

REVIEW ARTICLE

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THE JEW IN FRANCE — IMAGE AND REALITY

The Image of the Jew in French Literature from 1800 to 1908, by MOSES DEBRE (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1970); *The Jewish Element in French Literature*, by CHARLES C. LEHRMAN (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1971); *Aspects of French Jewry*, by GEORGES, BENGUIGUI JOSIANE BIGDOU—ROSENFELD and GEORGE LEVITTE, with an Introductory Essay by OTTO KLINEBERG (London: Valentine & Mitchell, 1969); *Anti-Semite and Jew*, by JEAN PAUL SARTRE (New York: Schocken, 1965).

Despite the global foreign policy of the United States and its universal interest in power blocs throughout the world, the American society maintains an insular attitude regarding its own existence. It still believes that what happens in America is unique and singular, not duplicated anywhere in the world. The Jewish community is also not immune from this disease of insularity. Yes, there is a mild interest in some exotic customs of the Jews of Persia, or Uzbekistan, for example. But there is no *real* curiosity on the part of the average Jew about the fundamental situation of the Jews of those countries, or of England, France, Belgium, Algeria, etc. That is not to

say that there is no sympathy for them or compassion for their difficulties. With generosity of spirit and substance Jews of America have responded time and time again to calls from any part of the world. But these calls are communicated through publicity-ridden agencies whose objective is the collection of a maximum of cash. The response, too, therefore, is an emotional reaction inbred in the Jewish character. Only rarely is there sensitivity to the sociological, psychological, religious, etc. plight of these Jews, how they have solved the problem of their relation to society, and in that society to the world. Since literature is a function of society, and in most cases its

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mirror, often its microscope, through its images a penetrating insight into the problems of the Jew in a particular country can be gained. The books under review provide a brief but illuminating view of the interaction of the Jew and French society. They are refreshing to read and enlightening to ponder. Their appearance in English offers an opportunity for an expanded vision of the Jew in another society.

The history of France is unique because the revolution that took place there was not merely a revolution against foreign domination, as in the United States, but an uprising against the oppressive elements of society—a revolution for the rights of man, for liberty, equality and fraternity. The revolution shook the foundations of world politics and caused philosophical tremors that reverberated for over a century. For the Jew, the history of France is unique because in that country the way was paved for his "pariah people" to enter European society. Napoleon formally asked the Jew if he wished to become part of French society. A certain price of conformity, though, was demanded. The Jew accepted. The underlying theme of French literature in respect to the Jew, therefore, is a debate whether he and France, each, has honoured his part of the social contract. In American literature, the Jew is taken as part of society, be he negatively or positively portrayed, but in French letters he is a distinct party, and there is a philosophical haggling over his transaction with France, which characters in novels

and plays project or express directly or by implication.

And it was in France that the avowed liberal doctrines of the post-revolutionary society were put on trial along with the accused in the celebrated Dreyfus case. The Dreyfus affair tested French society's sincerity, and no one likes his sincerity questioned. As one contemporary author put it through one of his characters,

Yes it is easy to be interested in humanity in general, in the anonymous masses . . . but that is nothing, no, really nothing. Loving your real neighbour, loving those whom you find suffering one fine day here next to you . . . that is love, that is goodness.

These two factors, the revolution and the Dreyfus case, made French literature more acutely aware of the Jewish problem than other literatures. The Jewish characters or creations of the French authors are thus not merely artistic decorations to entertain and embellish, but dramatic assertions of a particular philosophy. They are purveyors of an attempted solution to the problem of the Jew, preachers of a sermon on the Jewish question. That is why Edouard Drumont, the notorious and tragically effective French anti-Semite, could use "the Jew in literature" as an important basis of his anti-Semitic philosophy in his nefarious work *La France Juive*. And that is an additional reason, the holocaust perhaps being the main one, why Sartre, a philosopher, devotes a whole essay to the French anti-Semite. It is part of the tradition of French literature.

