

BOOK REVIEWS

Man and God: Studies in Biblical Theology, by ELIEZER BERKOVITS (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969).

Reviewed by
Shnayer Z. Leiman

In the eighteenth letter of his *Nineteen Letters*, Samson Raphael Hirsch issued a clarion call for the renewed study of Scripture, Talmud, and Midrash. He urged that the texts be read and studied "in order to live by them; to draw from them the teachings of Judaism concerning God, the world, mankind and Israel, according to history and precept; to know Judaism out of itself; to learn from its own utterances its wisdom of life."¹ Regarding Scripture and Talmud, Hirsch had more to say:

The beginning should be made with the Bible. Its language should first be understood, and then, out of the spirit of the language, the spirit of the speakers therein should be inferred. The Bible should not be studied as an interesting object of philological or antiquarian research, or as a basis for theories of taste, or for amusement. It should be studied as a foundation of a new science. Nature should be contemplated with the spirit of David; history should be perceived

with the ear of an Isaiah, and then, with the eye thus aroused, with the ear thus opened, the doctrine of God, world, man, Israel and Torah should be drawn from the Bible, and should become an idea, or system of ideas, fully comprehended. It is in this spirit that the Talmud should be studied. We should search in the Halakhah only for further elucidation and amplification of those ideas we already know from the Bible.²

Not surprisingly, Hirsch's plea fell on deaf ears; his dream was never realized. Only Jews committed to the teachings of the Written and Oral Torah could take Hirsch seriously—and in the century and a half following the publication of his *Nineteen Letters*, their every effort was devoted to survival—physical and spiritual. What little intellectual energy modern Orthodoxy could muster was spent on talmudic and halakhic study (in a valiant effort to maintain the excellence of East European Torah scholarship) and on popular expositions of Judaism (to render Judaism meaningful in an increasingly secular age). Other areas of Jew-

ish scholarship suffered mostly from neglect. Thus, seventy years of the twentieth century have elapsed with no Jew having issued an original, comprehensive commentary on all or most of Scripture. No Abarbanel, no Malbim in this century. This is not to demean the contribution of twentieth century Jewish Biblical scholars such as Arnold B. Ehrlich, Max Margolis, Ezekiel Kauffmann, and E. A. Speiser; any new philological commentary on Scripture, if at all meaningful, must take into account their insight into the plain sense of Scripture. Just as Rashi, Ramban, and Abarbanel marshalled whatever evidence was available in their day, whether linguistic,³ archaeological,⁴ or outright borrowings from Christian exegetes,⁵ so too the modern Jewish exegete must bring to bear on Scripture the vast historical, philological, and archaeological evidence uncovered by modern scholarship.⁶

This and more. For the Biblical student envisioned by Hirsch studies the texts "in order to live by them; to draw from them the teachings of Judaism concerning God, the world, mankind and Israel . . ." The primary task of the Jewish exegete, then, goes beyond explaining the plain sense of the Biblical text. It is rather to abstract a theology of Judaism from the sacred texts, one which will serve the Jew as a guide for reflection and practice. The frequent "Torah teaches you proper conduct" in Talmud and Rashi, the moral lessons or *toaliyoth* of Ralbag are as essential to Jewish exegesis as they are conspicuously absent from modern

Biblical commentaries. No Abarbanel, no Malbim, in this century.

In the light of the above, the timely significance of Dr. Berkovits' *Man and God* can be seen in proper perspective. Here indeed is a Hirschian Biblical theology, *i.e.*, a modern attempt to abstract theological notions "out of the Bible itself, to learn from its own utterances its wisdom of life." The volume is essentially a dialogue between Berkovits and Scripture. No recourse to history, philology, or archaeology here; only rarely does the author invoke the name of a contemporary Protestant Biblical scholar (even then, mostly for polemical purposes), less frequently does the name of a medieval Jewish commentator cross his lips (Ibn Ezra and Ramban are each mentioned once; Abarbanel and Malbim do not appear). Therein rest the volume's many strengths and its only weakness. Its strengths: a fertile mind, unfettered and unencumbered by the findings of the past 1,000 years of Biblical scholarship, pitted against the most fertile and unwieldy of books. Berkovits' vision is clear, and he sees much that others have not seen. The volume provides a welcome breath of fresh air and serves as a reminder to all that the pedantic concerns with Lower Criticism and literary analysis must give way to a far more fruitful and significant aspect of Biblical study—an understanding of Biblical teaching. Moreover, the volume proves once again that the cumulative scholarship of preceding generations has by no means exhausted what needs to be said concerning even the most elementary

