the Jerusalemite an implied criticism of the world out of which he has come, a sharp critique of all types of legalistic shrewdness that disregard the claims of morality.

The Tale of the Jerusalemite goes beyond social criticism; it is an extraordinary attempt to imagine otherness. The Jerusalemite's inadvertent voyage to the land of the demons can almost be read allegorically, as the story of a Jew who leaves behind his own world in order to live among the true gentiles. To be sure, the precious irony behind the Jerusalemite's fictional journey is that the other world, literally a world of aliens, turns out in practice to be little different from the world he has left behind. But then, the Jerusalemite himself is no different—no better a person, that is—"there" (in the demon world) than he is "here" (in the human one). In both realms, he shows himself to be a scoundrel, an untrustworthy scamp, a betrayer of others. Indeed, in its empathy for the other—be it demonic or gentile—the Tale of the Jeru-

salemite's achievement is unparalleled in classical or medieval Judaism. It enlists imaginative narrative as a medium for exploring the possibility of existence beyond the borders of Jewish historical reality, an existence that must have been nearly inconceivable for a medieval Jew.

The creative intensity of the Tale of the Jerusalemite informs other narratives in medieval Hebrew literature: the apocalyptic *Sefer Zerubabbel;* the harrowing tales of martyrdom in *Midrash Eleh Ezkerah (The Legend of the Ten Martyrs);* the many *ma'asim* in Sefer Chasidim in which Judah the pious painted his strange portraits of the *Chasid,* the pietist; and somewhat later the famously parabolic narratives of Nahman of Bratslav. And through Nahman, it is possible to trace a spiritual lineage from the earlier rabbinic narratives down to the "fallen" tales of such modern writers as Kafka, Agnon, and Singer: storytellers wandering in search of a path of wisdom yet knowing that path is lost to them, the access to wisdom cut off in the upheavals of modernity.

But what is most important about these narratives is not their particular position in the history of Hebrew literature. Nor is it their putative influence upon later writers with whom we are more familiar, nor even their ability to tell us about certain kinds of Jewish experience which otherwise would not be documented. The real importance of these narratives is that they show us a possibility of Jewish imagining that grows directly *out of* classical Jewish tradition and its textual life, an imagining that builds upon Judaism's very diction, its imagery, its fears and dreams and longings. □

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LETTERS

(Continued from p. 5)

gion, the rural areas voted strictly against the Sandinistas.

Rosenfeld thinks that solidarity with the Sandinistas has failed to sufficiently influence how Americans view Nicaragua. On the contrary, the solidarity movement has had such enormous success that many people find themselves wholly unprepared for the reality in Nicaragua: that the Sandinistas are less popular, by a landslide margin, than Mrs. Chamorro, especially among the poor, and that, in the remote countryside, the Sandinistas are far less popular than are the contras.

The solidarity movement has been deceiving itself and misleading others —as did solidarity with Castro and solidarity with North Vietnam years ago, and as did solidarity with Soviet Communist movements before that. I have immense respect for the courage, selflessness, and democratic socialist intentions of people in that movement whom I have met over the years. But in an age of democracy, how have these people allowed themselves to become so blindly enamored of an authoritarian vanguard party in Central America that, even today, when a free election has taken the scales off of many people's eyes, they cannot see the truth?

Classifieds

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