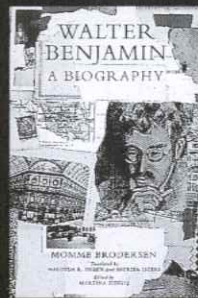


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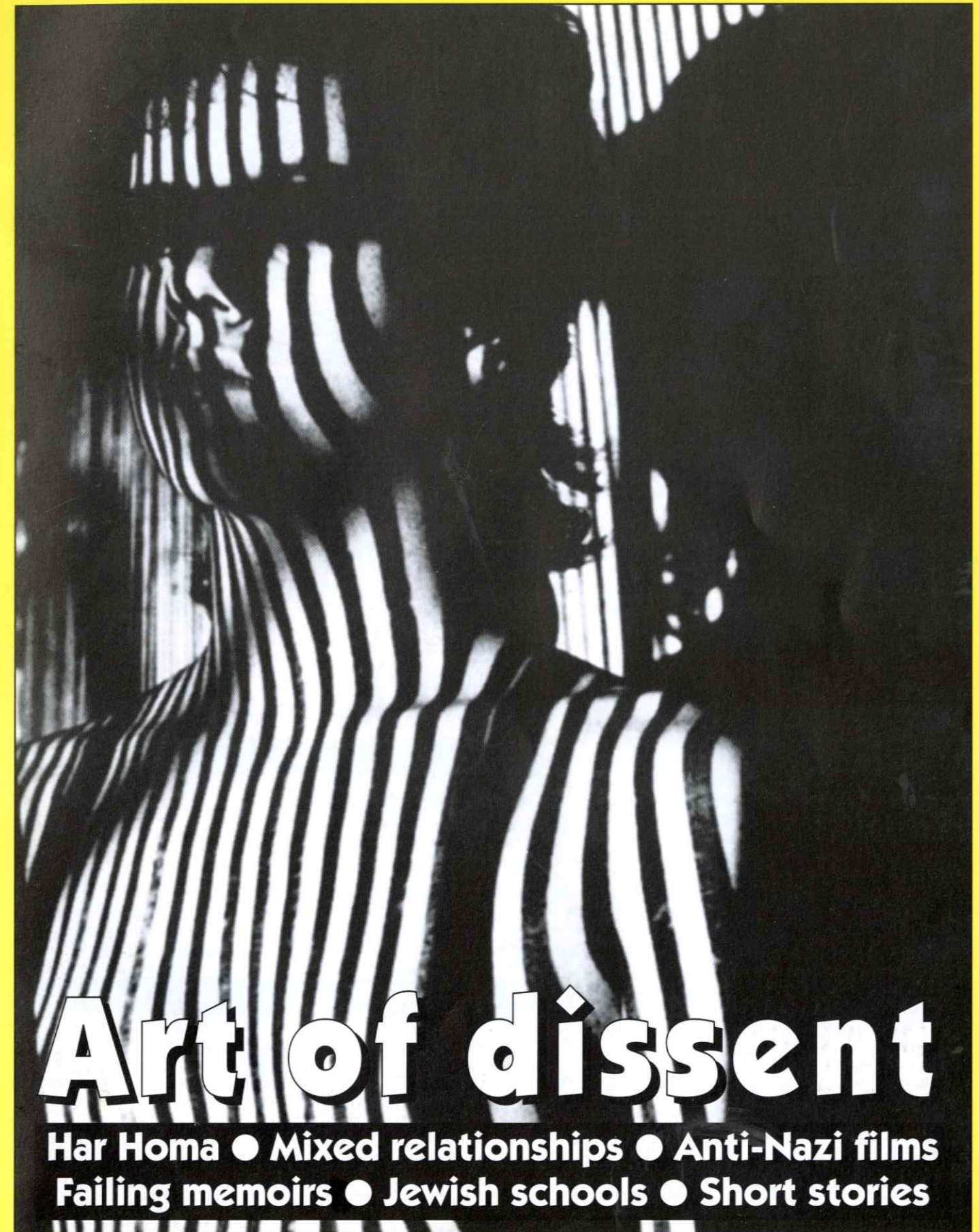
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Jewish Socialist

Magazine of the Jewish Socialists' Group

No 37 • Summer 1997 • £1.50



Art of dissent

Har Homa • Mixed relationships • Anti-Nazi films
Failing memoirs • Jewish schools • Short stories

Jewish Socialist

The right often deflects criticism of its totalitarian and authoritarian attitudes by throwing these accusations back on the left. One accusation that has dogged the left over recent years is that of censorship, but the boot is usually on the other foot. Three articles in this issue focus on cases where progressive people have been the victims of censors. Two articles (pages 15-18) look at to the Jewish community's response to artistic work that addresses political controversy. The third article (page 12) describes the censorship of anti-fascist films in Britain before the Second World War.

The right has commandeered the words 'freedom' and 'liberty' for their own purposes. The 'free market' has perpetuated wage slavery and, in many parts of the world, child labour; 'free speech' has been the cover for racist incitement; 'free choice' has maintained privilege in education. We urgently need to wage an ideological battle to link the concept of 'freedom' once again to justice.

The lead from the top of British politics is not encouraging. The Labour Party is more monolithic and intolerant of internal debate than ever in its history. Socialist principles have been jettisoned in the rush for a mythical 'middle ground', rather than attempting to reach out to the millions, including grassroots Labour members, who are disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conservative politics of the leaders of both major parties. We hope that the decisive Labour victory will create more favourable conditions for socialists to work in and demand fundamental changes.

Some over-enthusiastic journalists took the views expressed by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks as encouragement to vote Labour. Not so, he reassured us. Besides he's more busy with internal Jewish matters such as describing Reform Jews as 'destroyers of the faith'. It is rumoured that in the coming year Reform Jews will appoint their own Chief Rabbi to truly represent them. For once, maybe we should look at America: no chief rabbi but a confident, pluralistic Jewish community.

In Israel/Palestine the Israeli government is doing all it can to provoke Palestinian anger and, in response the Islamic fundamentalists of Hamas, substitute terror for mass political action. In this context Israeli peace forces struggle to be heard while an increasingly authoritarian PLO is losing credibility. However, there are signs of a renewed people's rebellion by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories against the new settlement programme. We cannot assume that a 'peace process' will continue despite the obstacles. Jewish communities, human rights activists and socialists need to voice their criticisms loudly and show solidarity with those fighting for peace with justice.

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Paul Collins, Ralph Levinson, Ruth Lukom, Simon Lynn, Karen Merkel, Charlie Pottins and David Rosenberg. Design: Clifford Singer. Cover picture: Censored, by Lynn Leon, 1985



Memories of resistance. See page 19

contents

NEWS

Rochester revisited	3
Action against fascists	3
Jewish Continuity merger	3
Are you feeling secure?	4
Jewish women's refuge	4
Not a peace settlement	5
Sound radio	6
Obituaries	7
Lies and Lubavitch	7
The last Jew in England	9

FEATURES

Mixed relationships	10
Anti-Nazi film	12
Art of dissent	15
Holocaust memoirs	19
Keneyne horror story	22
The slow mirror	23

REVIEWS

Palestinian stories	27
Jews and Blacks	28
The last blues dance	29
Flickerbook	29
Stanislaw Brunstein retrospective	30

Plus: Diary 8 • Letters 26 • Ask the Rabbi 6

FORTRESS ROCHESTER

The shadow of death looms over immigrants and asylum seekers across the world. Last Christmas day 300 immigrants were killed, probably deliberately, in the Mediterranean, victims of a trade created by the immigration controls of fortress Europe in this the 'European Year Against Racism'. People are deported every day, sometimes to face torture, persecution and death, sometimes to face starvation, sometimes ripped away from their families and communities.

At Rochester prison in Kent earlier this year, some 70 detainees went on hunger strike and a number stopped taking fluids. By the eighth week, some were close to death. Faced with the callous indifference of the Tory government, in particular of its spokespeople, Anne Widdecombe and Michael Howard, the hunger strikers decided to stop their strike rather than die, having

achieved the release on bail of at least five detainees, and having gained some publicity. However there has been no overall change in government policy or practice.

There have been weekly pickets on Saturdays outside the prison in Rochester at 2pm, and at the Home office, Queen Anne's Gate on Wednesdays between 5pm and 6.30pm. The prison pickets have boosted the morale of the inmates who can hear us shouting and call back. A wide range of organisations have supported the campaign including a group called Catholic Women Against Anne Widdecombe.

Solidarity with all asylum



seekers and refugees in detention remains vital, and detainees at Haslar prison, in Hampshire may now be on the point of taking their own action.

For the latest details of the campaign contact Brian Debus c/o Hackney Unison, 219 Mare Street, London E8 3QQ. Tel 0181-985 7134.

Medway Detainees Support Group: 01634 403001. National Coalition Against Deportations, 22 Berner Street, Lozells, Birmingham B19 2DR. Tel 0121-554 6947, fax 0121-273 1567.

FIGHTING THE FUHRERS

● Seventeen young Polish anti-fascists are awaiting trial after a confrontation with fascists who had been terrorising local people in the town of Radomsko.

The police and the town authorities had been doing nothing to stop these attacks, so the anti-fascists took matters into their own hands. In the confrontation one fascist was seriously wounded and later died. Thirteen of the anti-fascists are charged with the murder. They are in prison until their cases come to court. Their families are having great difficulty raising sufficient funds to pay for an adequate legal defence. The other 4 defendants are being tried separately in a juvenile court.

You can send money for

the defence fund to: Michal Swiderski, PO Box 8, 21-400 Lukow, Poland. For more information contact: MRE, Box 74, 04-520 Warsaw, 106, Poland.

● Anti-fascists in Fawkner, Australia are mobilising against a new threat from the neo-Nazi National Action group. NA has recently opened a bookshop and organising centre in the town, a multiracial industrial suburb north of Melbourne. Fawkner's main immigrant groups under threat are italians, Greeks, Turks, Arabs and Kurds. The local council, while clearly opposing the neo-Nazis' ideas, has discouraged the anti-fascist from confronting National Action, but the united front

Campaign Against the Nazis (CAN) is building for a militant public response.

● In Kent two local anti-fascists have received out-of-court settlements from the Kent police totalling more than £5,000 after claims of false imprisonment, malicious prosecution and battery. The two were arrested while leafleting Gravesend market in May 1993. Jewish Socialist readers contributed towards their defence campaign. Spokesperson Reg Weston stated: 'All along we never felt alone. Now we hope our small victory will encourage others to stand against racism and fascism and against arbitrary actions of a biased police.'

MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

What do you do if you have two failing organisations in your community? Merge, of course. Better to fail together than on your own. A few years ago the Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks heralded the arrival of Jewish Continuity – the body that would reach out and ensure a vibrant future for the whole community. Almost since its inception it has been riven with conflict as it has tried to settle any difficulties in representing the whole community in favour of its orthodox element. Officers have come and gone and the Chief Rabbi has clashed with just about every element of the community except his own orthodox branch. No wonder some people refer to Jewish Continuity as 'Carry on Judaism'.

Meanwhile the Joint Israel Appeal (JIA) has suffered from the long term decline in Zionist fortunes, especially since the Lebanon War of 1982 – a war which even many ardent Zionists saw as unnecessary aggression rather than a defence of Israel's security. They have tried every scaremongering tactic but most Jews ignore their appeals. Even worse for them, prominent Israeli personalities keep coming over to the diaspora to say 'we don't need your money any more'. Meanwhile many mainstream community activists have expressed concern that the flow of money out of the community to Israel is at the expense of the survival of Jewish institutions here.

So Jewish Continuity and the JIA have merged. They deserve each other!

HOME HELP

A refuge for Jewish women fleeing domestic violence opened in London on 12 May. The product of years of work by Jewish Women's Aid (JWA), the refuge, whose address must remain secret, can accommodate eight women and their children. The house offers a safe place for any Jewish woman, secular or orthodox. To ensure that it is accessible to observant women, the kitchen is kosher, with separate areas for meat and milk and a small shop selling kosher food. Shabbes will be observed in the public areas 'but what the women do in their own rooms is up to them,' says Tanya Novick of JWA. Women may be referred to the refuge through Jewish social services, local social services or housing departments; they may come via Women's Aid, the JWA helpline or the police. Stereotypes of Jews as placing particular value on the family have made it hard to expose the domestic violence in our community. The new refuge, as well as providing a place of safety, is raising awareness about family conflict.

JEWISH WOMEN'S AID HELPLINE

0800 59-12-03

Registered Charity No. 1047045

The Jewish Women's Aid helpline is open Mon, Weds and Thurs, 9.30am-9.30pm. Outside those hours there is an answering machine, or you can contact the National Domestic Violence helpline on 0345 023468, open 24 hours day every day.



IS IT SAFE?

While government and opposition parties promise greater security for everyone, one of the few booming businesses in Britain is private 'security'. Its vanguard in the Jewish community is the 'Community Security Trust' (CST), a shadowy well-financed operation that the Board of Deputies is prepared to accept political responsibility for, although the CST apparently doesn't have to answer to them. They've been touting around for more business lately, especially in school security and they have also offered their expertise to other religious institutions under attack – no, not mosques. Churches! But they got more than they bargained for when one of their press releases was regurgitated in the Observer. The lead letter the following week came from the Jewish Socialists' Group under the headline 'When security becomes bullying'. Here is the letter.

We read with interest and alarm that the 'Community Security Trust', operating from the headquarters of the Jewish Board of Deputies, is set to extend its 'security' work.

You report that it operates a 'sophisticated intelligence system collating information on

the (Jewish) community's enemies' and offers an 'investigative service'. The CST itself claims to be 'a Jewish neighbourhood watch – with a little bit added'.

This 'little bit added' is actually the surveillance and harassment of members of the Jewish community itself, especially those on the Left, who take issue with the political positions expressed by the self-proclaimed leaders of the community and argue for the democratisation of all the community's institutions –

Many Jews resent their macho and bullying style

particularly those entrusted with security. As victims of their harassment we have seen neither sophistication nor intelligence displayed by the officers of the CST and its forerunner the Community Security Organisation (CSO).

Many Jews resent the macho and bullying style of the CST at Jewish events in mainstream public venues. Members of the Jewish Socialists' Group and other organisations have even been prevented from entering a range of 'public' events policed by the CSO/CST. These have

included a Holocaust commemoration, meetings about Nazi war crimes and an Israeli film festival. The victims have been condemned as 'security risks' despite offering to leave any bags and personal effects with security personnel. Many of those excluded have been told they are 'on file'. On what basis they are on file and who verifies that the information is correct is impossible to find out.

After the exclusions from the Israeli film festival the then Vice Chair of the Board of Deputies explained in the local paper that it was the job of the CSO to keep apart 'people who have lost relatives in the Holocaust' and 'people with a political view'. It didn't seem to have occurred to him that the 'people with a political view' might themselves be Holocaust survivors or relatives of those who died.

No doubt the CST will say this all happened a few years back and they have cleaned up their act. If this is the case why was a young man who attended a more recent CSO/CST course told that the 'enemies of the community' are not only the BNP and Islamic fundamentalists but also Jewish Socialists? Clearly security is necessary. But we certainly won't be safe if we put ourselves in the hands of a shadowy, unelected force.

Now those very brave boys and girls of the CST couldn't muster a reply, or if they did, it was one that the Observer did not see fit to print. Meanwhile their vigilance failed to prevent a series of nasty attacks recently on pupils from the Jewish Free School in North London, on their way home. Equally worrying though is the allegation reported in the Jewish Chronicle that pupils at the school have been threatened with expulsion for talking to the press about their security concerns. The way forward for security for the Jewish community is to build links with other threatened minorities and if there is any investigating to be done maybe it is the CST and its backers who ought to be under the spotlight.