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teachings of Scripture. Most important, Dr. Berkovits' approach to Scripture reminds us how the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* went about studying the Book of Books, and proves that two millennia later, their exegetical approach has not exhausted its usefulness. Like Ben Azzai,⁷ the author "joins passages from the Torah with parallel passages in the Prophets, and passages in the Prophets with parallel passages in the Hagiographa; and the words of the Torah glow as on the day they were given at Sinai."⁸ Nor does Berkovits choose his Biblical passages at random. On the contrary, his citations are carefully chosen, his elucidatory comments well thought out. He anticipates his critic by explaining away (though not always, and sometimes tortuously) those verses which militate against his proposed interpretation.

Berkovits' approach to Scripture is that of a Jewish Socrates. The author's philosophical disposition and terminology are everywhere evident. By posing some very basic questions, Berkovits quickly makes the reader aware of his own ignorance. Some of the issues that he raises, and explores in depth, are:

- 1) What does the phrase "I am the Lord (*ani ha-shem*)"⁹ signify?
- 2) What does the phrase "I am the Lord your God (*ani ha-shem e-lohekhem*)"¹⁰ signify?
- 3) Why are these phrases tacked on to certain verses in Scripture and not to others?
- 4) In conjunction with God or man, what do the terms *kedushah*, *mishpat*, *zedakah*, *emeth*, and *emunah* signify?

Berkovits proves quite convincingly

that the conventional renderings of these terms have not done justice to the meanings intended by the Biblical authors. He then offers his own interpretations of the terms listed above. Often, these are striking in their originality and aptness. It is not always apparent, however, that *all* of the author's interpretations do justice to Hebrew Scripture. And this brings us to what in this reviewer's eyes is the volume's only weakness.

If Berkovits' independence from all those who preceded him enabled him to see more than many students of the Bible, it also, on occasion, obstructed his vision. For the traditional Jewish exegetes often use the same method as Berkovits to solve the very issues he raises. Occasionally, they anticipate his conclusions (thus rendering them superfluous);¹¹ more often, they arrive at conclusions that differ considerably from his (indicating that the evidence does not point in only one direction).¹² Moreover, some of the terms investigated by Berkovits have received extensive treatment by contemporary scholars—Jew and Gentile—whose exhaustive studies take into account both Biblical and extra-Biblical evidence. The latter often sheds much light on otherwise ambiguous passages in Scripture.¹³ Berkovits has limited himself to an in-depth investigation of the primary source, *i.e.*, Scripture. However penetrating his analysis of Scripture—and it is indeed penetrating—it is only a beginning. The scholar, after investigating the primary sources and arriving at his conclusions, must test those conclusions against the sec-

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ondary sources, by which I mean the traditional Jewish translations and medieval commentaries, and the findings of modern scholarship. Such a test enables the scholar to determine:

- 1) Whether or not he has gathered all the evidence others have gathered.
- 2) Whether or not he has introduced new evidence.
- 3) How others have construed the evidence.
- 4) Whether or not he has properly evaluated the evidence.

If Berkovits did test *all* his conclusions against those of the secondary sources (and simply dismissed the latter out of hand) it was not apparent to this reviewer. As indicated above, no new Jewish commentary on Scripture, whether

philological or theological,¹⁴ can afford to ignore the contributions of medieval and modern scholarship.

Aside from its analysis of the terms mentioned above, Dr. Berkovits' volume is replete with novel interpretations of stray Biblical passages.¹⁵ Indeed, it is a veritable encyclopedia of Biblical interpretation. Hopefully, Dr. Berkovits will continue to publish studies in Biblical theology. The serious study of Scripture and Jewish theology can ill-afford to lose his leadership and patronage. Perhaps *Man and God* will initiate among observant Jews the long overdue renaissance of Biblical study envisioned almost 150 years ago by Samson Raphael Hirsch.