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Aspects of French Jewry is mainly a statistical treatment of certain elements of the French-Jewish society. It is, therefore, more scientific than literary. There is an interesting introductory essay by Otto Klineberg that raises the basic questions of how one can measure any aspects of Jewry and how valid the measurements can be. There is the problem of identification, (that old-new bugaboo, "who is a Jew," and this from a scientific point of view!) Then there is the consideration of the influence of such identification upon the lives of the Jews in question, the ties of the Jew to his ethnic group. According to one sociologist, membership in a particular ethnic group means not only a distinctive culture or set of values but a separate social structure. From the cradle in the sectarian hospital, through the fraternity or religious center in college, the friends, the marriage partner, the clubs, the residence, the neighborhood, the church affiliation, the vacation resort, on to the rest home for the elderly, and finally a grave in the sectarian cemetery, the ethnic social structure is maintained. Is this similar to the ties others have with their groups or not? Can Jewry be considered a single group transcending geographical boundaries, or are there French Jews, American Jews, English Jews? A relatively recent survey conducted in Israel (Herman & Schild, 1962) showed that American Jewish students there identify themselves sometimes as Jews and sometimes as Americans, indicating that feelings to some extent vary according

to situations. "This fascinating aspect of Jewish identity," writes Klineberg,

has not yet been adequately explored, except for some interesting research on children, which appears to indicate that members of a minority group like Jews tend to give themselves their ethnic labels earlier in life and with greater frequency than those who belong to the majority.

Are there any characteristics from a statistical point of view that are specifically Jewish? These can only be determined, says Klineberg, by comparison studies with non-Jewish groups. The study of any particular group can reveal typical or specific characteristics only when they can be shown to be more typical and more specific for that group than for others. Whether such characteristics can be or have been demonstrated concerning Jews is still open to debate, claims Klineberg. However, he does admit that some trends are evident (pp. 6-7).

Some years ago I attempted to gather whatever information was available regarding Jewish psychological characteristics. The data at my disposal were almost exclusively from the United States, and they did indicate that certain forms of behaviour differed in relative frequency among Jews and non-Jews. The figures for crime and delinquency in general were low in the case of Jews; there was very little alcoholism, on the other hand the amount of psychoneurosis (though not the more severe forms of psychosis) was relatively high. There was a considerable urban concentration, the large majority of Jews living in cities; there was also a high degree of concentration in certain occupations, such as medi-

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cine dentistry and the laws as well as commerce, but a relatively small proportion in banking (in spite of the stereotype to the contrary). In intelligence tests they are on the average slightly ahead of the general population — but only slightly. They show more sympathy with underprivileged groups, such as Negroes, than does the population as a whole, but not more than certain "liberal Christian" groups such as the Unitarians or the Quakers. Voting studies indicate that they are more frequently to be found at the liberal (and even radical) than at the conservative end of the scale of socio-economic attitudes. There appears to be in general a marked degree of family solidarity; strong motivations toward upward social mobility; a high evaluation of education and learning as well as of the virtues of charity and philanthropy; a deep concern for social justice. Even if all these descriptions are accurate (and they are presented with considerable hesitation) they are true only in the limited sense of occurring somewhat more frequently among Jews than among non-Jews, with a very high degree of overlapping and within the context of the American scene.

Klineberg raises the point that any generalizations about Jews will be subject to limitations and qualifications and that all statements about the Jews will definitely be suspect. This should be kept in mind when reading such things as Sartre's book on anti-Semitism. With Sartre in mind, Klineberg remarks that some writers have raised questions as to whether Jewish identity would persist if there were no anti-Semitism to remind Jews that they are a "distinct people." He opines,

The fact is, that many who could give up their religious identity, re-

fuse to do so. For them the underlying motive must somehow represent something more positive than the refusal of the outside world to accept them completely.

It is interesting to read what this scientist, dealing with studies of groups, conjectures about characteristics he thinks the Jews have and which statistics may find (p. 8):

Perhaps there is something that is essentially Jewish. A concern with human values, the here and now of humanity? A messianic hope of bringing peace and justice to the world? A capacity for suffering and the ability to bring something positive out of the suffering? A spirit of criticism directed against the mass pursuit of pleasure? A focusing of attention on the material realities of existence, sometimes for the purposes of exploitation, sometimes in order to extract from them the highest aesthetic and scientific enjoyment? A feeling of inferiority as a consequence of rejection, and its counterpart, a conviction of superiority over all others? These descriptions and many more can be found in literature. Some of them may contain a degree of truth, but if we are to know how much, we need objective data, facts and, if possible, figures. Until these are available, we must continue to present them with the ubiquitous question mark.