BULLDOZING THE PEACE

As the Israeli government continues to bulldoze its way to 'peace', the Jerusalem-based journal, News from Within, published by the Alternative Information Center, looks at the background and implications of the proposed Har Homa Jewish settlement on Abu Ghneim Mountain

Abu Ghneim Mountain lies in the Bethlehem district. Since 1967 Israel has confiscated 61.2% of Palestinian land in this area. Most of the land on and around Abu Ghneim Mountain belongs to the Palestinians who live in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem, Umm Touba, Jabbel Mukkaber and Sour Baher.

The Israeli government has confiscated land continuously over the last 20 years.

● **1967** Abu Ghneim Mountain is annexed by Israel for the territorial expansion of Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem, together with the villages of Umm Touba, Sour Baher, and parts of Jabbel Mukkaber. The mountain, covered by a forest planted by the Jordanian government, is declared 'green land' on which construction is prohibited by Israeli law.

● **1991** Two Israeli companies propose the confiscation of the lands of Abu Ghneim Mountain to the Israeli government in order to construct a private housing project. The Israeli Ministry of Finance issues a confiscation order for 'public purpose' (a public housing project) and does not approve the private housing project. The two companies appeal to the High Court and obtain a freeze on the confiscation order.

● **1993** Israel establishes a permanent military closure of the 'green line', making the lands of Abu Ghneim Mountain (located inside annexed East Jerusalem) out of reach to the communities located on the West Bank (Beit Sahour and Bethlehem).

● **1993** The dispute between the private Israeli owners and the government is resolved by a High Court decision in favour of the government's 'public' housing project (Har Homa settlement). The approved first stage includes 6,500 housing units for 30,000 settlers.

● **1996** Completion of the last bureaucratic procedures for final approval (hearing of objections etc) and Har Homa is ready for construction. Bethlehem residents are informed of the additional confiscation of lands for the construction of a new bypass road connecting Gilo settlement with Har Homa.

The Har Homa settlement will complete the ring of Israeli settlements surrounding occupied East Jerusalem, and cut off Palestinian communities in the West Bank from Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. The Har Homa settlement, once completed, will house 50-60,000 settlers, bringing the settler population in the area to around 100,000. The population of the three adjacent Palestinian towns Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala numbers 55,000. A Jewish majority in the area south-east of Jerusalem will support future Israeli aspirations to annex it.

The area of Abu Ghneim Mountain is the only remaining territorial connection between the southern West Bank and East Jerusalem. It contains the only lands still available for community expansion and

for a solution to the devastating housing shortages which have been a major reason for emigration from the area. In terms of the environment, Har Homa will be a hazard. It will mean the destruction of the area's last remaining forests and, based on the experience of other Israeli settlements, it is probable that the Palestinian communities will serve as the dumping ground for the settlers' waste. The new settlement will clearly bring conflict to the local Palestinian communities.

In 1991, directly after the confiscation order, Palestinian landowners established the Committee for the Defence of the Lands on Abu Ghneim Mountain. The Committee has since exhausted all

Har Homa will complete the ring of Israeli settlements surrounding occupied East Jerusalem

measures of legal appeal against the settlement project. The legal struggle, though unable to reverse the plans, has succeeded in delaying its implementation. Meanwhile the Committee has lobbied among the Palestinian political leadership to adopt a clear stand of opposition to the Har Homa project. These efforts though seemingly futile at first, eventually resulted in regular co-ordination between the East Jerusalem Orient House and the Land Defence Committee. In preparation for the decisive stage of the struggle against the settlement, the Committee conducted a series of public meetings and discussions among the local community, and established

contacts with international NGOs and supporters abroad. Now that the legal means for halting Har Homa settlement have expired, only a broad public mobilisation, locally and abroad, can prevent Israel from taking a step which will further perpetuate conflict and suffering in the region.

On 26 February the Israeli government decided to start construction of 2500 housing units on Abu Ghneim Mountain. Binyamin Netanyahu also promised to build 3500 housing units for Palestinians in Jerusalem.

Those promised units however are not going to be built in the Mount Abu Ghneim area, but in 10 so far unspecified areas of Jerusalem. Furthermore there have been no concrete re-zoning plans, and since 1967 only 600 housing units have been built for Palestinians in Jerusalem. With all this in mind, Netanyahu's promise seems empty and unreliable. The Palestinian Authority, as well as the Israeli left, are warning Netanyahu that a formal decision to start building in Har Homa will result in Palestinian resistance, which will necessarily lead to an escalation of violence. In response, the Israeli government is threatening to react with full force if the Palestinians protest. Palestinian organisations are planning widespread protest activities.

For further information contact the Alternative Information Centre (AIC) PO Box 31417, Jerusalem. Tel 02-6241159. Committee for the Defence of Abu Ghneim Mountain: Centre for Rapprochement between the People, PO Box 24, Beit Sahour, West Bank. Tel/fax 02-6474574. Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment: PO Box 20873, Jerusalem. Tel 02-5812364.

NEW
MOON

This is New Moon. It calls itself 'gritty, pithy, sharp and incisive and not afraid to speak its mind'. As you can see, it's like the Old Moon but more subtle.

Advertisers like the 'Loaded' look, so on the cover we have a Wonderbra model complete with a 'fuck-me' pose, but the copy inside could happily grace the glossy pages of the Jewish Chronicle magazine or even an evening with your parents – 'Well is she Jewish or isn't she?'

Other 'gritty, pithy, sharp' items include, 'Would you shag your best mate's mum?' which nestles next to a questionnaire insert for 'Catch Introductions'. Question: 'Should people live together before marriage?' and 'Should your prospective partner's income be more than £20K? £50K?' If you want to hang on to your new partner, make him/her Vanessa Feltz's secret chicken soup recipe.

And – this one's a must – Praymate of the Month Rabbi Jonathan Romain reveals he wears Y-fronts and loves cheese and onion crisps.

We await the Total Eclipse.

YIDS WITH ATTITUDE

Sound Radio took to the airwaves in North East London last November, finishing on 1 December, World AIDS day. This local radio station was able to go on air by taking out a special licence to broadcast on 107.4FM for up to 28 days. Sound Radio was run by Cultural Partnerships, 12 of their radio production trainees, 60 volunteers and tenants living on two large housing estates in Hackney.

Jewish Socialist decided it would be a great opportunity to broadcast our ideas through another medium and reach parts we don't always reach. We produced a half-hour programme, Yids with Attitude, which went out at peak weekend time. Our presenter, performer, Ian Saville, transformed his magical powers into smooth, funny and capable presentation skills. He was joined by seven contributors from the editorial committee,

members of the Jewish Socialists' Group and local campaigners in North East London.

We took an early editorial decision to seize the day and speak the unspeakable. So, we decided to deal with tricky subjects, talk about some taboos, have some 'culcha' and of course, lots of jokes. The main discussion explored education. Contributors shared memories of attending Jewish schools and discussed the ways in which religious schools damage children. We were joined by local campaigners who are fighting against the trend to have single gender schools. There was lots of music – mostly klezmer – and we featured tracks reviewed in the magazine. There was information and discussion about work around asylum issues and racism and we read one of Michael Rosen's poems.

We were especially delighted to be joined by our very own rabbi, of the ever popular 'Don't ask the Rabbi' column. This was a first appearance in the flesh – well, in the voice. The rabbi answered some of Ian's own personal problems and dealt in greater depth with some of the sensitive questions which are so often put to our magazine. Tricky queries about sexuality were handled with dexterity – for example, one listener was concerned about whether it's kosher to suck toes and if so, are they milk or meat? Next time Sound Radio is on air, we hope our rabbi will be joined by Dybbuk, of Dybbuk's Diary fame – to provide the very latest gossip!

The station received very positive feedback following our programme. People who called in from south, north and east London were delighted by the programme's daring and wit.

DON'T ASK THE RABBI



How can a Chief Rabbi can attend a memorial service for Rabbi Hugo Gryn without attracting attention?

- 1 Pretend to be the janitor. Stand at the back and jangle keys.
- 2 Go in disguise – wear a black hat, false beard and glasses.
- 3 Go as a representative of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.
- 4 Claim you thought it was a memorial for Hughie Green. When the coffin goes by, shout out 'Opportunity knocks!'

Dear Rabbi, It is the end of the financial year and I need a tax deductible use for some share options on privatised utilities. Do you have any suggestions?

One of my favourite Israeli charities is Bibi's Bungs who are dedicated to protecting political and religious leaders who find themselves under attack for fraud and corruption. Let's stop these awkward questions.

Call Bibi and his friends Roni and Regi Bar-On.

Salud, comrades!

We were very saddened to hear that Charlie Goodman, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War and longstanding community activist, had passed away. Charlie grew up in Camden Town until his family moved to the East End when he was 11. He lived there for the rest of his life. Active particularly in the tenants' movement, he strove constantly to improve the living conditions of his fellow eastenders. Charlie featured on the cover of our very first issue back in 1985 under the photo caption: 'Arrested at Cable St 1936. Where is he Now?'. On page 17 of that issue, he recalled his experiences after being arrested and imprisoned after the Battle of Cable Street.

'I was visited by a Mr Prince from the Jewish Discharged Prisoners Aid society, which was an arm of the Board of Deputies. They called all the Jewish prisoners together and asked "What are you here for?" And one chap said: "Well I've been out of work, things have been bad, I couldn't help myself, I went and

did a bust." Prince replied. "Oh don't worry, we'll look after you." The next five or six received the same response and then he came to me. "What are you here for?" he asked. "Fighting fascism," I said. "You!" said Prince, "You are the kind of Jew who gives us a bad name. Through you the Jews have to suffer...." He expressed his dismay at the attitudes that had developed among many other Jews who remained in the East End. 'I feel, very much to my sorrow... (they) are taking their stand with the rednecks and with the racists. They are saying the same sort of propaganda as the racists – "the Asians are dirty, they chuck things out of the window, they don't live like us". I have to continually remind them that the same things were said about the Jews.' But he was optimistic about the future. 'Organisation is taking place where Jewish people are being brought back into the fight against racism and soon... Jews will be united with all against racism.' Another Jewish eastender and veteran of

the Spanish civil war who passed away recently was Lionel Jacobs, who spent the last years of his life in Miriam Kaplowitch House, the Nottingham Jewish old people's home. Lionel and his two brothers, Isadore and Julius, followed their father Morris into the Communist Party in the 1930s. Julius was prominent in the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism. Lionel was one of the 200 Jews from Britain who became 'volunteers for liberty' in Spain. In Spring 1938 he was captured by Franco's troops and was imprisoned for many months in the notorious San Pedro de Cardena prison.

After the war Lionel joined his mother and sister who had moved to Nottingham to escape the blitz, and returned to his trade, tailoring. A fellow survivor of the International Brigade remembers Lionel making him a pair of trousers in Spain, out of scraps, long before patchwork became fashionable! Lionel never lost his Communist beliefs and was proud of his lifetime's service to the anti-fascist and labour movements. To Lionel Jacobs and Charlie Goodman, Jewish Socialist says Salud!

CREATIVE WRITING

If your history doesn't suit you, why not make it up, or at least bend the facts? This has been the prerogative of authoritarian regimes throughout the ages. Now it seems the practice is alive and well and thriving in ultra-orthodox circles, at least in Israel according to Rami Rosen writing in Ha'aretz.

One notable example concerns a figure known as Simeon the Apostate. This character apparently turned up in Vilna in the late 18th century. His purpose was to persuade Jewish youth to assimilate and convert to Christianity. He became the right hand man of the Vilna Gaon, the leading *misnagd* (opponent of the Hassidim) and was able to use his position to encourage Jewish youth to leave the *yeshivas* and enter into secular education. His fame grew and he tried to spread his influence into Bielorrussia. In the course of a journey he

reached the town of Lubavitch. There the Lubavitcher rebbe soon saw through him. He fled back to Vilna, but his cover had been blown. He was forced to flee to Germany. A descendant of his, Max Lilienthal, returned to Russia and set up a system of Jewish schools at the behest of the Imperial government.

Lilienthal was indeed a historical figure. However the same cannot be said for his ancestor. Simeon the Apostate appears to have been a figment of the imagination of a 20th century Lubavitcher Rebbe (Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson). Simeon's name and the story appeared in a typewritten brochure published by Lubavitch in Israel in 1964, although the tale was apparently written at the time of the Second World War. According to Professor Israel Bertel of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 'It is

impossible to find any trace of this story which does not have as its source Schneerson's account. He invented history.'

According to Professor Bertel the point of the story was contemporary. Simeon was supposed to represent contemporary threats to Judaism, whether from antisemites or assimilationists, which other streams of Judaism (Reform and Conservative) were powerless to resist and which, according to Lubavitch Hassidim, were leading Jews away from the 'true path'.

Another example given by Rosen, again about Lubavitch, concerns the selective misrepresentation of history in a Yiddish book intended for girls of primary school age. The book deals with Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 following the expulsion of Jews from Spain. According to the author of the text, the divine purpose of

the discovery of America was to provide a refuge for Jews fleeing from antisemitism in later generations.

Many such stories spring from the need of powerful hassidic sects such as Lubavitch, who were traditionally anti-Zionist or non-Zionist to invent their own Zionist history to fit in with their contemporary support for the Zionist right in Israel. Thus a phantom proto-Zionist movement, 'Vision of Zion', complete with a congress in 1806, springs into existence from the printed page and there are graphic stories about hassidic pioneers in Palestine in the 19th century.

Once written down it becomes fact. There have apparently been serious academic works, in Israel and elsewhere, which have quoted the story of Simeon and similar stories, without their authors being aware of their dubious historical pedigree, or with the source being quoted without calling into question its historical veracity.

Michael Heiser

DOUBLE DEALING

A private member's bill, endorsed by Tory and Labour front benches, would punish anyone who conspired here to commit illegal acts abroad. Just what the Czar and his Okhrana always wanted! As George Galloway MP pointed out, it could have stopped aid to French maquis and Yugoslav partisans too. Opponents may have scuppered the bill for now, but stay alert. British companies wooing regimes like the Saudis want the law to do their dirty work (unless backhanders are included among the illegal acts).

Joining Iranian exiles and some British trade unionists protesting at the Iranian embassy over the arrest of striking oil workers, I mention arms dealer Hashemi. He said he gave £85,000 to Tory party funds so he could meet then prime minister Thatcher to discuss circumventing the arms embargo on Iran. Keeping the Iran-Iraq war going by supplying both sides must have been as profitable for some western interests as it was costly for the two peoples.

My remarks prompt a former union official to recall the time he negotiated on behalf of technicians employed by a military equipment supplier in eastern England. A former director and Tory junior defence minister says he had no idea what the company was doing. Finding that the boss kept being called away, our union man discovered that Israeli and Arab arms-buyers were waiting in hotels across town.

'I persuaded him that the sooner he settled with us, the quicker he could do business with them. Our members got a much better rise than they had expected,' he recalls. 'The company was able to conclude its deals with the Arabs and Israelis, and I dare say

dybbuk's diary

include the increased price of the goods.'

As Bury Tory MP David Sumberg was saying recently in defence of sales of riot equipment to Indonesia: 'Let's face it, we are in the business of selling arms.' Indeed, where would British business be without counter-insurgency and the occasional Middle East war?

GBH

It's OK to criticise the Israeli government. The righter-than-right -wing Zionist stalwarts of Herut-Great Britain disapprove of the Hebron agreement. They think Binyamin Netanyahu has gone soft on the Palestinians. 'We are not just criticising for the sake of it,' says Joe Gellert, 'but we are being critical.'