NOTES

1. *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism*, Bernard Drachman translation revised by Jacob Breuer, N. Y., 1960, p. 127.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. Rashi frequently cites Semitic and even some non-Semitic languages. These include Aramaic (e.g., see comment on Num. 5:2), Arabic (Gen. 30:14), Persian (Deut. 21:14), Greek (Gen. 35:8), and Latin (Gen. 42:21). Often, but not always, Rashi drew his comparative linguistic comments from talmudic and midrashic literature. For Rashi as a linguist, see J. Pereira-Mendoza, *Rashi as Philologist*, Manchester University Press, 1940.

Ramban probably surpassed Rashi as a linguist; his obvious mastery of Aramaic (Deut. 21:14) and Arabic (Gen. 43:20) and his familiarity with Greek (Ex. 12:12) and Latin (Ex. 30:23) reflect his thirteenth century Judaeo-Spanish cultural background. On Ramban's considerable linguistic talent, see M. Moresheth, "Ramban ke-Balshan," *Sinai* 60 (1967) 193-210.

4. See, for example, Ramban, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. Chavel, vol. 2, p. 507, where he offers a detailed description of inscribed Judaeo-Spanish *shekel* and *half shekel* weights he examined at Acre (modern archaeologists have yet to discover exact parallels to the weights described by Ramban), which he then

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adduces in support of Rashi's comment on Ex. 21:32. Cf. Ramban's comment on Gen. 35:16, where he mentions that he measured the distance from Rachel's Tomb to Bethlehem, and adduces that measurement in support of Rashi's interpretation of Gen. 35:16.

5. See Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Early Prophets* (ed. Jerusalem, 1955), p. 520, who after citing the opinions of both Jewish and Christian exegetes, adds: "Truthfully, I find their [the Christians'] interpretation more satisfying than all the interpretations of the aforementioned Jewish scholars."

6. A parade example of the contribution of modern archaeology to the understanding of Scripture is the heretofore enigmatic *pim* mentioned in 1 Sam. 13:21. Targum, Rashi, Radak, and most commentators considered it a derivative of *peh* "mouth, edge" and rendered it either nominally "a tool used for sharpening, a file," or adjectively "sharp edged, many toothed." Since the plural of *peh* never takes the masculine form, the forced nature of their interpretations was evident. Today, the meaning of *pim* is beyond dispute. Archaeologists have discovered numerous weights, each weighing about 8 grams, and inscribed with the word *pim*. Such weights were commonly used to weigh precious metals used for legal payment. Clearly, 1 Sam. 13:21 is to be rendered: "And the charge was a *pim* for the ploughshares . . ." For discussion and photographs, see D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (Harper Torchbooks), pp. 227-230; for the etymological history of *pim*, see E. A. Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, pp. 156-159.

The above rendering of 1 Sam. 13:21 appeared in the 1917 Jewish Publication Society translation of Hebrew Scripture and, since then, has been taken into all subsequent translations. Yet many who teach the Book of Samuel remain unaware of the new evidence bearing on its interpretation. Not having been properly trained by their own instructors, many Jewish teachers are not prepared to cope with the findings of modern Biblical scholarship. Because of their unpreparedness, they inadvertently and perforce misinform their students or withhold information crucial for the proper understanding of Scripture. Teachers, I suppose, can hardly be held responsible for their ignorance of a discipline they were never taught and to which they have little or no access. It is somewhat more difficult to be a *melammed zekhuth* for modern Jewish Biblical commentators who choose to ignore archaeological evidence (such as Rabbi C. D. Rabinowitz, *Daath Soferim: Shmuel, ad. loc.*). It is the commentator's task to present a sovereign interpretation of Scripture, *based upon all the available evidence*, which can then serve those less expert than himself—i.e., teachers and students—as a guide to the understanding and interpretation of Scripture. By neglecting the findings of twentieth century Biblical scholarship (based upon the many writings and artifacts discovered in this century such as the vast Ugaritic literature; Hittite, Sumerian, and Akkadian law codes; annals of the Assyrian and Chaldean kings describing the fall of Israel and Judea; the Dead Sea Scrolls, etc.), the commentator does not avail himself of *all* the evidence and performs a disservice to the cause of Jewish education.