An article in the book deals with the changes which took place in the French Jewish community. Except for some peculiarities due to the influx of Algerian refugees, the changes parallel those which occurred in America. The information has already become trite to American Jews. Compare for example:

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The "well settled" French Jewish groups did not view the massive between-the-war East European immigrant influx favourably . . . Unity of numerous Jewish organizations in France is not possible . . . Thanks to the creation of Israel . . . there is hardly a French Jew who is not pro-Israel . . . Jewish institutions of East European origin and the organizations consecrated to Yiddish and Yiddish culture are stagnating . . . Most Jewish institutions are stressing Jewish education . . . There is a tendency for Jewish organizational efforts to reach but a minority of Jews . . . Once children of East European immigrants found it necessary to struggle to be accepted . . . this is no longer the case. They are no longer satisfied to maintain Jewish traditions handed down to them, they seek to create.

An interesting bit of French history revealed concerns the *Consistoire*. It is the official organization representing French Jewry created by Napoleon I and modified to conform to the separation of Church and State. Because of its historical origins and its official nature, it has considerable influence, despite the absence of certain groupings and the relatively small number of its affiliates. It plays an administrative role with regard to Jewish marriages, burials, and *kashrut* supervision, and chooses the Chief Rabbi of France. It also runs France's official rabbinical school. Until the war, however, it was rather static and frozen. Accordingly, a new central fundraising body (*Fond Social Juif Unité*) was created after the war which is responsible for planning social, cultural and educational activities. Spurred by this rival, the *Consistoire* has also lately undertaken

more communal responsibilities. In France as in America, it seems, history may speak with dignity, but money talks louder and does more!

Another fact, which is of interest from a demographic point of view, is that half of all the Jews in France live in the Paris region. This may seem unusual, until one remembers that two and a half million of the six million Jews of America live in Greater New York.

The rest of the book comprises two statistical studies. One deals with the attitudes of first year University of Paris students and the other with the social integration of Algerian refugees. Despite good introductions explaining methods, treatment, scope, etc., it is difficult for a layman to interpret the materials easily. A good rule for sociologists presenting such studies in a book to be read by laymen is to translate statistical data into ordinary language in a summary. If a pun may be excused, "tables" of statistical fare must be offered in a form "easily digested" by the ordinary layman.

Despite the disturbing clutter of tables, with my lay knowledge of statistics I could gather from the first study there is no great distinction between the students in America and those in France. The majority are not fundamentally religious in belief and practice, and among the minority who are, there are various levels represented. Some interesting differences between *Ashkanazim* and *Sefardim*, boys and girls and differing economic and religious groups, which the survey

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found, are significant, however. An inverse relationship, it was found exists between religious observance and socio-political activity. This is perhaps not so in America, where the activities of the Jewish Defense League and the Students Struggle for Soviet Jewry are led predominantly by Yeshiva students. The ignorance of Jewish culture among students is as abysmally low in France as it is in America. Roughly 70 percent of the students interviewed could not name a Biblical commentator, a Yiddish writer or an Israeli author. But they were all linked to Israel. Also interesting is that among *Ashkanazim* (but not *Sefardim*) there was a correlation between religious practice and cultural knowledge; the more religious the student the more he knew about his culture.

The second study is an attempt to measure the integration of North African Jews into French society. 100,000 Jews came to France from Algeria following that North African country's independence in 1962. An additional 100,000 came from other North African countries but not in such numbers at once. How they fared in their host country is a matter of urgent interest to welfare groups. I must admit that, though this study seemed intricate, exhaustive and detailed, and perhaps because of it, I could not get a picture of the North African immigrants' adjustment to French society. Nor was there a summary of the findings at the end of the study to help. The samples

were very small and the authors continually qualify their conclusions. The difficulty stems from the complete absence of previous data upon which the authors could base their study. They also complain of the problems they had in contacting their statistical universe.

The studies in this book were sponsored by the American Jewish Committee in co-operation with the French Alliance, and paid for with Conference Claims funds.

Moses Debre's *The Image of the Jewish French Literature from 1800 to 1908** and Charles Lehman's *The Jewish Element in French Literature*** are really catalogues of French literary works dealing with Jews or the Jewish problem. Debre's study, which has the distinction of being a pioneering effort, modestly confines itself to representations of Jews in French literature in the nineteenth century. That is the century which followed the revolution and debated the Dreyfus case. The writers are classified into anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic, a logical division in view of the author's purpose. There is a scholarly introduction to the book by Anna Krakowski, Prof. of French Studies at Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women, which takes issue with some of Debre's classifications and indicates some significant omissions from the study. However, the impression I have is that Prof. Krakowski's piece was originally an article on Debre in some critical journal pressed into service as an intro-

*Translated by Gertrude Hirschler, New York, Ktav Publishing Co., 1970.