During the 1982 Lebanon war, Great British Herut (GBH) supporters went around threatening and assaulting critics of Israel, especially if the critics were Jewish. Most Jewish people probably despised such behaviour, but some community leaders were loath to condemn it. Asked about Herutniks breaking up a Peace Now meeting, the late Dr Jacob Gerwitz responded by denouncing 'Trotskyists' in the Jewish Socialists' Group.

Removed from a County Hall meeting where they'd threatened members of the audience and assaulted stewards, a gang of Herutniks marched off singing lustily 'Begin, Melech Yisrael!' (Begin, King of Israel.) Alas, more bad

news. Testifying against former defence minister Ariel Sharon in a Jerusalem civil court, former prime minister Menachem Begin's son Ze'ev said his father did not want the blitzkrieg on Beirut, and blamed Sharon for dragging him into it. Oy gevalt! Begin a peacenik? What is there left to believe in?

TEN YEARS AFTER

One man who used to say how much he admired General Sharon (after the massacres at Sabra and Shatila), France's Jean-Marie Le Pen, has been visiting his Serb ethnic cleanser friend Vojtslav Seselj, and celebrating the Front National's local election successes.

But Le Pen has accused President Chirac of persecuting him at the behest of 'an all-powerful organisation' (guess who?). Recalling that Chirac declared 10 years ago, 'I hate only one thing in this world, and that is fascism,' Le Pen, according to a book just published, says the president and his RPR party 'have made an agreement with B'nai Brith and other foreign organisations'.

Ten years ago, Le Pen courted respectability by calling on President Reagan and meeting eminent Jewish leaders at a dinner hosted by Jacques Torczyner, president of the World Union of General Zionists. This upset French Jews who were shunning him. But PR statements insisted the Front National leader was not an

antisemite; au contraire, he was a 'friend of Israel'. Just goes to show you can be both.

LITTLE MALCOLM

Sent to Germany to cause a stir, Malcolm Rifkind only managed it thanks to a German reporter's reference to 'der Jude Rifkind'. Only someone raised on parochial stereotypes should find it odd that an educated Edinburgh Jew could use that well-worn quote from Martin Luther.

British media gasps about the German journalist's 'gaffe' might have impressed me more if newspapers here hadn't kept on about Imran Khan 'marrying a Jewess'. Jemima Goldsmith is nothing of the sort, not that it would matter under Islamic law if she was. Evidently in our enlightened society one paternal grandparent means you're tainted.

PUDDING AND HOLINESS

There's a public house in Pimlico, a real Euro-entrepot, where Breton onion sellers rest their bikes while Scottish coach drivers fetch in fresh haggis. I always insist my haggis are free-range and my onions humanely despatched by a qualified schochet. But in Manchester, where they're strict these days, the Beth Din has refused to allow kosher haggis from Glasgow to be served at a function under its supervision. 'The haggis had a hechsher,' a spokesman acknowledged, 'but not one which was familiar to the Manchester Beth Din.' I'm not surprised. I once tried reciting some Rabbi Burns at a family simcha (supervised by the Machzikei Haggis). 'Thou chieftain of the pudding race,' I began, but I'd hardly got to his 'sousie face' before I was jabbed in the ribs and told 'Don't you dare refer to Uncle Gershon like that!'

Nottingham 1326

Dear daughter

Thirty-six years is a long time to keep a secret. Especially from one's children. At first it did not matter – the death of your mother destroyed my belief in God, and all beliefs for that matter. Being from the Palatine helped, as my guttural was as foreign to my fellow Jews from Lombardy as it was to the English and Norman speakers who surrounded me. There, I've said it. A Jew. You know now.

I swore at you once when you said in jest you were as dark as a Jew. I could have told you then, but I kept quiet, it was still too dangerous. It is still dangerous, but with my friend Jacob being baptised and taking the faith of our oppressors, what other Jew can I talk to? Yes, you too are Jewish, and your children. There are things you need to know, things you need to tell your children.

When the riots started, and the killing in Lincoln, people started to pack their bags. We have had to move so often to be safe. The Lombards were glad to go, even if they left with nothing. Who would repay debts to a departing Jew? Who would buy their houses when next day you could have them for nothing? All that was left was Jacob and a couple of others – outcasts or apostates like myself and a few who carried on in secret. Jacob had taken up with a Christian years before – the only Jew I ever heard do that – and had been cast out by the community as a dead man. Those others left Nottingham soon. Loneliness and the suspicions of their neighbours took their toll. People suspected Jacob, but he was living with a Christian woman and his children were brought up Christian. Still, some people muttered and avoided his inn. Why now, after 36 years, he has finally himself taken the cross of affliction I do not



THE LAST JEW IN ENGLAND

By Ross Bradshaw

know. Only last spring we met for Passover together as we have for so many years. I will come back to this in a moment.

Few suspected me, arriving with two children and working where and when I could. I wore the clothes of the Christians and kept myself to myself. When I did go to the Lombards they did not want to know – in part they were protecting me. What Christian would keep on giving work to a Jew? Anyway I had no more time for the Jewish God than that of the Christians. God had taken your mother at your birth. What sort of God would do that?

I met Jacob when I was driving the wagons and delivering to his inn. He came from Alsace and knew my dialect and he quickly guessed. When you speak

your own tongue to a familiar a giveaway word waits on the lips to fall. Oh, yes he knew. At first it was just our secret. In any case, what was the point in doing more? God had abandoned me, or me him. The few others who remained were too frightened to do more than make a blessing over their bread, with their doors tightly shut.

When only Jacob and I remained we decided, almost in protest, to celebrate Passover. I could mostly avoid God – the main point was that we were remembering our people's flight from Egypt and the end of our slavery. We wanted a day when we would be free again. For that matter we wanted a day when the Christians would be free from their bloody church. You will remember

Passover as that secret game we played near Easter. I only stopped you coming when you were of an age when any secret had to be shared with your friend.

Jacob and I carried on playing that secret game these many years. This year I will do so on my own. I know no other Jews now. It is years, ten at least, since a traveller also let slip a word or two and I knew. Well, they let me know. What Christian would even notice a Hebrew word in a stream of language they barely knew. The two or three travellers I kept in touch with have died or left the country many years since.

Next week, when I eat my unleavened bread, I might be the last Jew in England. Apart from you and your sister. I am not a young man and two or three more winters are as many as I dare hope for. And that will be that.

With this letter I have written out the Passover story and am sending this to you and to your sister. I have written out everything else I can remember about what our people do, and what I know of them. It is written so that you can understand it, but I have included some words in our own script so you can see what your ancestors saw.

What you do with this letter (and what I have sent) is up to you. You can burn it or hide it. You can read it to your fine husband if you wish or talk to your children about it.

With this letter you can remember me as the last Jew in England, or you can choose also to become in due course the last Jew in England. Whether you pick up this personal burden is up to you, I can only offer it to you.

Your children also carry my blood and that of your mother. So the burden I offer you is even heavier, for as well as the chance to be the last Jew in England, you have the chance to also be the first.

Your father

Mixing it

Ruth Novaczek, in a personal memoir, argues that cultural fusion, not separation, is a positive way forward for Jewish life

'M'arrying out', a negative concept – the marriage that means you are out, not in, exiled from your culture. King Solomon married out, Ruth married out. Did Moses marry out? The question is, what are we marrying out of? Can't this concept be turned around? Couldn't we marry in – to a more egalitarian idea of combining two cultures. There is of course the issue of conversion, you can marry out if the non-Jewish partner becomes theoretically Jewish. That's about as egalitarian as it gets. Many Protestants, Episcopalians and Catholics are happy to embrace Jewish culture as converts, it solves the problem of creating a homogenous family group. Historically it's been Jews who convert, and lose a culture built on remembering and observing a tradition. In Europe this has been a manifestation of Christian imperialism. But is it right to expect a Hindu, a Muslim or a Rastafarian to convert to Judaism? Central to this debate is the hierarchy of religious culture. In millennial, multicultural Europe can we really answer the complexities of this debate with a simple act of conversion or, the alternative, the development of a purely secular existence? Why can't two cultures coexist?

I grew up in the 1960s and went to a school in central London, where the 2,500 pupils comprised most ethnic groups and the idealism of the melting pot prevailed. As a Jew, I found my corner of the playground with a group who consisted of mixed race and 'beige' people of all kinds: Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Greek, Italian and Jewish, we were a group distinct from the 'white kids', many of whom roamed in skinhead gangs, attacking Jews and Asians. We were separate from the large gangs of black kids who occupied one corner of the playground, oppressed by a school system that kept them in the lower streams in class, and a self-protective, self defined group in the playground.

The group I was in failed to define itself. We never really talked about race or culture. I'd been to Habonim, the socialist Zionist youth movement, and had learnt about Israel, the kibbutz movement and the Vietnam war, but it didn't prepare me for relationships with non-Jews, or with the assimilated Jews I met at school, Jewish names and faces but no cultural identity. I learnt what I could by reading Angela Davis and George Jackson who answered a radicalism I craved but couldn't find in Zionist youth movements, however hippie or left wing. I felt a connection to black struggle, linking my mother's stories of racism and slavery in America to my own Jewish consciousness, but had no movement of my own to identify with.

I am describing this historical background because in the school playground I knew I was facing a multicultural and a world of choice I didn't fully understand. My mother told me many marrying out stories, family dramas and gossip, while warning me that she wouldn't come to my wedding if I married a gentile. On the other hand she

encouraged my relationships with black and Asian friends and boyfriends. Her mistrust at that time was focused on Christian, white antisemitism. The contradictions, my boredom and dissatisfaction with Habonim, the hidden Jewish identities of school friends, and constant playground antisemitism confused me. I began to date non-Jews and closet Jews, still unsure about my sexuality.

My first long term relationship was with a non-Jewish American who had antisemitic parents. He was extremely handsome – native American looking – while I was called 'Yid', 'Barbra Streisand' and 'big nose' as I walked across the playground. Ten years later I came out as a lesbian. My divorced parents were horrified, claiming that no Jewish person was ever homosexual. My father threw his cigarette to the ground and stamped on it. 'You see this?' he said as he ground the stub on the pavement. 'This is the life of a lesbian.' My mother ignored me, leapt to the opposite side of the room, scared, and we still don't discuss it.

At first I met only white, gentile lesbians, and struggled with alienation and how to mix sexual liberation with cultural oppression. Many lesbians I met were blatantly antisemitic. I again relied on my mixed race friends to make sense of things. I had short-lived relationships and felt something was missing. With time I met black lesbians and gay men who told me there could be cultural consciousness alongside sexual awareness. But I still hadn't met a Jewish lesbian.

Suddenly the Spare Rib debate, and the identity politics of Jewish responses turned a white-dominated lesbian feminist culture into a battleground. Finally a Jewish lesbian movement emerged. I began to see how Jewish issues had been taboo, and that a forum for us and our issues was developing. I realised that Jewish lesbians, in the absence of our own cultural movement, had often identified with women of colour and their articulate and cultural contributions to feminism. On the other hand I met a lot of Jews who had never engaged in any dialogue with people of colour, and dated only white, non-Jewish women, identifying with a cultureless gay culture. I learnt what I could from the former, and moved into open communication with Jewish women, attempting to create something for ourselves.

I also found that this wasn't enough. I was still frustrated by the debates within Jewish culture and, after a traumatic National Front attack on my flat, I felt it was important to maintain and develop the dialogue and connections with people of colour. While I felt nourished and inspired by new debates, I found myself dissatisfied with a contemporary Jewish culture that reinvented klezmer, picking up where the Shoah had broken the lines, yet failed to reinvent a contemporary radical approach. Bhangra answered the Asian need to exist in the diaspora while mixing tradition and contemporary styles. I was still reading Allen

Ginsberg and juggling the implications of the Shoah, and the difficult task of asking questions about Israel. I also found that when I went to Jewish gay or progressive events with my Asian lover, she would usually be the only person of colour in the room.

I found it hard to reconcile the constant admonishments in Torah against marrying out and 'idol worshipers' with my relationship with a Hindu, and I found the vicious antisemitic anti-Zionism of her friends hard to take. So did she. However my parents were more accepting than they'd ever been, and my father told me that he felt Asians were the new Jews, that we have similar experiences and things to learn from each other. For a while it was as near to happy families as you could get, and my father said to me: 'She's lovely, marry her. But like Jews, Asians don't marry out either, and I don't relish being described as a 'gora' or a 'honky'. 'But I'm Jewish,' I'd say. 'It's different.' The caste system is parallel to our traditional, hierarchical thinking, and every culture is rooted in that kind of self-protective negativity.

My father had always found something to criticise in my Jewish girlfriends, and called one black girlfriend a 'shvartse'. (This caused a long term split, and he has changed his views to some extent. For him, Asians are 'hard working and moral' like Jews; he's afraid of Afro-Caribbeans. Jewish racism never fails to shock me.) I realised that after my parents' arranged Jewish marriage had broken down, my father had also married out, finding more strength in a relationship with another Hungarian, and a non-Jew, than he had in a 'nice Jewish marriage' that had failed. I feel now that it is very important to challenge sectarianism, fundamentalism and all the other dangers of pre-millennial thinking. If I had met more cosmopolitan, radical, and progressive Jews here, I might well be happily and Jewishly married.

Most of my closest Jewish friends live in New York where there is a strong awareness of the challenge of being Jewish, radical, and anti-racist, but in New York there are more Jews, more lesbian and gay Jews, more choices. Britain itself has an insular, problematic culture. I want to embrace my Jewishness without learning to 'act more like an Anglo-Saxon', as one manager at my work suggested.

I find myself increasingly alienated from white



liberal politics and frustrated with Anglo-Jewish culture. I find myself drawn to a broader, more mixed, community. I don't want a 'romantic shtetl'. The celebratory fusion of a properly defined Jewish identity with a different and parallel culture, seems to me a way back to my roots. If, as a people, our roots are Mesopotamian, if my father has carried the name Cohen across many national boundaries, political upheavals and generations, then Jewish identity isn't as fragile as the North West London community would like us to believe. For several generations in Europe, marrying out for Jews, has usually meant the loss of their culture. In Israel Jews are mixing across cultures (this is complex and deserves more space) but this isn't Israel. There's something worrying about Jews perpetuating ideas of racial purity.

If we can marry out positively, retaining our cultures in the mix, dealing with the stereotypes and problems in both cultures, then perhaps I'll feel free to go to a Jewish cultural event with my Asian partner and not feel I'm in a small minority. Indeed I could feel that I am reconnecting with my roots through a different future. King Solomon did it. At a New Moon Jewish Film Festival launch last year, my partner wore a sari and I wore a suit. We were photographed several times. The published version omitted the woman in the sari. I wonder why.

'I found myself dissatisfied with a contemporary Jewish culture that reinvented klezmer yet failed to reinvent a contemporary radical approach'



Charlie Chaplin in
The Great Dictator

FOR OUR OWN GOOD

Even as Hitler was preparing for war, the British Board of Film Censors was refusing to grant certificates for anti-Nazi films for fear of offending a foreign power. Dave Godin looks back in anger

Hitler and his cohorts saw Hollywood (and indeed pre-Nazi German film production), as an industry dominated by Jews and 'serving Jewish interests'. The anti-Jewish German 'documentary' *Der Ewige Jude* (1940), usually translated into English as 'The Eternal Jew', but, in this context, more accurately rendered as 'The Ubiquitous Jew'), was written by his 'anti-Jewish expert' at the Ministry of Propaganda, Dr Eberhard Taubert who claimed that the Jewish domination of Hollywood was epitomised by the films of 'the Jew Chaplin'. Although there was a preponderance of very secularised Jewish people who had helped build Hollywood into the world's dream factory, most were reluctant to make overtly anti-Nazi films until after the USA had actually entered World War II.