7. Ben Azzai, like his illustrious colleagues, was a Biblical concordance incarnate. Moderns have recourse to the printed concordance which, if more

systematic, has also proven less productive for popular Biblical study. Few Jews own concordances, still fewer use them. And knowledge of the fact that the printed concordance is available when needed prevents the few who occasionally use it from committing Scripture to memory. Since, however, it is apparent that students are not about to commit Scripture to memory, and that the printed concordance is here to stay, yeshivah high schools would perhaps do well to initiate students into its proper and habitual use.

8. *Vayyikra Rabbah* 16:4. For *samehin* = glow, see H. L. Ginsberg, "Lexicographical Notes," in *Hebräische Wortforschung* (Walter Baumgartner Festschrift), p. 72.

9. E.g., Lev. 18:5.

10. E.g., Lev. 19:3.

11. See, for example, Berkovits' accounting for "I am the Lord" in Ex. 6:8 (pp. 39-40) and cf. Ibn Ezra's closing comment and the comments of R. Bahaya and Ralbag, *ad loc.*

12. See, for example, the comments of R. Bahaya, Abarbanel, Alshikh, and Malbim to Leviticus, Chapters 18 and 19. All ask, as does Berkovits, why "I am the Lord" and "I am the Lord your God" appear as tags to specific verses in these chapters; none arrive at his conclusions.

Again, Berkovits has great difficulty with the conventional renderings of Deut. 6:25 "and it shall be *zedakah* unto us." Berkovits states "we doubt that anyone is able to associate any good meaning with the statement that such a practice of doing God's commandments will be *s'daqah* unto the one who pursues it" (p. 298). One need merely glance at a host of translators and commentators from Targum to Rabbi David Hoffmann in order to list Jewish exegetes who associate a very "good meaning" with *zedakah*, i.e., *merit*—a meaning more persuasive than that proffered by Berkovits. So too *zedakah* at Gen. 15:6; cf. Targum, Rashi, and Sforno, *ad loc.* as against Berkovits' gratuitous interpretation on p. 296. This is not to deny that the range of *zedakah* includes many of the nuances suggested by Berkovits; but in the instances listed above, I found his interpretations unconvincing.

13. Cf. note 6. In the light of the extra-Biblical evidence, Berkovits' interpretation of Judges 11 (p. 29) seems highly unlikely. He suggests that it was meaningful to speak to Ammonites about a transcendent Y-wh because they too recognized a Supreme God who ruled over all men, while Chemosh was merely a national-mediatory god of the Ammonites. But the Moabite Stone—an ancient Moabite inscription discovered in 1868 which commemorates King Mesha's victory over Israel—indicates otherwise. In it, Chemosh and Y-wh are depicted as rivals; Mesha tells how he dragged the vessels (?) of Y-wh before Chemosh. Clearly, it would not have been meaningful to speak to the Moabites, or to their Ammonite neighbors, of Y-wh as a transcendent supreme judge of the universe. For extensive discussion of the Moabite Stone and bibliography, see H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, vol. 2, pp. 168-179; for a convenient English translation of the text, and photograph, see D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, pp. 195-199.

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Similarly, Berkovits' discussion of *shafat* (p. 231 ff.) and his attempt to explain why the Judges were called *shofetim* (p. 234) would have benefited much from numerous earlier studies treating the primary sense, and range of meaning, of *shafat* in ancient Semitic languages. Cf. the brief summary in E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Anchor Bible), comment on Gen. 18:25, p. 134. Berkovits' discussion of "*hesed* and *emeth*" (p. 285 ff.) has been anticipated by others; the phrase has been correctly identified as a hendiadys (a single thought expressed by two words connected by "and"). Here too, cf. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, comment on Gen. 24:27, p. 180.

14. This is especially true if the theological argument is grounded in philological theory, as in Berkovits' volume. While poor philological theory need not necessarily yield poor theology (cf. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, p. 6), a weak philological foundation often pulls the rug out from under the feet of—and sometimes topples—an otherwise sturdy theological structure. Not a few of Samson Raphael Hirsch's pupils rejected his theological teaching *in toto* or in part when they discovered that its linguistic underpinnings had no real basis in the linguistic science developed by nineteenth and twentieth century philologists. See K. Kohler, *Personal Reminiscences of My Early Life*, p. 8; cf. R. Kirchheim, *Die neue Exegetenschule*, *passim*.

