

October is the Cruellest Month

T.S. Eliot notwithstanding, October and not April is the cruellest month. Let Eliot have his illusions about April: what does the man who wrote about Bleistein with a cigar know, anyway?

Given the unpredictability of printing schedules, you may be reading this in April and not in October, but I wanted you to know that this October has been both cruel and depressing. First came the news that once again I had been overlooked for the Nobel Prize in literature. Instead, it was given to one Dario Fo, an obscure Italian comic playwright whom no one ever heard of. Do you know anyone who reads Italian? Last year it was given to an obscure Polish female poet whom no one ever heard of. Do you know anyone who reads Polish? To add salt to my wounds, I wasn't even on the short list of finalists—even though, if obscurity is a criterion, I am as obscure as they come.

There is no longer any point in keeping it quiet. It must finally be said clearly and unequivocally: This repeated annual snubbing by the Nobel Committee is motivated by nothing other than anti-Jewish animus. (I have written several strong letters to the Anti-Defamation League about this; for some unexplained reason they never responded.)

Once the Nobel committee set the tone, it was no surprise that this year's Pulitzer Prizes also overlooked me. Nor was this the first time. They have ignored me for the past thirty years. With all the different categories they have, one would think that during all this time I would have qualified for at least one of their prizes. If not non-fiction, then fiction; if not fiction, then poetry; if not poetry, then criticism; if not criticism, then translation. But such is the power of prejudice that not once in the past thirty years have I received any recognition whatsoever. In the future I will not even bother searching the prize lists. It is too depressing.

Even the lesser awards like the National Book Awards and England's Booker Prize have overlooked me once again. Well, one becomes inured to such things. Besides, can one really expect the Brits to give an award to an Orthodox Jew? But the bottom line remains unchanged: I don't stand a chance with any of these people, and we all know the reason.

Just when I was getting over the literary insults, I came across an issue of *Jewish Action* magazine which features on its cover "The Greatest Minds of the Twentieth Century." I opened it eagerly, certain that my name and an annotated bibliography by a suitably sycophantic disciple would be there. It wasn't the Nobel Prize, but it was at least some recognition that would help tide me over this cruel month.

I thumbed the pages carefully. My name was not there.

All these deliberate snubs in one month were a little hard to bear. It was depressing to discover that even a Jewish journal, sponsored by an Orthodox organization, could fall victim to the same kind of prejudice that animates the Nobel Committee. How they could overlook an Orthodox person is beyond me. What other reason can there be for not including me in that select list than the subtle and pernicious influence of a hostile world that now has even penetrated the ranks of the Orthodox to the extent that they have denied me a place among the greatest minds of the twentieth century. But I comfort myself with the knowledge that there is always the twenty-first century

Blind prejudice has even penetrated the world of athletics. I have been playing tennis, for example, all my life. One would think that by now the international rankings would have listed me. But no: I have never even made the world's top 500!

So pervasive is anti-Semitism that even the world of chess, so long dominated by Jews, has fallen victim to its poison. Just today I checked this year's world chess rankings. I am not even in last place.

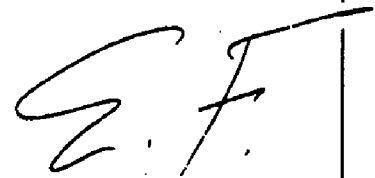
I try not to grow bitter and cynical, and I remind myself that Delacroix never won a prize and Cezanne never sold a picture, but what is one to do after these deliberate snubs in every field of endeavor, year after painful year?

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The Nobels and the Pulitzers and the world rankings might ignore me, but despite them, I am still creative, and an idea has begun to germinate in my mind. I am happy to announce that during this year *Tradition* will institute its own awards (which, like all awards, will of course be coveted). It will be called *The Tradition Prize*, awarded to the most unrecognized talents in the world in every field of human endeavor. There are only two

qualifications: a) applicants must be Jewish; b) applicants must be obscure. (Obscurely Jewish or Jewishly obscure candidates do not qualify.) An unusually large number of candidates is expected.

It is only fair to warn our dear readers that someone is already in the lead for the first year's major award. His name cannot as yet be revealed, but rumor has it that, in keeping with the standards set by Nobel, he is an extremely obscure editor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'E. F.' with a long horizontal stroke extending from the 'F'.

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