Since film is a notoriously expensive medium in which to work, and since its roots and origins were firmly entrenched in the concept of it being 'entertainment' so far as Hollywood was concerned, it was left to the Soviet Union to explore its didactic potential. They had been doing so since the revolution so it was hardly surprising that they made what was the first feature film to warn against the vicious evil of anti-Semitism. Professor Mamlock (1938) was a screen adaptation of a play by Friedrich Wolff, which told of a Jewish professor being hounded by Nazi laws and Nazi thugs. So far as Britain was concerned however, The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) refused to grant it a certificate for public exhibition, as indeed they did nearly all films originating in the Soviet Union, on the grounds that, firstly it was Bolshevik propaganda and, secondly no film might be publicly exhibited which might give offence to a foreign government. Even the normally liberal and leftish London County Council (who, like all local authorities, had the right to over-rule BBFC decisions), only passed it to be shown in the London administrative area after ordering certain cuts to be made, so its impact on British audiences was severely restricted. Come September 1939 however, the BBFC had a sudden change of heart, and passed it to be shown anywhere in the UK. Just for the record, when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, the USSR banned this film too, and when the organiser of a Moscow Students' Film Society tried to book a copy to show, he was promptly arrested and held in custody for several days.

When writing about anti-fascist film, it is a disquieting fact that one is also writing, in part, a parallel history of The British Board of Film Censors, now redubbed The British Board of Film Classification to make you think they no longer censor films but merely 'classify' them as to audience suitability. At certain times, they are the obedient servants of the government of the day, who officially, play no part in their operation. They

have always operated in a secretive way to ensure that there is never (nor ever has been) informed debate about film censorship in this country. Ask any person who claims to have knowledge of film and film history to name 10 films that have been 'banned' in Britain, and they will nearly always be hard pressed to do so. (The BBFC can't actually 'ban' films, but it can withhold a certificate, without which your film can only be shown by special permission from each and every licensing authority in the country. An expensive and arduous chore and thus an effective deterrent.)

Prior to Britain's declaration of war, nearly all films which emanated from the Soviet Union were refused a certificate. In truth however, I don't think their main preoccupation in those days was with 'politics' per se, so much as a wish to avoid material which might prove to be controversial or which used cinema as anything other than entertainment for the masses. Their willingness to go along with the consensus establishment attitude of appeasement of the 1930s was certainly a factor, however, and their quaint regulation that no film would get their consent if it were likely to 'give offence to a foreign government' ensured that several films which sought to warn people of the growing menace of fascism remained unseen here.

Thus it would have been futile to try to import a copy of the 1939 Soviet film *Concentration Camp* which spotlighted the plight of Jews, Communists and other 'subversives' who were forced to work in labour camps to 'atone' for their 'crimes' against the German people. Nor would anyone risk losing money (you have to pay to have your film censored, even if they say you can't show it!) by trying to bring in Bud Pollard's American film on a similar theme called

Victims Of Persecution (1933).

In 1934 the BBFC refused a certificate to an American documentary by Mike Mindlin, *Hitler's Reign Of Terror*, and in 1935 they similarly vetoed the film *Free Thaelmann!* which was made by The Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism to spotlight the continued imprisonment of the German Communist leader Thaelmann. To their lasting shame, even the London County Council refused to give this film their OK and, right up until the late 1960s, it was included on their 'List C' which pompously itemised the titles of 'Films which may not be exhibited in the administrative London area'. When I pointed out that its continued inclusion on 'List C' could be read as approval for fascism, they quietly dropped it along with several others, some of which stretched back to the days of silent cinema.

Right up until the very outbreak of war, the BBFC could be relied upon not to pass any overtly anti-fascist material on the grounds that it might offend a foreign government. As late as 1939 the film, *I Was A Captive Of Nazi Germany* (made and shown in the USA in 1936), was refused a

Several films which sought to warn people of the growing menace of fascism remained unseen here



certificate, and only passed by the London County Council after cuts were ordered. Such was the climate, and the network of intimidation that Nazism had bred by then, that the director and all the players in the film, with the exception of Isobel Lillian Steele, chose to remain anonymous. Within days of war being declared however, the BBFC obligingly gave it a 'U' certificate. Similarly, Warner Brothers' *Confessions Of A Nazi Spy* (which McCarthyites would later call 'prematurely anti-fascist'), arrived in the UK after war had been declared, and so was similarly awarded a 'U' without any problems. (Of the films mentioned so far, this is the only one that appears to have survived, and has been shown on UK television).

Once the war was underway, many overtly anti-fascist films were made. The now forgotten fact that the Soviet Union was eventually our gallant ally meant a totally different climate had to prevail. To sustain public morale, all horror films were automatically banned for the duration of the war, and although newsreels were always exempted from BBFC classification, there was sufficient self-censorship and plenty of government guidelines to ensure that many examples of Nazi barbarism remained undetailed until victory was in sight. In the USA, where the war against Japanese fascism was seen as more immediately threatening, the Hollywood studios did try to insert some element of anti-fascist ideology into films which still provided a degree of entertainment value. Films like *Hitler's Children* (1942), *Hitler's Madmen* (1943) and *Watch On The Rhine* (1943) were all acceptable after their fashion, but failed to analyse the full range of issues involved.

Perhaps the bravest of all Hollywood films (since it was made before the USA's entry into the

war), was the now almost totally forgotten *So Ends Our Night* (1941). Based on a novel by Erich Maria Remarque (the author of another novel that Hitler despised, *All Quiet On The Western Front*), it was one of the very few films that just about identified the Jews as the group that Hitler was most actively persecuting. Starring Frederic March, Margaret Sullavan, (a vocal anti-fascist in her day), Glenn Ford and Erich von Stroheim, it remains to this day a powerful document, and is one of the few Hollywood movies that seems motivated by genuinely felt anti-fascist commitment rather than mere patriotic duty. Since many of Hollywood's films during the war on the Pacific front resorted to their own crude racist stereotypes and propaganda, racism as a mental aberration to be deplored wasn't at that time a priority in their thinking. Also, the 'Jews of Hollywood', as Hitler called them, were all too aware of antisemitism in the USA, so they tended to play down any specific Jewish identities for their characters. Most depictions of the victims of Nazi persecution showed them simply as 'good people', but some extreme right-wingers still claimed that Jewish interests in Hollywood were bent on dragging the USA into the war.

The more seriously committed and highly politicised films during the war years came from the Soviet Union. No *Greater Love* (which was also shown as *She Defends Her Country*), and *The Rainbow*, managed to mix anti-Nazi sentiment with the inexorable, but subliminal, conclusion that Communism was the only real ideology that could combat and eradicate it, and certainly these films contained a degree of realism and harshness that had previously been unknown to British cinema audiences. They were highly moving, since they relied solely on humanist sentiment; no cop-out to the folly of religious superstition; no flinching from depicting suffering and pain.

Once an Allied victory was approaching, newsreels began to bring home the full extent of Nazi crimes against humanity. As the camps were liberated, so the newsreels followed. In many cases, anticipating the denials that future generations might make, they often photographed the victims of The Master Race with local German civilian dignitaries also in camera. The newly formed United Nations sponsored a documentary, *The United Nations War Crimes Film* (1945), which, appropriately, was the first film to benefit from the post-war resumption of the 'H' (Horrific) certificate from the BBFC that restricted it to audiences over 16 years of age. It was important that such a record be made, though I have never been able to trace a surviving print. After the war, the Eastern bloc would be amongst the keenest to exploit captured German newsreel and archive material to reinforce their political notion that Communism was the only true bulwark against Fascism, and the only sure means of ensuring that it never again resurrected itself.

Right wingers still claimed Jewish interests were bent on dragging the USA into the war

DON'T MAKE AN EXHIBITION OF YOURSELF

The 'Too Jewish?' show exemplified a light-hearted, postmodern view of American Jewish identity. The work could be broken down into two main categories: firstly the kitsch rendering of pop Jewish iconography (role models, heroes, celebrities) and classical Jewish stereotypes (the nose job, the Jewish American princess); secondly a more sombre rereading of Jewish texts (biblical, religious, kabbalistic). The 'Rubies and Rebels' exhibition proposed a more modernist approach, with traditional paintings and sculpture depicting personal narratives heavily influenced by Jewish iconography. Monica Bohm-Duchen, a curator of the 'Rubies' show, states specifically that she meant to exclude work by Jewish women about 'the Holocaust and the reassuring power of domestic religious ritual' because it tends to be 'intellectually and aesthetically unchallenging, even somewhat predictable in its imagery, a confirmation of truths already known rather than an exploration of the unknown'. Ironically the work in the show fits this description all too closely.

The identity art discourse which began in the early 1970s and reached its height in the early 1990s challenged the exclusionary, Eurocentric (white, male, Christian, heterosexual) normative state which dominated the museum and commercial art landscape. A movement began which attempted to create a platform for pluralistic, multicultural and hybrid art. For many artists of colour the inscribed difference from dominant culture, and the wholesale historic exclusion from esteemed cultural forums, has created a context where issues of identity are raised explicitly in much of the art work. The 1993 biennial exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, referred to pejoratively as the politically correct biennial, was something of a landmark for these developments. Statistically, in comparison to all previous biennials, the 1993 exhibition included the largest number of people of colour, women, gays, lesbians and politically oriented subject matter.

As the Whitney situates itself as a barometer of the current trends and fads in the American commercial art world, one can conclude that there was a rupture (as slight and easily recuperable as it may have been) in the dominant art discourse. It reflected struggles going on in society. What was particularly powerful was the multiplicity of identities allowed in the exhibition. It was no longer the sole Asian, African American, Latino artist (usually male) who

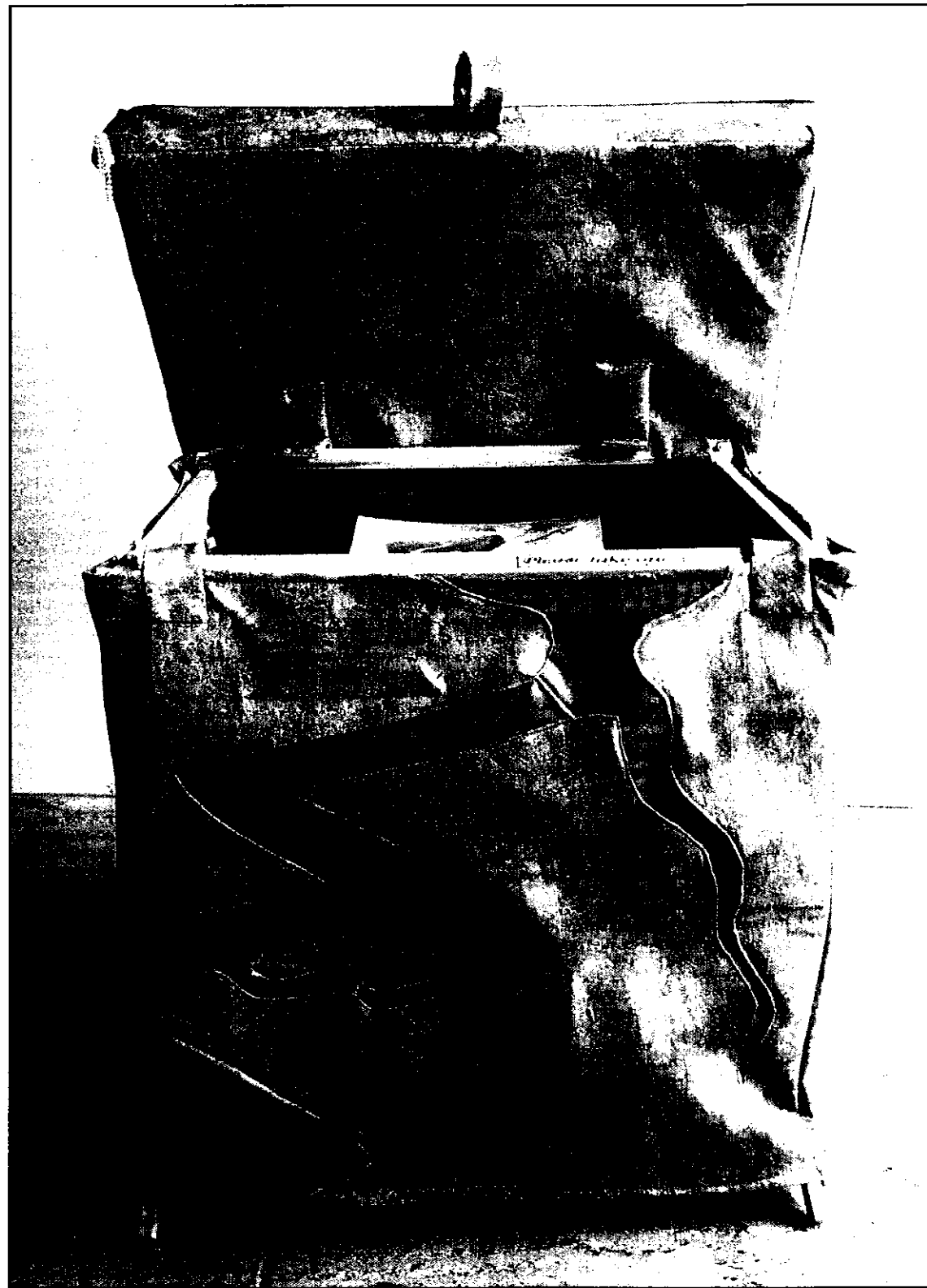
was obliged to become the representative of that particular identity and of the 'other' in general rather, there was a repositioning of the 'other' through a complex cross-referencing of voices and representations. As Coco Fusco (Cuban-American artist, performer and writer) has stated, 'people of colour are demanding the right to determine the meaning of their culture and delimit its identity or rather to point to borders that still exist. This is a battle that seeks to resolve a legacy of inequity by addressing the power relations involved in symbolic representation'. Work about Jewish identity and difference was absent from this biennial.

Jewish 'otherness' has a very complicated and uncomfortable positioning within the context of identity politics. As American Jewish anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin has said: 'The silencing discourse about Jewish difference is generally accomplished through subsumption within categories presumed to be dominant.' What problematises the concept of Jewish difference are the shifting discourses of power and visibility which Jews have experienced throughout history. The contemporary invocation of difference relies to a great extent on the concept of externality – both in terms of being 'outside the mainstream' and of being externally, visibly, different. The centuries-long history of Jews being the 'internal other' in Europe, as well as voluble contemporary alignments of some Jews with conservative, imperialist positions of power, further complicates the attempt to position Jews within this movement.