15. Berkovits' argumentation for, and clever rendering of, Prov. 30:9b "or lest I be poor, and steal, and *usurp* the name of my God" (p. 97) is typical.

After the Tradition — Essays on Modern Jewish Writing, by
ROBERT ALTER (E. P. Dutton & Co., 1969).

Reviewed by Wilhelm Braun

These fifteen eminently readable essays written during the Sixties by a critic who is both learned in Jewish matters and familiar with American and Israeli literature offer careful literary evaluations of a number of important contemporary Jewish authors. They are also a series of experiments assaying the "authentic Jewishness" in which the author reveals how profoundly these writers, though steeped in secular cultures, have conveyed the insights that their people have lived by.

Rarely can Jewish writers be fair to Jewish themes in their work. Because of ignorance or aversion, or from sympathy and enthusiasm, they tend to misinterpret or inflate their heritage. For example, Mr. Alter censures Leslie Fiedler for inflating the Biblical Joseph into a Jewish vendor and interpreter of dreams, an archetype of the poet and therapist, while on the other hand, he commends Kafka's tortuous world where moral obligations so often seem to derive from distant and unreachable authorities as the more authentically Jewish formulation of a spiritual problem.

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If we carefully analyze American fiction we will find that most Jewish characters do not stand up under objective scrutiny. They turn out to be weird and unnatural, embodying fantasies with which Americans endow Jews, which Jewish writers have about themselves. Far more serious in their denial of Jewish tradition are the apocalyptic wasteland novels so prevalent on bookstands. They are contrasted with a courageous engagement in history demanded by the prophets that would be in keeping with tradition.

The second group of essays, the heart of the collection, is devoted to four major writers, who, in their works, have interpreted tradition with greater sensitivity. Bellow's rejection of the Jew as the archetype of modern, alienated man and his repudiation of barren philosophical abstractions in favor of a more genuinely Jewish sense of beholding the particular qualities of a person that make up his individuality, is put alongside an appreciation of Malamud's *shlemiels*, imprisoned as they are by their ineptitude, or their Jewishness, or by both. For Malamud's central metaphor, the prison, whether an actual or figurative one, is the image of moral life with all its imponderable obstacles to immediate self-fulfillment.

Agnon's East-European world and Elie Wiesel's vision of the ho-

locaust render tradition more authentically, not only because of their background or their stories' locale, but because of certain qualities inherent in their threatening and often destructive atmosphere. Agnon preserves a sense of continuity with the past through his classical Hebrew in which a hundred generations have studied and prayed; his language helps him to retain his grip on the spiritual visions of the ages and thus becomes a safeguard against a possible loss of faith. Elie Wiesel, himself a victim and survivor of the holocaust, preserves a modicum of hope with values derived from his own Hassidic masters who taught him that man, though a pathetically finite creature, can yet loosen the chains of the Messiah by his active commitment in the lives of other men.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book are the six essays on the Israeli literary scene. They open up new vistas, presenting the work of exciting poets and novelists who grapple with the problems of a reborn literature, trying to give expression to a new society. Among the younger writers who are unjustly neglected in this country are such fine novelists who present the serious problems of contemporary Israel. The honesty, integrity and intelligence of their work gives us hope that tradition will yet be redeemed.

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A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry, edited by IRVING HOWE and ELIEZER GREENBERG (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969).

Reviewed by Ruth Wisse

Poetry, in any modern language, is hardly the favored mode of communication. Modern Yiddish poetry is clearly at several added disadvantages. The decline in the spoken language has led to a generation that understands almost no Yiddish, and contrary to popular belief, familiarity with Rosten's *Joys* will not make up the loss. Even among those whose cultural life is conducted in Yiddish, there is a pronounced and long-standing preference for works of ideas rather than sensibility, and an almost total absence of formal schooling in the language, without which so much of modern poetry would be incomprehensible. How many readers have come to T. S. Eliot or even William Carlos Williams without benefit of a college course in English? By contrast, few readers of Yiddish have had even grade school training in the language and its literature, and it is little wonder that the subtleties of Sutzkever and Leyeles are little to their taste.