Many artists and writers began to see the general exclusion of Jewish identity art as marking the misfitting of this work within the gallery setting. It became important to ask how Jewish work which specifically addresses Jewish identity and difference is marginalised if Jewish artists and, more importantly, dealers, curators, collectors and gallery owners are actually well-represented as insiders in the art world. How can we be simultaneously integral to the art world, and other, as issues of our identity remain unarticulated in that setting. The class representation of Jews within the art world impacted by profound Jewish assimilation, marks the inclusion of Jewish identity work as inappropriate. In this context Jewish identity art can be perceived as oxymoronic. Jews are well represented in the art world as long as their work is not too Jewish. Traditionally Jewish subject matter has only found a home in Jewish museums, but these spaces historically have suppressed any

Two Jewish political artists, Cynthia Madansky and Jenny Polak assess the impact of two important exhibitions held last year: 'Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities' at the Jewish Museum in New York and 'Rubies and Rebels: Jewish Female Identity in Contemporary British Art' at the Barbican in London

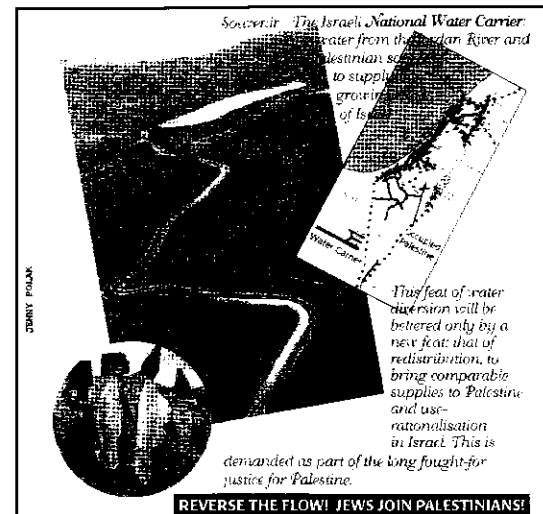
This item was excluded from Rubies and Rebels at the last minute – because 'our sponsors might not like it'. The parody of a souvenir hand-out was part of Jenny Polak's installation 'Reverse the Flow' addressing water inequity in the Middle East: a big embroidered laundry-basket decorated with images of Israeli swimming pools beside Palestinian women burdened under water-jars. Having transported her work from New York to London, Jenny Polak was suddenly told that her text had to be removed. The basket made no sense without the words so the artist withdrew the whole piece. 'Reverse the Flow' would have been the only critical comment on Israel in the entire show, apart from Lynn Leon's similarly censored work.



controversial internal critique by Jewish artists.

Perhaps the greatest body of art work by Jews has been subsumed within Modernism, and can be described as the (re)occurrence of annihilation, a main theme of Jewish consciousness in a post-Holocaust landscape. During the 1970s and '80s, Jewish feminist artists were integral to the movement: challenging patriarchal texts, the subordination of women in the home, oppressions experienced keenly by Jewish women in common with women in the dominant culture. In fact there is a

legacy of Jewish artists who have produced political and critical art about social issues (war, resistance, homelessness, queer rights, human rights, Aids, social welfare, anti-Communist sentiment in the US) including Martha Rosler, Nancy Spero, Pam Skelton, Leon Golub, Barbara Kruger, Andrea Fisher, Nicole Eisenmann. Though they do not connect their work explicitly to issues of their Jewish identity, we see them as constitutive of a tradition of Jewish artists who are committed to producing work which expresses and promotes progressive positions.



Both of the Jewish identity exhibitions which prompt this article excluded all explicitly political Jewish art. Although they are quite different, in 'Too Jewish?' and 'Rubies' the omission actually entails a disturbing act of censorship. As a participating artist in Rubies, Jenny Polak found specifically that her work which dealt critically with connections between the Jewish diaspora and Israeli repression of Palestine was considered unacceptable subject matter for that show. Cynthia Madansky's work about Palestine and Israel has never been included in a Jewish context though it has been exhibited internationally alongside the work of Arab artists. The curators of both shows perpetuated the unofficial boycott of work by Jewish artists which upholds a strong critical Jewish perspective. They succumbed to the usual rhetoric: Jews who are critical of Israel, or publicise our dirty laundry, or promote self-criticism, are self-hating Jews who provide fuel for antisemitism. Undoubtedly one reason for not allowing work about Israeli occupation is the heavy reliance of these exhibitions on the conservative Zionist establishment for financing.

There is a strong fear, which we believe is not always well-founded, that an exhibition which allows such critical Jewish perspectives would alienate the audience of first consideration, 'the' Jewish community. The curators of the two exhibitions in question chose to construct their audiences as conservative. What would a radical Jewish identity art exhibition actually look like? It would include work which addresses and presents a critique of Ashkenazi hegemony, class politics and Jewish labour history, right wing British and American colonialist policies, the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the scope and work of anti-Zionist positions, homophobia in Jewish communities, the 'cost of whiteness' and the effects of assimilation, Jewish sex workers, sexism within Jewish families and much more. As political artists and as Jews we do not shy away from controversy but see it as an essential part of promoting dialogue, social change and a responsibility. Art can create forums for the exchange of ideas and for political change which are responsive to the needs and implications of current history. It is vital that in the face of Zionist extremism and the rise of fundamentalism, a Jewish oppositional voice is developed and expressed. Especially in a Jewish context.

Rubies and rebbes?

I've sometimes wondered if the Jewish Socialists' Group might be protesting too much at Britain's 'Jewish Establishment'. That's because I hadn't yet encountered the enduring and pathetic phenomenon which the JSG had been complaining about for so long. But after the opening of the Rubies and Rebels exhibition, I no longer have that excuse.

Entering the Barbican Concourse, an aggressive frisking from two yarmulka'd yobs formed my introduction to the Community Security Organisation I'd heard so much about. True to paranoid form, the CSO had prevailed on the management to let them close up one of the gallery's entrances, intensifying the claustrophobic atmosphere that reigned within. Once inside, it was culture shock with a vengeance. This was like no art opening I'd seen in my life. This was... Brent Cross at prayer.

My body was being buffeted by waves of Big Hair and gilt-buttoned torsos, my ears assailed by surreal fragments of conversation about people's personal lives. No one – except when cornered by boring old me – seemed to want to talk about art. But skulking behind the concrete pillars or dazedly wandering among the perfumed army, I finally saw a few stragglers from my own rootless cosmopolitan tribe. In fact, the sort of people I'd expected to be running this show.

I fought my way through the crowd to Lily Markiewicz, probably the British artist best known for making work specifically about Jewish female identity. Wasn't she meant to be one of the exhibition organisers? Not any more. 'I was dropped from the curation, and then my work was dropped from the show.' Was that because she wasn't straight enough, I asked ignorantly. 'No – it was because I wasn't Jewish enough'.

Not Jewish Enough. It's a feeling I know well, having for the first half of my life not known I was Jewish at all. Looking around at the pictures on the walls, I slowly began to realise what was 'Jewish enough'. Paintings of seder tables. Mothers of families. Hebrew letters. Old family albums. Holocaust memoirs. Israel. And what wasn't Jewish enough – the work of most of the Jewish women artists working in Britain whom I'd ever admired or heard of: Susan Hiller, Pam Skelton, Jessica Shamash, Leslie Hakim Dowek, Judith Katz... I could go on.

A lot of what surrounded me looked depressingly like Sunday paintings, or an art college diploma show. When I looked at the labels, I saw that the Jewish Establishment had set its mark. Over there hung Mrs Chaim Bermant. Up here was the daughter of Frederic Raphael (memorably heard on the late 'You don't have to be Jewish' programme defending his right not to even feel Jewish). Here, presiding over the exhibition, was Mrs R B Kitaj,

Rubies and Rebels: Jewish Female Identity in Contemporary British Art. Exhibition curated by Monica Bohm-Duchen and Vera Grodzinski. Barbican Concourse Gallery, 8 October-10 November 1996. Leeds University and Metropolitan University Galleries, 22 November 1996-10 January 1997.



Lynn Leon's haunting images of a Middle-East landscape, carved up into the competing patterns of *tallit* and *keffiyeh*, caused a storm when they were exhibited in Israel two years ago. The Likud chairman Haifa municipal council demanded the show be closed, for 'giving protection under the cover of Art to defa-

mation and incitement against the religious sector'. The Council kept the exhibition open.

Back in England, Leon wrote: 'My feeling of impotence as a diaspora Jew has become overwhelming, and the only contribution I can make to the Arab-Israeli dilemma is through my art.' She came under attack

again when she was invited to exhibit in the Rubies and Rebels show at the Barbican. The British curators refused to print the full text of her statement, written after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Lynn Leon has now gone back to Haifa to continue her work in the peace movement and as an artist.

although she was actually dead. And here was her husband, delivering a speech to curl the toenails and propel the whole event straight into the gossip columns.

In the world according to Ron, those critics who wrote rude reviews of his retrospective are wife-murderers and cattle-truck guards. The worst of this Schindleresque tosh (a logical follow-on from Kitaj's bombastic Diasporist Manifesto with its self-contradictory glorification of Israel) is that it discredits the very real question of racism in British art criticism. But to confront that question one would have to look away from Kitaj's territory in the Marlborough Gallery and the Tate, to all the black British artists working as cleaners or driven across the Atlantic for recognition. One would have to destroy the privileged uniqueness-in-persecution that the Jewish Establishment typically insists upon.

Naturally, the curators of Rubies and Rebels (Monica Bohm-Duchen and Vera Grodzinski) were embarrassed by Kitaj's speech. But why had they invited this man to deliver the keynote address? Especially after he'd failed in his promise to show work at Monica Bohm-Duchen's more interesting After Auschwitz exhibition a year earlier?

A closer examination of the show's history only revealed more worrying questions. Setting aside the

treatment of Lily Markiewicz, why had even the few remaining works with any subversive potential been censored in the last days before that ghastly opening? Lynn Leon's text about Rabin's murder and the rise of 'a powerful partnership of ex-military men and ultra-Orthodox males' had been cut; Jenny Polak's installation about water inequity between Israelis and Palestinians had been withdrawn. Who were the show's shadowy 'sponsors' whose sensitivities were the pretext for this seemingly rather cowardly or unprincipled course of action?

I tried to find out, writing to the curators and giving them the chance to put their side of the story. They never replied. An all-day symposium allotted only an hour for audience discussion. Many of the other events surrounding Rubies and Rebels were apparently stifling in their cosiness and self-congratulation.

A parochial interpretation of what it means to be Jewish and female had triumphed in a show that could have been startling, adventurous, contemporary, funny (qualities that were consigned to one small evening of film and video). Still, now I can nod wisely whenever I hear that term, the Jewish Establishment.

Amanda Sebestyen

Hindsight and insight

Escape through the Balkans: The Autobiography of Irene Grünbaum translated and edited with an introduction by Katherine Morris (University of Nebraska Press, 1996). Justyna's Narrative by Gusta Davidson Draenger translated by Roslyn Hirsch and David H Hirsch (University of Massachusetts Press, 1996). After the Holocaust: The Long Road to Freedom by Erna F Rubinstein. (Archon Press, Connecticut 1995). Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz by Rena Kornreich Gelissen with Helen Dune Macadam. (Beacon Press, Boston 1995). A Partisan's Memoir: Woman of the Holocaust by Faye Schulman with the assistance of Sarah Silberstein Schwartz. (Second Story Press, Toronto 1995).

The 50th anniversary of the defeat of the Nazis in 1995 stimulated the publication of a spate of personal accounts of the war and its aftermath. Many Jews who survived Hitler's Final solution have felt moved, or been urged, to write about their experiences and publishers have chosen this time to produce books that have been hidden since the 1940s.

There is a paradox between writing about wide-ranging events so historically recent that we have had little time to assimilate and analyse them, and the urgency of the task of recording them as survivors approach the end of their lives. Of these five autobiographies, ironically, those written longest ago come closest to resolving this paradox. This is partly due to rigorous work by editors and translators in researching and conveying the context in which the memoirs were written. Escape Through the Balkans, a breathtaking story by a gifted writer, describes the flight from Belgrade, through Albania and Italy, ultimately, to Brazil, of Irene Grünbaum. Her manuscript was discovered in an Austrian archive by Katherine Morris who has translated, edited and annotated it.

The fate of the Yugoslavian Jews under the Nazis is not well known. Even less understood is the wartime experience of the small Jewish community in Albania. Grünbaum's route took her through areas where, in a haunting reflection of this decade's war in the Balkans, events were so complex and confusing that no one, least of all those caught up in them, knew quite what was happening.

Writing in 1949-1950, Grünbaum conveys both the concrete events and the emotional turmoil of a young woman on the run in alien, often hostile, territory, living on her wits, dependent on strangers, never knowing who she could trust. This is the chronicle of a female experience: she pre-empts and averts sexual attack, conceals herself in traditional Muslim clothes, moves on when she judges she has become too much of a burden to the mother of whichever household is sheltering her. And woven through the story is her profound sadness as she gradually acknowledges that her husband, who was taken by the Nazis, has almost certainly been killed.

But powerful though the story is, the insight we gain comes in part from the fact that the translator/editor understands that a personal narrative, however well told, is not enough. The carefully researched notes cast light on the text and on the context in which the author's experience is set. When Grünbaum mentions by name some Jews who escaped from Greece, Morris gives a detailed description of the deportation of the entire community of Salonika of which these few were probably the remnant. The extraordinary mixture of people Grünbaum portrays with such sympathy and humour become comprehensible through Morris's ability to untangle the complex and shifting forces at work in wartime Albania.

The other early – indeed contemporary – account of Hitler's Final Solution is Justyna's Narrative. Like Grünbaum, its author, Gusta Draenger, ('Justyna') was a talented writer and a creative and resourceful woman. Unlike Grünbaum she was not to survive the war. She and her husband, Szymek, were leading members of the Jewish resistance in Krakow in Poland. Imprisoned by the Nazis, she wrote the story of the resistance in tiny handwriting on scraps of paper smuggled into her cell. With the help of her cellmates she edited her memoir and between them they made four copies which were smuggled out of the prison. One survived to be preserved at Kibbutz Lochamei Haghettaot – the kibbutz set up to honour the fighters in the ghettos of Europe.

First published in Poland at the end of the Second World War, the introduction to that edition, written by a comrade of the author's, has been included in this first English translation. Here

The current proliferation of memoirs of the Nazi period may serve a psychological and communal purpose, but they do not always shed light on the events their authors lived through, says Julia Bard

again, the exciting, youthful, heroic, narrative is framed by a thoroughly researched introduction and chronology. The translators explain the place of Justyna's Akiba Youth Movement and the development of the underground resistance within the Krakow ghetto and locate the fate of Krakow's Jews within the context of the entire Nazi project in Poland.

'Justyna' and her friends knew they would die. They suspended their differences with other Zionist groups and with the Polish Workers' Party (the underground reincarnation of the banned Communist Party which had both Jewish and non-Jewish members) but knew that their combined forces could only defer, not prevent, the deportation of the Jewish population to the camps. Nevertheless they found the courage to oppose the massive forces lined up against them. They forged identity papers, moved in and out of the ghetto past armed guards, acquired weapons and threw grenades into cafés frequented by Nazi soldiers.

These young people were activists, but they were not natural fighters, as Draenger describes: 'This, then, was their dilemma: they longed eagerly to join the general struggle for the betterment of humankind, but because they were Jews, they had no choice but to devote every ounce of their strength and energy to the struggle for their own survival... Maybe during the Middle Ages the condemned were unconscious of the noose being drawn tighter and tighter round their necks until it strangled them completely. But we have to go on clawing to survive while fully aware that nothing can possibly save us from the fate to which we have been condemned so unjustly.'

This rather grandiose prose is offset by sensitive descriptions of the emotional impact of individual acts of resistance such as when she travelled illegally, and at great risk, having removed the armband that identified her as a Jew. 'If with the utmost expenditure of nervous energy you were able to deceive your would-be tormentors, then you were condemned to eavesdrop on highly unpleasant conversation about Jews that would make your blood boil.' The purity of Justyna's rage, her youthful energy and clarity of purpose draw you into her story, illustrating the force and charm with which she led her young comrades in this final struggle.

The other three accounts, in contrast, were written in old age and, here, the paradox between the distance of the individual from the events and the historical closeness of those events is most apparent. While many of the authors' memories are still all too vivid, they are imbued more with hindsight than with insight.

All three would have been strengthened by rigorous editing and informative notes, but the editors, perhaps understandably given the tragic nature of the material, seem to have been reluctant to question, change and, where necessary, cut the text. This is unfortunate because the accounts contain valuable information which is at times engagingly written.

A phenomenon as complex and devastating as the Holocaust may be analysed as a whole but can only be described in bits. Records were kept by the Nazis and by the Allies, but the testimony of the

victims is fragmentary and distorted. Because the destruction was so comprehensive there are gaps, unanswered questions, events we can never know about. Like archaeologists, we can make deductions and generalisations from the fragments, but we need to be able to separate the old from the new, to brush off the soil that has attached itself to the valuable shards of accurate recollection.

After the Holocaust: The Long Road to Freedom, an account of the immediate aftermath of the war, illustrates the problem. Erna F Rubinstein describes how she and her sisters survived the Death March – the Nazis' last ditch attempt to hide what had happened at Auschwitz by marching the emaciated inmates as far away as they could from the camp. Many died en route but Erna, her three younger sisters and a friend escaped into the zone occupied by the Americans.

The refugees floating about across Europe after the defeat of the Nazis faced continuing hardship, chaos and hostility. The Allies preferred to keep these survivors in Displaced Persons' camps, many of them concentration camps put to a new use, than to open their doors to them. Rubinstein's work in one of these camps enabled her to analyse the situation both as a survivor and as an observer but her account is marred by the muddle of information, some retrieved from the period she is writing about, some, unconsciously grafted on. The most jarring juxtaposition of information from two different periods comes early in the book when Rubinstein describes a disagreement with her sisters: 'For me, prayer was an important part of life. I tried to teach the girls different prayers in Polish and in Hebrew, and asked them to join me in prayer every night. They found it very difficult. Pola would question: "Why are we praying to God? What did God do for our mother and father, and our little brother?"

"Where was God when six million Jewish people were slaughtered?" Anna would protest.'

Now this figure of six million, which has become an icon today, was certainly not known in the weeks after the liberation of Auschwitz. Indeed, it was some years before historians arrived at a consensus that this was the number of Jews who had died.

Rubinstein is using this dialogue as a device to describe the scale of the genocide; she painstakingly, but quite ahistorically, explains the basics. However in claiming to know what she couldn't possibly have known at the time she undermines the value of the book as testimony.

This didactic approach has a similar effect in Rena's Promise and A Partisan's Memoir. Though both are significant and interesting books, neither author has faith that her compelling story will convey the events unless she contorts the narrative to include information that belongs elsewhere – in footnotes, for example. This interferes particularly with Rena's Promise, a gruelling portrayal of daily life in Auschwitz where the author and her sister survive by staying together, sharing their minuscule rations, giving emotional support when there seemed to be no hope and having occasional lucky breaks. In this book the co-author, Heather Dune

Macadam, intrudes on the first part of the story, gratuitously paraphrasing Rena's words, offering pedestrian explanations of the events being described and giving lengthy descriptions of her own feelings as she interviews the author. Luckily she backs off by page 50, but her breathless, wide-eyed presence as a mediator between author and reader seriously interferes with the early part of the narrative.

Once past that; however, Rena Kornreich Gelissen is permitted to recreate the details of concentration camp life, from the wooden soled sandals that pass for shoes, to the Sundays spent picking the lice off their bodies; from her recurring terror during the 'selections' for the gas chambers to her last minute escape from becoming a victim of Dr Mengele's 'experiments'.

A Partisan's Memoir covers less familiar territory. Faye Schulman was one of very few members of her community to survive the Nazi massacre of more than 1,850 Jews in her home town of Lenin on the Polish-Russian border. Her talent and expertise as a photographer made her valuable to the Nazi occupiers, and she was forced to take pictures of their atrocities: a trench filled with the bodies of her friends and relatives; the corpses of Jews in a nearby town strewn on the ground where they had been shot. Schulman joined the partisans who operated from the surrounding forests. 'We were guerrilla fighters who fought mostly in small scale ground combat operations, dangerous but highly effective in harassing the enemy. We destroyed railroad tracks, blew up enemy trains filled with munitions and food headed for the front line. We destroyed highways, set up ambushes, attacked towns and villages occupied by the Nazis. We demolished bridges and fortifications, disrupting communications and supply lines to the enemy troops. We engaged in counter-propaganda and tried to win support from the local population...

'...It was said our brigade had the best and most disciplined fighters in the province of Minsk.'

A beautiful young woman, as her photographs testify, Schulman spent the two years from 1942 to 1944 living in the forest, sleeping outside even in the bitter Polish winter, participating in dangerous missions under the noses of the Nazis, nursing the wounded and even, at one stage hiding and caring for an eight-year old girl. The pictures and text are a remarkable chronicle of this underground network of fighters who courageously persisted in their unequal struggle under almost impossible conditions.

But here again, the problem is the scene-setting. Schulman starts her narrative by describing Jewish family life in her home town before the Nazis occupied Poland in June 1941. When she recalls events – large scale like the Russian occupation that preceded the Nazi invasion, or small scale like a marriage, a birth, a brother leaving home to study – she vividly evokes the time and the place. But too often she seems to be trying to sell the reader a nostalgic and stereotyped version of pre-War Jewish life in eastern Europe. 'To us,' she writes, 'our parents were holy. We were obedient children, asking few questions and rarely questioning their authority. This was the way of the world at the time.'



Partisan and photographer, Faye Schulman, in 1943

Schulman's family was clearly much more interesting than this, as the rest of the narrative illustrates. A religious Jewish girl who, by her teens, has developed a reputation as a photographer, who becomes renowned for her courage in the partisan movement and who makes a new life for herself in North America is not a person who obeys authority without asking questions.

But this, too, is a manifestation of the paradox facing anyone writing autobiography in the wake of such terrible events. These books are in some respects a catharsis – a way of gaining control over memories that have tortured their authors for five decades. Rena Gelissen's tale is one of terror and humiliation leavened by luck, resourcefulness and courage. She is alone among these writers in acknowledging her personal need to pour out her story after containing it for so long, as she writes in her dedication to her dead parents: 'Dear Mama and Papa: This book is for you. For fifty years I've been telling you this story in my mind. Now it's finally written down and I won't have to tell it anymore. Love Rena.'

The therapeutic role of memoirs is also served by attempting to ensure that some good comes out of even the most terrible and irrational experiences – to give those experiences meaning by using them as a warning for the next generation. In Rena's Promise and After the Holocaust this results in a patronising, philosophising style familiar to grandchildren everywhere. But talking to, or even writing a memoir for, your grandchildren is not the same as writing for a wider public. Publishers and editors may be reluctant to tamper with such sensitive material written in the first person as testimony. But precisely because it is sensitive, they have a duty to their authors as well as to their readers to ensure that the information is accessible, engaging and, above all, accurate. The unedited originals can then be put in an archive for historians of future generations to refer to.

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Keneyne horror stories

At one popular Jewish school 'Jewish studies' amounts to little more than mindless ritual, and those in charge don't bear moral scrutiny, according to one insider

Simon Newman (not his real name) accepted that his personal views would not always be in line with those of his employers when he took up a post at a respected Jewish primary school but he did not realise the extent of the compromise he would have to make. 'I think it's right that teachers are seen to support the ethos of their school, and I was prepared to do that. I don't wear a kappel (skullcap) at home, but I put one on at school as a statement that I was ready to conform. Within a two-mile zone around the school I wear my kappel and don't eat out in (non-kosher) restaurants.' Nevertheless, Simon was startled to be told he must wear tsitsit – a kind of vest with fringes at the corners worn by very orthodox men and boys. 'When I tucked the fringes in, two of the rabbis who teach at the school felt me to make sure I hadn't cut them off.'

He does not discuss his life outside school. 'I daren't mention the fact that the local progressive rabbi is a friend of mine nor the fact that for many years I lived with a non-Jewish woman. Before I was offered the job I was asked (informally) where I was married. If it had been in a Liberal synagogue I wouldn't have got the job.'

How, in this atmosphere, does a teacher encourage enquiring attitudes among the children: 'You can get children to be questioning in science – except about the dinosaurs which lived millions of years ago. You can't question everything.' But what if the children ask where the world came from? 'I must say Hashem (God) created it. You can't question the existence of God in an institution which is there to promote "God-ism". If I'm asked a direct question I lie, because that's my job.'

'There's a lot of demand for places at

the school and priority is given to religiously observant families. Some synagogue authorities have lied to get a child in. We knew one family were claiming that they went to shul (synagogue) more often than they really did, but the rabbi had given us his signed statement backing them up so there was nothing we could do, even though he and they had lied.

'On the minor fasts (which only the most orthodox Jews observe) we were told: "Don't let the children see you eat lunch." Lunch was served, but we were told to be discreet about eating it.

'We say prayers several times a day. The worst offenders for chatting through all the rituals are the two rabbis who run the Jewish studies department. The children say two brokhes (prayers) before their milk and biscuits at break time; another one when they wash their hands before lunch and another two before they eat their lunch. When you add it up it all takes hours. Ninety per cent of the parents don't do any of this at home but their children aren't learning much at school either. The governors are always saying: "It's a shame we can't give a Jewish education to more children." But they don't know

how crappy the Jewish education is.

'The families pay extra for Jewish studies but the agenda of the Jewish studies department is not to teach Hebrew so much as to make Jewish children enjoy being Jewish in the hope that a few of them will become khozrim bitshuva (the nearest equivalent is 'born again'). They focus on the fun of the festivals, the singing to welcome Shabbat. There is no distinction between religious worship and religious education and though 25% of each day is taken up with Jewish studies the children don't end up able to read Hebrew. The are taught how to bow when they are chanting the Amidah (a prayer said three times each day). In assembly they recite the Amidah and the Shema (another regular prayer). In my opinion it's worse than the shtetl. At least there the people were steeped in the culture and ritual and the community valued it. This is simply going backwards to meet the demands of parents who don't value it at all.

'The policy of the school is to treat everyone with respect but in the staffroom you overhear attitudes towards non-Jews that can only be described as racism. I always challenge racism – they probably think of me as the thought police. Many of the staff have only taught in Jewish schools; some also went to Jewish schools themselves. The children receive no education about other religions. When Rabin was shot, the Rabbis in charge of Jewish studies were unsure about whether it was a good or bad thing! I feel closer to moderate Muslims than to some of the people I hear making comments about Arabs in the staffroom.

Simon Newman was interviewed by Julia Bard. Since this interview he has taken up a new post at a non-denominational primary school.

● Keneyne horror (the original Yiddish phrase wards off the evil eye) features personal stories that lift the lid on life on the Left and in the Jewish community. If you have had an experience that you think Jewish Socialist readers would want to know about, we'd like to hear from you. Write it yourself (no more than 800 words, please) or give us the outline and we'll arrange to interview you. We can't promise publication, but we'll try to cover a range of stories. Confidentiality will be respected.

The Slow Mirror

Pedro was from Buenos Aires. Yet it was only after his death that I stopped to consider what that might mean. I was in Argentina for the first time, attending an ornithology conference, and I was walking down the Avenida Santa Fe when it suddenly occurred to me: so this is what he saw and heard while growing up. Did he think of this place often after making love with me?

There was an accompanying vision of oncoming black taxis and wide, endless boulevards, a sense of strolling through perfumed breezes toward obelisks and military monuments. But the important thing was not the actual character of Buenos Aires. It was only vital that the city was real, that it was always present whether or not I was aware of it, and that Pedro had come from there.

I was on my way to the address of his childhood (torn down to make way for a utilitarian concrete monster) when all this condensed inside me as if from the cloud of a forgotten dream. I stopped as if confronted by a riddle. And when I looked around again, I found myself in front of an overcrowded antique store. I entered to think my confusion out, nodded to the owner and walked to the back to get out of the light. There past a shelf of books and numerous hat racks, I discovered the mirror. It was sitting on top of a dusty 17th-century Portuguese dresser in the twisted-and-turned style made popular following Vasco da Gama's first trip to India, and it caught my attention because it was shaped like a lyre. I am a professor of ornithology by trade – with a speciality in North American seedeaters (*Passeriformes Fringillidae*) – but an amateur lutanist at heart. And I am fascinated by antique instruments. Naturally, then, I approached this lyre-mirror and brushed my hand along its frame. And when I stared into its reflection, I discovered a Chinese camphor-wood trunk whose front was carved with a serpent brandishing a lantern in its mouth. The trunk sat directly opposite the mirror, atop a curious English desk with handles made from lapis lazuli. It was the magical alliteration of lapis lazuli, lantern, lyre and lute that finally impelled me to obey my original instincts and make an offer for the mirror, and I was able to bargain the dealer, an ancient Uruguayan from Paysandú smelling of pistachio nuts and brandy, down to a reasonable price.

That evening, back in my tiny room at the Hotel Estrella, I noticed, for the first time, the mirror's singular powers of retention. Following

a shower, I had taken out my brush with the intention of combing my hair into a semblance of reason. I lifted the mirror out of its wrappings and discovered that the camphor-wood trunk and the surroundings of the antique store – and not I – composed the entirety of its reflections. From all angles, no matter whether I moved to the side, knelt or stood on the hotel's monstrous desk chair, the silver surface of the mirror still gave to me the various surroundings of the Uruguayan's store.

After a momentary fright during which I made an aborted call to the desk clerk, I watched the reflection for quite some time, coming to two possible conclusions: the first (and more obvious), that this was not a normal mirror; the second (and naturally enough, more disturbing), that I might very well be going mad.

I dreamed of the mirror that night, imagined that it reflected the image of a Rose-Breasted Grosbeak – the bird on which I did my dissertation at Cornell University and after which my daughter, Rosalie, was named – flying through green clouds evaporating from giant oak trees. This bird was a messenger, had been sent by Pedro to pick Rosalie up and carry her to heaven.

In the morning, I fully expected to see a reflection of the bird or even my face, but found once again the antique store. In consequence, I cut short an appearance at a symposium on tone displacement among wood warblers and went back to the Uruguayan dealer. I informed him of my two possible conclusions.

'Let me assure you, Señora, you are not going insane,' he said with a smile of solidarity. 'There is indeed a time lag. The mirror seems to retain images. They seep in and take a long while coming out. I call it the "slow mirror" (In Spanish, he referred to it as the *'espejo atrasado'*.)

'How long does it take for the mirror to give its images back?' I asked.

The dealer shrugged. 'I took over the store four years ago from another Uruguayan, a man from Punta del Este, and the mirror has yet to reflect anything but the Chinese trunk,' he said. 'Of course, it has also given back the images of some people who have lifted it up and passers-by who have headed toward other antiques.' He laughed and twirled his moustache. 'But the selfish thing has not yet given my image back. So it must be slow by at least four years.'

'And do you know where it came from?'

'Brazil, I believe. Of Portuguese craftsmanship, perhaps. Although maybe it's Japanese. Might have come over with the immigrants. I was told

Richard Zimler from New Fiction by Jewish Writers Five Leaves Publications £9.99

by a Korean agronomist that the wood forming the lyre frame is Japanese Maple.'

The antique dealer generously offered to buy the mirror back if I was disappointed with its slow reflections. But I assured him that I still wanted it, thanked him for his help and returned to the hotel.