Luckily, the Yiddish poets have

not been guided by statistical inquiries into the quantitative and qualitative standing of their readership. They have fashioned, within the past sixty years, a body of literature that may be the most remarkable cultural achievement of Jews in modern times, second only to the renaissance of spoken Hebrew. If someone doubts this claim, let him confront the available evidence.

For those satisfied with proofs at second hand, there is at last an English anthology to introduce the range and power of the subject. *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* has the merit of good translators and intelligent editors, a combination that sets this book apart from most of its predecessors.* Because of the difficulty of rendering adequately the older Yiddish poetry, such pioneers as Ettinger, Peretz, and Frug have been omitted, and the concentration is heavily modern. The unexplained omission of bilingual poets, like Bialik and Katsenelson and Uri Tsvi Greenberg is an odd and more serious lacuna. But most of the major modern poets have been

* Joseph Leftwich's *The Golden Peacock*, (New York, 1961) is a highly ambitious compendium, with lines like the following: "I was not in Treblinka/And in Maidanek, not/But I stand on their threshold/Very near the spot;" magnificent Leivik reduced to maudlin, even faulty English. Of the other three volumes, Ruth Whitman's *Anthology of Modern Yiddish Poetry* (New York, 1966); Jehiel and Sarah Cooperman's *America in Yiddish Poetry*, (New York, 1967); and Sarah Zweig Betsky's *Onions and Cucumbers and Plums*, (Detroit, 1958), the latter is by far the best. It has fortunately been reissued in the Granger Index Reprint Series, 1969.

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included, and in works that fairly represent their styles and concerns.

This anthology attempts to strike a balance between poems of a national character and those of personal, idiosyncratic perception, although, as the editors in their excellent introduction conclude, it is often difficult to distinguish the two:

Individual poets rebel against the domination of the national-social theme . . . They seek desperately to assert their own voices, their own temperaments and moods; they insist upon the right to shake off the burdens of the folk and the curse of history so that they may sing or speak as solitaires . . . Yet the very need for reiterating their wish for individual sensibility testifies to the power and persistence of the burden of collective fate. In the end the luxury of choice is denied them, and almost every poet, nationalist or aesthete, radical or believer, must turn back to the tragedy of our age.

The modern Jewish experience is everywhere reflected. The consuming poverty which was so long the very ground of Jewish life finds voice in many poems, in the terrible irony of Morris Rosenfeld's "Earth," written at the death of his son; in Chaim Grade's portrait of his mother, an apple-woman of the Vilno marketplace; in Berish Weinstein's "Hunger": "Those warm doors with the smell of broiling meat are driving me crazy. / The hot steam of cooking insults my nostrils. / I can smell bread baking through the frost-thick windows." The nostalgia for the past—though more often for the early days of the lower East Side than for the latter days of the *shtetl*—is along-

side the raw joy of release from its bondage. Itsik Feffer exults:

The sun has blessedly bronzed my
body,
My life is all battles and songs of
fame;
It really breaks me up to remember
That I carry some famous rabbi's
name.

Mani Leib writes a pained sonnet "To a Gentile Poet," in which he compares the enviable "Heir of Shakespeare" with his own useless loneliness. But the same ongoing clash of cultures is differently resolved in Glanz-Leyeles' mighty confrontation between "Isaiah and Homer":

Homer — a field of brightness, a
forest of fragrance;
Royal stags roam there; gently,
birds rise higher;
Young lambs leap to the singing
of green earth;
But heaven's own eye is Isaiah.

Over the entire book hovers "the tragedy of our age," and especially the tragedy of the *churban*. For H. Leivick, both Job and Isaac, the classical symbols of Jewish suffering, have been preempted. The spokesman for the holocaust's victims is the sacrificial sheep who asks Isaac accusingly: "And my throat. May *it* be cut?" Instead of denying the image of sheep led to the slaughter, which has been the tendency of Jewish apologetics, Leivick insists on its sanctity, arguing that the animal slaughtered in Isaac's stead is a more accurate poetic correlative for the Jewish experience than the boy so miraculously saved.