The mirror, although perched on a simple writing desk by my bed, still insisted, of course, on reflecting the Chinese trunk and the antique store. And by standing far to the right, I could now see the first Uruguayan dealer from Punta del Este, a small, withered man with eyeglasses held together by tape. He sat behind a table centred by a baroque candelabrum with the sinuous arms of a Hindu goddess. A strong sunlight that seemed to be distilled through billowy clouds shone in through a window on which a gilded Byzantine crucifix was hung. I watched, mesmerised, and after some time a tall woman in black entered the store, toured and left without making a purchase. The dealer ate lunch from a white bag as if the contents were to be kept secret. He read a large book bound in leather. Later, hard-edged shadows from unseen furniture crept across the floor as if seeking the night. A man in a brown fur coat entered, admired an azure-glazed Persian vase and

I placed the mirror atop my rosewood dresser. She stared into the reflection and said: 'It's too slow.'

wrapped it in white handkerchiefs from his pocket before letting the Uruguayan package it. Just prior the store's closure, two large women holding bursting packages came in to ask directions.

And it was then, alone with the antiques, that I felt a sudden tremor of joy. It was as if, while watching the store, I'd left my body behind for a time. And now I had returned to discover the wonder of fingers, hands, lips, of a woman who could touch the world, feel her place at the centre of life, breathe, kiss talk. I picked up my phone to share this discovery with Rosalie. Yet upon hearing her quivering voice, I decided it best to simply inquire about her health.

'But where are you?' she asked.

'Buenos Aires.'

'Still there ... then why are you calling?'

'To see about you. I'm sorry if I woke you.'

Rosalie was silent. I imagined her tears reflecting a sepia world leached of colour, pictured a lone child facing a German fairy-tale forest. Without an answer, she let the phone down. Our line disappeared. I sat with my head in my hands. Regretting so much. Watching the antique store submerged in night. Finding the mirror now quite normal – an impossible artefact to be sure,

and certainly a gift, but just one of many impossible objects all around me. I imagined it had been pulled through a magician's hat from the same invisible land that had given rise to Rosalie's leukemia and my own helplessness.

Time crept very slowly to me that night. I slept in and out of cold, endless dreams bordered by water. And when I woke in the morning, it was with the great energy of escape. I was gripping the silver Star of David which Pedro had hung around my neck when we were engaged. Dressing madly, I ran out of my room to catch a lecture on male incubation.

Two days later when the meeting's concluding cocktail party had finished, I packed up the mirror, boarded my night-time plane and headed back to San Francisco.

There, inside our Richmond District home on 12th Avenue, I placed the slow mirror atop my rosewood dresser. When Rosalie had awoken from a nap, I showed it to her. 'From your father's city,' I said. She returned my smile absently, stared into the reflection for a few moments following my explanation and said: 'It's too slow.' She patted my arm, refused to elucidate on her comment and returned to bed.

Only later did I understand what she meant: *I haven't enough time left to wait for the mirror to return my reflection.*

Despite the dark canal of dread this realisation cut through me (or perhaps because of it), I began to follow the life of the antique store avidly, compulsively I must say, becoming an expert on the habits of the Uruguayan from Punta del Este and the lascivious tastes of his Saturday store manager, a weedy looking man with a penchant for atavistic blondes in elastic clothing. I also came to enjoy the idiosyncrasies of several regular visitors, particularly those of an elfin Native American woman living in La Boca who came in once a day to sniff the camphor-wood trunk because of her sinus problems (I read her lips once while she discussed her misery with the Uruguayan).

Often, I would watch the tale of the mirror upon waking and just before going to bed, and for some time it took the place of reading, lute-playing and films for me. And yet, as one can well imagine, after a year of the store and customers – and the Chinese trunk in particular – I grew decidedly bored with the life of a Buenos Aires antique store and moved the mirror to the floor by my linen closet where I could check on it from time to time but rarely be encumbered by its constant story.

Rosalie was growing weaker at the time. And she was in more pain. Chemotherapy was helping very little, if at all. Often, she spoke to me in the voice the tiny, winged being I imagined trapped inside her limp body. I realised at such moments that it would not be long before this entity would fly free from her and disappear from both our lives like a Thomas Campion sprite. Although I am frightened even now to admit it, I surely hoped for this to come to pass quickly.

Soon after I had put the mirror away, Rosalie asked me in a trembling voice if I would hang the

mirror on the wall directly opposite her bed. 'Something impossible I saw in it,' she said. She refused to say more, showed me by way of explanation a book from her childhood that she must have hidden away. It was Italian, with illustrations of birds by Bruno Munari in reds and blues and yellows that seemed distilled from actual feathers. It was the only book Pedro had brought with him from Argentina when his family had fled the persecution of an anti-intellectual, anti-Semitic dictatorship. All the others had been left behind and had perhaps gone up in smoke. When Rosalie was a child, Pedro used to sit with her for hours and show her the pretty pictures. 'What did you see?' I asked again.

Rosalie put her finger to her lips in a gesture of silence, smiled as if to comfort me and squeezed my hand.

Two days later, she was dead.

I found her holding the lyre-mirror to her chest, face down, as if she were seeking to incorporate the silver reflection in her body. Underneath was her children's book. How she found the strength to take the mirror down from the wall I had no idea.

The past recedes from me after that, as if my personal history were pulled out to sea for a period of years. I know I must have worked and ate and talked with people – done all the things one is expected to do in order to survive. But my thoughts from that time are bounded by the impenetrable black ocean of an ancient epic. When my history finally does emerge up through this dark landscape again, it is with Rosalie's face as its masthead; a week ago, almost four years to the day after her death, I saw her reflected in the slow mirror. From her surroundings, I could tell that she was standing in the doorway of my linen closet. She was staring straight ahead with what I can only call the face of a woman adoring a child. After some time, she kneeled down and kissed the surface of the looking glass.

I watched all this in her room. From inside a warm ether that seemed to be composed of tears. From under her blankets. For I had re-hung the mirror on her wall after her death and begun to sleep in her bed.

The next day, I watched myself in the reflection carrying the mirror to her room and hanging it on the wall, exactly as I had done nearly four years earlier.

After that, I lived Rosalie's final hours without pausing for sleep. I believe it was peace I saw in her face more than anything else. Was it simply the antique store that was helping her so? I hadn't a clue until I saw her rise from the bed with the childhood book she was keeping on her night table and glide with the ease of the spectre across the floor. She stopped to the right of the mirror and stared for quite some time, then climbed onto the dresser and took it down. She brought it into bed with her and gripped it as one might hold a sick child.

A few moments later, there was only the darkness of her unwavering chest. On the evening I witnessed all this in the mirror, I flew down to

Buenos Aires. Upon my arrival, I took a taxi directly to the antique store.

The ancient Uruguayan dealer from Paysandu was still there. 'El espejo atrasado, no?' he asked when I entered.

'Si, may I look around?'

'Please.'

The Portuguese dresser in the twisted-and-turned style was still at the back of the store. Another mirror was resting on it now, a normal one which reflected my hand when I held it up as an experiment. I stood where Rosalie had and stared. From my angle, I could see a bookshelf. It seemed clear that whatever she had seen, she had spotted there.

I passed over the books as quickly as I could till I was stopped by the name Munari. It was another of his children's books. On the cover, a scarlet finch perched on a sunflower. I pressed it to my chest and closed my eyes, was suddenly dizzy with a mixture of amazement and fear. My booming heartbeat was swaying me from side to side. My feet felt rooted at the very centre of the world. I gripped the Portuguese dresser in case I sensed myself going faint.

When I gathered the courage to caress the book open, I found an inscription in Ladino to

I found her holding the lyre-mirror as if she were seeking to incorporate the reflection in her body

Pedro from his mother dated: Purim, the 14th of Adar, 5707 (1947). I sounded out the message in a whisper: *Para mi pequeño pájaro con amor. El imposible es la prueba.* (For my little bird with love. The impossible is the proof.)

The strange sensation that these words were meant for me seemed to suspend my breathing. From deep inside the armour of body, I felt as if I had happened upon an understanding of the world grounded in belief. Was it this belief that had given Rosalie the serenity she possessed before death? Pedro must surely have passed on his mother's words to her years ago. Did they assure her that she'd be joining him in God?

When the movements of another customer tugged my back into the consciousness of the store, I paid for the book. The dealer said, 'Isn't that the mystery of life. We had

this lovely thing displayed prominently for many years and no one bought it. Now that it's hidden away, you come in and find it. You figure it out.'

'Maybe this has something to do with it,' I said, showing him the book's inscription. To his wide-eyed look of bewilderment, I said: 'It's Ladino. A Jewish Spanish written with Hebrew

Has the unlikeliness of the world never made you feel that there's more to this than meets the eye?

letters dating from before the Inquisition.' I read him the message from Pedro's mother.

'What do you think it means?' he asked.

I unfurled my arm to indicate the store, the street, the antiques. I pointed at him, then at myself. 'Has the unlikeliness of the world itself... or something absolutely impossible that's occurred never made you feel that there's more to this than meets the eye?'

'Ah, I understand,' he said. He puffed out his

lips and held up his hands in a gesture of passive scepticism. As he started to speak, I raised my index finger to my lips and offered him Rosalie's soft smile of silence.

On my return to San Francisco, I took the mirror down and sold it to a Chilean antique dealer in the Mission District with brilliant blue eyes. And flew to Cornell. I walked in the woods during several days, holding the children's books, not knowing what I was after, until an arrow of pastel pink streaked by in front of me.

It was a Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, a female and she had alighted on the branch of a gnarled oak tree directly above me. She was staring at the ground. When I looked down, I discovered a puddle of water atop a bed of moss. It was reflecting the face of a tearful old woman, a sudden winged shimmer of pink passing through green clouds into a sunlit sky. And I thought: *Dreams, too, are impossible. And: Whether I know it or not, this wood, this place, is here all the time.*

Reprinted from *The Slow Mirror*, a collection of short stories, with permission of Five Leaves Publications, PO Box 81, Nottingham NG5 4ER.

LETTERS... LETTERS... LETTERS...

WOMEN ACTIVISTS

JS As a mature student at the University of North London in my final year of study, I am researching the role that the women of the East End and London played in the Battle of Cable Street on 4 October 1936. I would be very grateful to hear from any women who were involved in the Jewish Workers' Circle, the Jewish Labour Council, the Jewish People's Council against Fascism, the Communist Party, AJEX or any other organisation which was active in the fight against fascism at that time.

Simone Gold
17a Elder Avenue, London N8
9TE. Tel 0181-341 0923.

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

★
Jewish Socialist, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX

WHAT JUSTICE?

JS In his letter, 'Wrong demand' (JS36), Bernard Misrahi took issue with the declaration by the Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) of its opposition to all immigration controls. He is concerned that 'putting the "no controls" issue to the fore... takes the argument against the racism of controls from our territory of social justice to the terrain of our enemies who promote fears of being swamped'. Does it? Where is the social justice in the refugees of Africa 'swamping' Malawi, which has infinitely fewer resources than Britain? Where is the social justice in millions of starving or desperately ill people around the world being told to 'stay there and die'? Where is the justice in keeping any of the laws designed to keep out one 'undesirable' race or another, going right back to keeping us out in 1905?

The case against all immigration controls is firmly rooted in 'our territory of social justice'. Many people

think that 'No immigration controls' is a utopian idea which can only happen in a socialist world. But immigration controls were introduced into Britain in 1905; neither Britain nor the rest of the world was utopian prior to that!

Bernard does not know 'whether there can be immigration controls which are not racist...'. For me, the idea of 'non-racist immigration controls' is utopian precisely because we do not live in a socialist world. We live in a thoroughly racist, imperialist society. In capitalist Britain all immigration controls are racist.

Bernard is concerned that 'our insistence on "no controls" will isolate us from many black organisations which support anti-deportation campaigns'. But we don't 'insist' that campaigns adopt a 'no controls' position. On the contrary, the JSG position is to campaign on a united front basis alongside people with different perspectives. What our policy allows us to do is to support all anti-deportation campaigns whether or not those under threat would be excluded

by 'less racist controls'. To have a policy of 'No immigration controls' does not stop the JSG supporting intermediate demands which point in that direction. We could demand getting rid of controls introduced since the Tories came to power, then further demands taking us back to the 1970s, 1960s and finally to 1905 itself. This would certainly make the controls less severe, though it is arguable whether they would be 'less racist'. What such demands don't do is spread the illusion that there is some kind of non-racist alternative to immigration controls.

Dave Landau
London

Sorry

A typesetting glitch in our last issue misquoted Majer Bogdanski in the report of the Zygielbojm plaque commemoration. Majer's quote should have read: 'The plaque that the family unveiled this morning is the lasting recognition of his valour.'

Home and away

A Land of Stone & Thyme: An anthology of Palestinian short stories

Edited by Nur and Abdel Wahab Elmessiri
Quartet, £9

Some stories in *A Land of Stone and Thyme* read like mimeographed leaflets of old - polemical, rhetorical and full of a rage against oppression. Some read like abstract allegories and metaphorical magic realism - the literal realism hidden from the occupiers of Palestine who censored and restricted overtly political writers. And many of the stories from the diaspora have a sophistication that has grown from the interface between the exiles and other cultures and literary traditions.

Produced by a daughter/father collaboration, this collection of short stories features, in the main, that generation of writers who emerged in the 1960s in both occupied Palestine and the diaspora. It is one of those rare anthologies for which the division into six sections accurately and thoroughly encompasses the content.

The first section, *Shadows of Paradise Lost*, begins with the allegorical tale, 'The tree', by Ahmed Omar Shaheen, whose biography mirrors the Palestinian condition. Born in Jaffa in 1940, he moved to Gaza after 1948, then on to Cairo where he settled. Only one page long, 'The tree' is about memory and place. When the tree/place is branded by bandits, memory is desecrated. As the tree withers from its trauma, the person waiting by it for his friend is 'exposed to passers-by'. Encapsulated in just a few paragraphs are nearly all of the themes which are pursued in the rest of this section.

The stories in the following section, *Exile from the Land*, examine the struggle to maintain memory when expelled from place. Rasmi Abu Ali conflates memory and habit in his wonderful story, 'Stealing away, we returned'. A mother and her child steal back to their olive groves shortly after the occupation to 'rummage through the damp dust in search of olives'. Many other women from their village of Shurfat have crept back, but each harvests only those orchards that belong(ed) to their family. Having successfully dodged the Israeli patrols, the mother decides to return two days later to bring back clothes from the family home. The child gathers empty bottles, school books and a broken serving spoon - junk made precious by memory. Stopped by soldiers and warned not to return, the child thinks, 'If you escape this one... then come what may, you'll take everything in your stride.' The personality of the exile is born.

Refugees in Hostile Cities, the third

section, is about the construction of identity. In Rashad Abu Shawar's 'Pizza in memory of Mariam' a young man, now in Lebanon, mourns the death by machine gun fire of his pregnant wife 'and the still unformed Palestinian creature'. Between the prescribed Valium and his heavy drinking, the protagonist is frustrated by his own sense of being unformed within an identity yet to be codified.

A naive man, thrown into an occupation prison, is deported to Lebanon in 'The homeland' by Mahmoud Shuqair, an activist himself who was deported to Amman. The character is unable to relieve his sadness through tears, but the prose drips with his depression. He is

Today it is nothing but a tragedy and tomorrow we shall say it was an adventure

redeemed by a 'young man from the tribe' with a rifle who leads him to confidence through struggle.

In section four, entitled *Babel*, an interesting story by Mahmoud al-Rimawi, 'A chapter from the book of present days' attempts to locate the line between journalism and fiction, when no voice can report on the 1982 invasion of Lebanon without impassioned perspective. In a switch on Dorian Gray, 'The city' by Mohamed Tamila is inhabited entirely by elderly people, except for the narrator who is convinced that he is a young 30. It is only when he gets home, having been released from prison due to his madness, that he finds both his wife and child 'ancient' and faints as he looks in the mirror.