Perhaps because it was conceived

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and compiled in America, the volume favors the American-Yiddish poets. Moishe Leib Halpern's is probably the single strongest voice in the anthology, in part because of the superb translations by John Hollander, but no less because of the acerbic modernity of Halpern himself. His poem, "The Bird," a kind of Jewish immigrant's parody of the native "The Raven," is still one of the most timely pieces in the Yiddish repertoire, a coarse, biting restatement of the ever-"relevant" question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Halpern's anti-romantic bite is at its sharpest in "My Home, Zlotchev," a poem that redeems once and for all time the saccharine longing for "*Mine Shtetele Belz*":

Yet the world is a wonderful thing.
With a horse and wagon over a
field
We dragged ourselves to a train
That flies like a demon over the
land
Till it reaches a steerage that goes
To downtown New York —
This is the only solace to me:
That I won't be buried in thee —
My home, Zlotchev.

The volume would be welcome if for no more than the twelve poems of Halpern, in the best English translation they have so far received.

Ultimately and inevitably, however, the reader must be warned against taking the shadow for the original. Though the translations are generally accurate and sensitive, they are not always "poetic" and sometimes sacrifice more than they include of the original. The editors explain some of the difficulties in their introduction, but a specific

example, a little *piut* from Jacob Glatstein's holocaust liturgy, may demonstrate the problem. The eight-line poem is called *Roykh* — Smoke:

From the crematory flue
A Jew aspires to the Holy One.
And when the smoke of him is
gone,
His wife and children filter
through.

Above us, in the height of sky
Saintly billows weep and wait.
God, wherever you may be,
There all as us are also not.

Chana Faerstein's translation captures the haunting paradox of the final couplet, but the entire framework of the original is lost. In Yiddish, the poem reads:

*Durkhn krematories koymen
kroyzt aroyf a yid tsum atik
yoymin.
Un vi nor der roykh farkhvint
knoyln aroyf zayn vayb un kind.*

*Un oybn in di himlishe hoykhn
vaenen, benken heylike roykhn.
Got, dort vu du bisto
Dortn zaynen mir ale oykh nishto.*

The prominent weight given to the lamenting *oy* and *ay* diphthongs is hardly manageable in English. But even in terms of meaning, Glatstein's use of the term *atik yoymin* as a synonym for God has overtones that the English does not, and probably could not catch. The term, "Ancient of Days" refers to the apocalyptic deity of Daniel (7:22) who will reign after the fourth beast has devoured the entire earth. Glatstein's Jew circles upward in a puff of crematorium smoke to the God who reigns after the ultimate

destruction. *Got*, the Jewish God of Yiddish prayer and history, has been replaced by this new divinity. In the English, Holy One and God are one and the same, but the irony of the Yiddish is absolute: for the Jew going up in smoke the fourth beast has already come.

There are many questions that could be raised about the principles of selection. Abraham Sutzkever, for example, is inadequately represented, as are the Soviet Yiddish poets whose most poignant and mature works are not given. In fact, the choice of poems from the works of Markish, Hofstein, and Kvitko does some injustice to the considerable talents of these men. But these are minor objections as compared to the major achievement of the whole.

Many recent anthologies have tried to mediate between the language of the original and the language of translation by providing transliterations, linguistic commentaries to explain untranslatable technical plays, or both. Howe and Greenberg have compiled an old-fashioned treasury, without so much as originals on a facing page. The introduction sets each of the poets within his proper geographic and poetic background, but otherwise the poems stand quite alone, without recourse to biographic or bibliographic support. Yiddish readers will make the kind of comparisons and judgments that I do, but the anthology is for those who have no access to the original, and for them there is surely enough, which is as good as a feast.

Messengers from the Dead: Literature of the Holocaust, by IRVING HALPERN (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

Reviewed by Herbert Cohen

Messengers from the Dead is a slim volume of literary criticism of books on the holocaust. The title refers to those authors who in their narratives "bear witness" to this cataclysmic event in Jewish history. Its unique contribution is twofold: firstly, it considers the writings of several holocaust writers in one small volume; and, secondly, it analyzes works which previously have received little critical attention. Among the ones discussed are Viktor Frankl's *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, Primo Levi's *If*

This Is a Man, Chaim Kaplan's *Scroll of Agony*, and the novels of Elie Wiesel. It is regrettable that Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* is not considered.

The purpose of the study, according to Mr. Halpern, is to attempt to understand the incomprehensible through looking at eyewitness accounts, diaries, and fiction in English dealing with aspects of the holocaust. Although it is important to remember the event, the author feels that there are no ready answers to the many problems it poses for the man of faith.

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The Royal Reach, by NORMAN LAMM (New York: Feldheim Publishing Co., 1970).

Reviewed by Steven Riskin

"The Orthodox Synagogue in this country must be based on that philosophy of the synagogue as the center of Jewish communal life, as the source that generates Torah education and Sabbath observance, kashruth and charity and good deeds, throughout the entire community." So writes Rabbi Norman Lamm in one of his penetrating and stimulating sermons in *The Royal Reach*, entitled "Why Synagogues Fail."

The sermon, since it has become an accepted aspect of almost every Sabbath and Festival service in the majority of our synagogues, is one of the most obvious methods to be employed by the rabbi in generating Torah education and halakhic observance. Unfortunately, sermons rarely rise above the level of platitude, so that neither do they teach nor do they inspire their listeners to learn. Happily, Norman Lamm's *The Royal Reach*, contains notable exceptions to this rule. Lamm artfully portrays both the timeliness

and the timelessness of Jewish tradition in every one of his fine essays. He clearly proves that the sermon can become a forceful educational tool of intellectual stimulation.

The discourses, while never exhaustive, are nevertheless learned and insightful. Contemporary issues such as Law and Order, the Ethics of Protest and the New Morality are treated together with eternal Jewish problems such as Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism, the Election of Abraham and Love and Law. A picture emerges of a Judaism firmly anchored in our halakhic traditions and yet fully responsive to the new religious dimensions and challenges presently emerging as a result of the open secular society of the Diaspora and the re-creation of the State of Israel.

The Royal Reach has greatly enhanced the status of the sermon. Rabbi and layman alike will benefit from Dr. Lamm's application of eternal Torah truths to the contemporary world.

Hamilchama Al Yerushalayim, by MOSHE NATAN (Otp haz, 1968); *Chasufim Ba Tsariach*, by SHABTAI TEVET (Shocken, 1968).

Reviewed by
Morton J. Summer

The Jewish experience in the twentieth century to a great extent

has been denied to American Jewry, for they in particular have been denied participation in the two major determinants of Jewish fate in our lifetime. The superficial vicari-

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ousness of contributing to Jewish organizations did not etch into our souls the exquisite agonies of either Auschwitz or Jerusalem. Nor were the television cameras substitutes when the time came to put on *tefillin* at the Western Wall after the Six-Day War.

Moshe Natan and Shabtai Tevet have focused on the uniqueness of the Jewish experience—the former in describing the war for Jerusalem, and the latter the tank war in the Sinai and Golan Heights. The charisma of both these books is the serious humanity that predominates the thinking and emotions of Jewish warriors.

In these books the story of the Six-Day war of June 1967, is told through the eyes of the men who fought. The letters to their wives and children reveal their fears and reflect their ultimate bravery. Natan and Tevet interviewed hundreds of soldiers, generals, widows, and parents to elicit indestructible monuments to those who fell. The war through these memoirs is not an in-

comprehensible totality but a series of poignant personal episodes. The rationale for the war is made in apologetic terms—survival. Either fight or die.

Mr. Natan writes:

Those that could not sleep rested and exchanged experiences of that first day of battle. The names of close friends, some wounded, others dead were recalled. It hurt to recall when and how they had died, when and how they had remained at the roadsides. "I thought of my friends," one of the men said, "and in their deaths I saw the face of war. I knew the cruelty of war and felt how hateful this whole business was to me, that I wanted so badly to finish it quickly and return home forever."

Reading through these books reinforces one's belief in the Jewish mystique. The blood and bullets hint at the *Hashgacha Elyona* that guards over Israel.

These two books are must reading for every Jew who wants to be involved in the destiny of Israel.

Book Reviews

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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