The babel of language and meaning in 'The crucified sheep' by Ghassan

Kanafani dominates the philosophical conversation of the passengers in a car travelling in the desert. On their way they meet a Bedouin alone with his sheep. He refuses their offer of food but begs for water for his dying sheep. The passengers explain that they need the water for their car. The inability of the Bedouin to comprehend their priorities and values, and their inability to imagine his life and needs, leads the narrator to comment on the human condition: 'Today it is nothing but a tragedy and tomorrow we shall say it was an adventure.'

The following section, *Death-in-Life/Life-in-Death* opens with a beautiful story which adds the element of love to the ongoing themes of identity and memory. Written by Emile Habibi, well known author and Communist List member of the Knesset, 'At last the almond blossomed' uses the imagery of Dickens' 'A tale of two cities' to write about duality in Palestinian experience.

In 'Four colours' by Ahmed Omar Shaheen, the dreamer fantasises about fanatical settlers marching into a village with their band playing 'My homeland, my homeland' and 'O my flag, O flag'. The settlers, refusing his offer of shekels, which they insist is no longer valid currency, point to the village roofs where he sees Palestinian flags flying. Suddenly he realises that he is surrounded by sunshine and rainbows and beauty. It is Life-in-death. Likewise, 'The procession' eerily relates the uncanny feelings of a pall-bearer who senses movement in the coffin he is carrying. Funerals are a repeated setting in this collection of stories.

The final section, *Dreams of Paradise Redeemed*, is, like the first section, opened by a very short tale named 'The tree'. This one uses a literary parallel between the Vietnam war and The Conflict. Try as the Americans might to kill the birds and trees, they continue to live and grow.

As a collection, this book holds together well, tracing the saga of people who, expelled from their land, try to hang on to its meaning while dealing with hostile hosts. They struggle with language and languages in an attempt to maintain their memories but when they return the place is both familiar and unrecognisable. Every step of this process is painful and fraught with contradictions, but the people endure.

Spike Katz

An American tale

**Jews and Blacks:
a dialogue on race, religion
and culture in America**

Michael Lerner and Cornel West
Plume/Penguin
(\$12.95 – available only in the
US and Canada)

Jews and Blacks is the distillation of five years' dialogue between Michael Lerner, an author and editor of the Jewish periodical, Tikkun, and Cornel West, professor of African-American studies and the philosophy of religion at Harvard. Exploring the tensions between the two communities in the US, their discussions range through black nationalism, Jewish nationalism, Jewish racism and black antisemitism; Farrakhan crops up throughout the text, but also has nearly a whole chapter to himself.

From a black perspective I learned a great deal about Jewish history, particularly the Jewish-American experience. The book contains wide-ranging and detailed historical and factual information about Jewish and black people in

the United States. The authors explore what they have in common – historic oppressions, their impact on black and Jewish people, and how they were internalised by these communities in different ways. Jewish people in America had to constitute their identity through education and intellectual pursuits because other areas were denied to them. In contrast, access to education for black people was, and continues to be a site of oppression.

The authors discuss intellectually and analytically 'loving black as a political concept', but are unable to transfer this debate to a personal level. Throughout the book they make economic, social, and political links about the reasons for racism and antisemitism.

Their American perspective sees 'blacks' and 'Jews' as homogenous constituencies, and uses fixed categories of 'class' and 'race'. There is little recognition of the diversity and differences within and between these communities. I could not locate myself in the history

**There is little
recognition of
the diversity
and differences
within and
between these
communities**

of black people described here. When Michael Lerner states that 'fitting in and assimilation is not an issue for black people', he is referring to particular African American experiences. It clearly is an issue for anyone who has lived with and through the struggles for identity of British born black people, and others from minority ethnic groups in Britain.

The lack of a global perspective makes invisible the African part of the African American experience. Black people were taken to the Caribbean, too. Some left the Caribbean and went to America and Britain bringing a flow of ideas and information; at the same time, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X influenced black people in Britain.

Black and Jewish people recognise that we share a common history of oppression, of being 'other'. We also share a flow of ideas and information. There are influences on us that are largely unacknowledged – Paul Gilroy

Café society

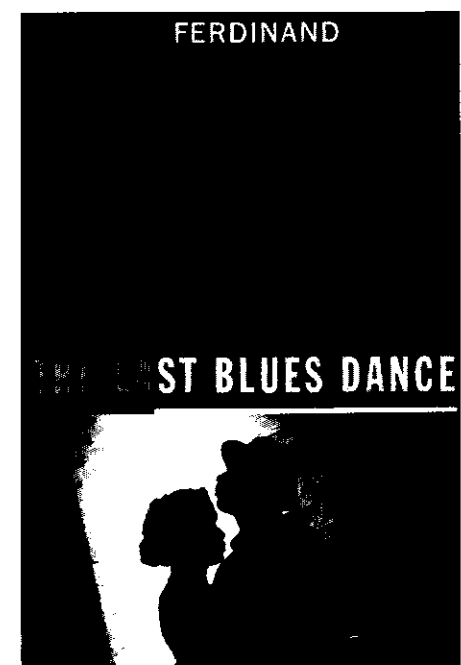
The Last Blues Dance

Ferdinand Dennis
Harper Collins, £5.99

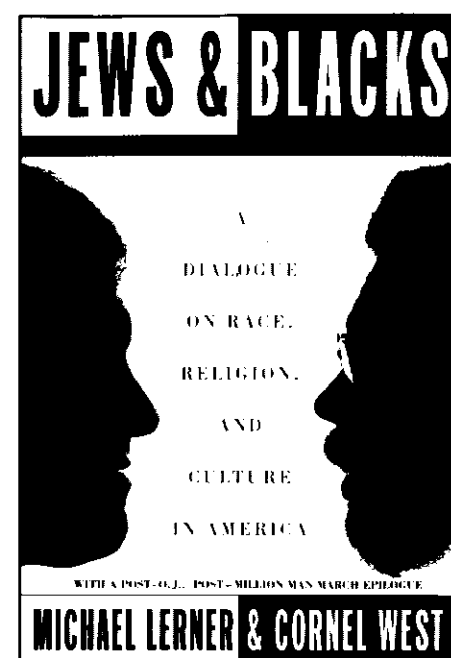
Boswell Anderson is a Jamaican café proprietor and dreamer on the brink of losing everything: his café, his wife and his dreams. Set in Hackney, The Last Blues Dance intertwines the stories of a group of friends, lovers and ex-lovers who use the Caribbean Sunset Café. It is written in 'real time' but each character is obsessed with their own past and their relationship to it. Boswell's daily grind is made bearable by his fantasy life – a world of Jamaican images, smells, music, love and mythical terrors. The other characters are similarly sustained and plagued by fantasy worlds.

Ferdinand Dennis focuses on the tension between the homeland that exists in people's hearts and the land where they actually live. One of Dennis's central arguments is that a sentimental attachment to history can be pernicious and detrimental to progress. The book's hero is fighting for a love which he can't articulate and against his sense of loss which he daren't expose. He doesn't know whether these emotions originate with people or with his country of birth. Does he belong or is he in exile? If he is in exile, what is he exiled from? For any diaspora community these are important themes.

However, there are too many characters whose stories are started and not resolved because another has been introduced. It's difficult to remember who is who and what is happening to them. Paradoxically, it's almost as if Dennis is using different people to focus on facets of a single charac-



ter. The struggle to maintain all the histories and storylines makes it impossible to concentrate on the underlying themes.



gives an example of this in the black communities' use of 'diaspora' as a way to describe our 'elsewhereness'.

This book highlights some of the contested spaces between our communities. Its epilogue grapples with the implications of the O J Simpson trial and the Million Man March. The authors conclude, unsurprisingly, that there are no easy solutions in the relations between blacks and Jews. Maybe this goes without saying.

Joy White

Dennis paints vivid pictures. Every detail of every person is described including their body shape, clothes, smells and sexuality. We are plunged into their psyches and it is all there; the young cook in the café was mute because she was sexually abused by her brothers; the arrogant, handsome thief is violent because his single mother preferred his twin; the languid wife is mentally withdrawn because she is terrified of losing her husband and so it goes on. This lay psychology which, in some instances, lasts for pages slows down the story lines which are already competing with the philosophical and political thrust of the book.

What a disappointing read. This book should have been edited and re-worked. It would have benefited either from reducing the number of ideas or expanding the entire work. The problem with the novel is that it wants to be a play. If we could see the characters inhabiting so many complex scenarios, the experience would be enriched and would be accessible too.

Karen Merkel

Brief encounters

Flickerbook

Leila Berg
Granta, £15.99

Having had what can only be described as a hellish time at school, Leila Berg's Risinghill, Death of a Comprehensive School, A S Neill's Summerhill and (the less well-known now) R F Mackenzie's State School were crucial reading for me in trying to understand how a more human education could work. These books are well worth returning to now as our schools are plagued by governmental obsession with league tables, none of which rank schools according to how happy their pupils are.

I was therefore attracted to Leila Berg's autobiography of her early years on the promise that the book 'will change the way we think about children and childhood forever'. All publishers hype their books, and here is a big claim (big price too for that matter) which sadly is unfulfilled.

Flickerbook, as the title suggests, comprises short – very short – pieces, which give a complete picture when you run through them quickly. Leila Berg provides little snapshots of her life as she saw it at the time. Thus we see a child growing, in a fairly dysfunctional family, within a world utterly confusing to her. Little is explained to the child by the adults who surround her, and yet she desperately needs an explanation. As a Jewish child, at that time, matters were even more confusing and no explanation is forthcoming: 'I practice praying like men pray, I sway backwards and forwards, like the rocking horse in Lewis's, and I make a singing noise in my nose instead of words that mean something.'

'He shouts at me. He is surprised as well as angry. Why can't girls pray?'

She is aware of her difference from the gentile world (though most of her world is Jewish), leading her to believe that certain activities, certain buildings and even blazers are Christian – without any idea of what Christian means.

As the young Leila Berg grows older, her comprehension grows but the world

remains essentially unexplained and unreasonable and is still seen in small snapshots.

By her teen years I was eager to move on. The book's format, with these small, often unconnected, observations, wearied me. When would a more complete narrative appear? Leila Berg may have seen the world that way, perhaps we all do, but I was longing for facts, rounded characters and explanations in this book – as much as the child wanted them in her life. The passing references to Mancunian bookshops and theatres left me wanting traditional forms of writing all the more.

Towards the end we had a little near-narrative, describing the activities and personal life of the teenage Young Communist Berg. Her first two lovers were killed in the Spanish Civil War. Her next lover was careless, leading to an illegal abortion. She then bedded a succession of other Young Communists, all of whom wanted to marry her at once (aha, so sexual intercourse did not start in the '60s) and that was that.

I regret that I found Flickerbook curiously unsatisfying. Leila Berg has lived through interesting times, and took part in them. Sorry to be a fuddy-duddy, but if you are reading this Leila – just tell us the story.

Ross Bradshaw

**Why is this lonely
hearts advert
different from any
other?**

**We're looking for
Jewish children to join
ours (under 5s) to form
an East End cheder.**

**Phone John or Merav
on 0181-980 3710.**

Lasting impressions

**Stanislaw Brunstein:
a retrospective exhibition**
12 March-25 April, Sternberg
Centre, London

There are now countless books about the destruction of European Jewry and they continue to run off the presses. In recent years there have been plays and films focusing on particular episodes of the genocide and a growing number of museums and exhibitions describing the process of slaughter. All give rise to an enormous sense of loss. We are left wondering just what would have become not only of the individuals cut down in their prime, but of those who had hardly had the chance to live, who stemmed from the vibrant and creative Jewish communities of Eastern Europe.

Only rarely though do we get a real glimpse of the life they lived before the Nazi invasion. Stanislaw Brunstein grew up in Warsaw, in the newly independent Poland between the wars. He left to study painting at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris but returned to the maelstrom of late 1930s Poland. He survived the Nazi onslaught from the west only to be captured and imprisoned by the Soviets who carved huge chunks out of Poland from the east. By the end of the war there was hardly anything left of the Poland he knew.

He arrived in Britain in 1946 with little but his memories. But these were the wellspring of his extraordinary artistic activity. Even in the late 1980s he was conjuring up scenes of the Polish street markets of his youth and the characters of the shtetl – the water carrier, the farmer with his cow, the barrow boy, the beggar. He conveys their characters as much through their posture as by their facial expressions. Brunstein died in 1994. His retrospective exhibition is truly a celebration of Jewish life in all its complexity and in some cases its simplicity, before the destruction. Often at Holocaust memorial gatherings we are told never to forget that six million of our people died. This exhibition reminds us that these people lived.

His use of colour is striking. Blues and greens, reds and browns predominate. Even where the mood is sombre and the subject matter grim – Mother and Son (1974), or Grief (1984), he blends



in the brightest colours to bring out an intense warmth amid sadness. Equally, the characters in his more contented pictures – Taking a Stroll (1987) or Barmitzvah (1963) – are burdened with a sense of unease. In the busy Street Market in Poland (1987) the disconsolate expressions of the people contrast with the richness of the colours he uses. Above his people the sky is rarely uniform. The blue sky is often giving way to dark grey clouds, heavy with foreboding.

Many of his strongest paintings illustrate everyday life in the marketplace, in the streets and in open fields. Even with

a single character in focus he can convey a sense of community and continuity of life. The simple buildings of the shtetl are ever present and he contorts their shape to increase the sense of oneness between people and their environment, especially in Purim (1976) and Singer of his Sorrow (1948).

Some paintings transcend this community and touch on more general themes. On the Move (1987) shows a middle-aged couple with a tiny bundle of belongings on the back of a horse-drawn carriage, leaving behind their home and their community. A few years after it was painted a hauntingly similar scene appeared on our

Facing page: Self-portrait.
Left: Studying. Below: On the move.



TV screens. Bosnian refugees were 'on the move'. Similarly with Homeless (1990), the child with ragged clothes crouched in a doorway, peering up suspiciously, feels disturbingly close to home in London in 1997.

Brunstein's most intense paintings are those recording his incarceration by the Soviets. In Vorkuta II (1965) you cannot discern any features on the faces of the inmates at this forced labour camp inside the Arctic Circle. They are at their lowest point of dehumanisation. In Solitary Confinement (1970), the Stalin look-alike guard, complete with medals, blends in with the wall of his cell. The searchlight beaming on the prisoner's dejected face cuts across the natural shaft of light through the cell window. In this picture the window is at the centre. Windows seem more incidental in many others yet they are there and seem to represent a chink of hope in dire circumstances.

The intensity is relieved in his water colour and pen pictures. Here, character types take on the form more of caricatures. In Vegetable People (1960) he responds to six distinctive shapes and postures among people he has observed, providing them with suitable names such as 'Galiceaner heymishe cucumber'. On the occasions I met Stanislaw Brunstein, I was very aware of how his humour was suffused with irony. This is well illustrated in his pen drawings such as Conversation! where the participants won't face each other and Having an Argument where the participants stare and talk past each other.

He was a careful observer of human relations and emotions but he could also reflect on his own. Some of his self-portraits show an unsettled man somewhat ill at ease with his surroundings. This is most graphic in the Artist and his Tailor. From one body the artist's profile looks up with joy at the work he is creating on his canvas while at the same time the tailor's worried profile looks down at the tailor's dummy and the tools of his trade as he gets to work to make his living.

Although Brunstein had several sole exhibitions of his work and contributed to exhibits elsewhere he rarely enjoyed the wider appreciation in the community that his work merited. This is a wonderful and very moving exhibition. Apparently the history of the Holocaust is now available on CD ROM but, as the saying goes, 'Life is with people'. Stanislaw Brunstein introduces us to these people and succeeds in etching them into our memory just as surely as they were etched into his.

David Rosenberg