**Translated by George Klin, Teaneck, Fairleigh Dickenson Press, 1971.

duction by the publisher. This may account for the absence of historical data on the author. Debre's study was first published in 1909 in German. Nothing of this, however, is recorded in the book or the introduction. I found it irritating. Debre may be known in France, but an English speaking reader needs some historical and biographical context.

Lehrman's study, more ambitious than Debre's, as the title suggests, has added the Middle Ages and modern times to the fertile study of nineteenth century Jewish themes. Examining the French writers chronologically from medieval times to the present, Lehrman attempts to trace a Jewish element, a sort of Judaic leavening, that animates sections of French literature. His "catalogue" of French works dealing with Jews and their religion tries to prove its existence. Lehrman maintains there was never a break in the continuity of the Jewish spirit and that it vivifies "the most diverse fields of modern civilization." This spirit, he defines, on the basis of a French sociologist's findings about Jews, as a capacity for "quick thinking" (pp. 16-17):

In ancient times, this disposition gave birth to the Messianic doctrine of the Prophets; transposed to scientific fields, it gave rise to a great many pioneering theories; on the moral plane, these acquired and inherited qualities led the Jews to become champions of justice and reason . . . In this common disposition . . . lies the invisible link among Jews . . .

As one proof of this assertion, Lehrman cites the influence of the

Bible on French literature. This argument has been used by many to prove Jewish influence on Western civilization. It is a specious argument, in my opinion. The fact that a poem or drama by a non-Jewish author has a Biblical theme does not imply the existence of a Jewish element. Though we have given the Bible to the Western world, it is through Christianity and its teachings that the majority of mankind has come in contact with it. As a consequence, interpretations of the Biblical text and implied connotations of cited passages are all coloured by Christian thought and dogma in the literature of the world. It cannot, therefore, honestly be said, as Lehrman argues, that because French has incorporated Biblical phrases into its spoken language it has a Jewish element. Medieval French compilations may contain fables which are similar to those found in the Talmud, but it need not follow that they had been inspired by that Jewish classical work. Nor can dramas of Biblical heroes be said to be inspired by a Jewish element. Lehrman himself notes this objection. Commenting on one such work he admits "it is a discourse, religious and Christian," but then rather lamely defends his thesis by arguing "Christian of course, but that part of Christianity which comes from Judaism." Racine's *Cantiques Spirituels*, his *Esther* and *Athalie* may speak about God and His law, and be filled with the spirit of the Old Testament, but it is through and by Christianity, as the conclusions of these works all indicate, that the author comes to his themes.

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Here, too, though Lehman admits "Racine . . . as a Christian poet . . . interprets . . . in the light of the New Testament," he nevertheless maintains his thesis! Again, in analyzing the pre-occupation of the Romantics with the Bible, Lehrman sees a Jewish element as the cause—a highly dubious thesis. I also was not convinced that Montaigne, because of Jewish blood that ran in his veins through a great grandparent on his mother's side, was inspired in his works by a "Jewish element." One must take Cecil Roth's quoted statement (p. 73)

. . . in the veins of the most exquisitely French of all French writers ran a non-Gallic blood, that this genius who blossomed into maturity on French soil was nourished and vivified by a foreign influence — Semitic — becoming, therefore, more powerful and nimble, without being any of the less French.

or Fortunat Strowski's quoted words,

His (Montaigne's) curiosity was drawn to the four corners of the earth by those relatives (his Jewish ancestors) whose vessels carried merchandise to every sea, while he himself took root on his native soil.

as literary hyperboles.

These arguments of desperation, claiming prominent personalities no matter how remote from Judaism as Jews, are perhaps more typically Jewish than the personalities so ardently investigated. Arguments such as these in Lehrman's study mar what otherwise is a well thought-out, clearly presented work. In my opinion it would have been

more correct to consider the "Jewish element" in French literature as a subject matter with which French writers deal rather than a spiritual element which gave rise to their creations.

Among the pre-revolution writers, Lehrman discusses Bossuet, who limits his prejudices to Biblical Jews by exonerating their descendants from the "crime" of the crucifixion, and Pascal, who cannot forgive the Jews their denial of belief in the Christian saviour though he admires them as a people in all else. Montesquieu's liberalism, which receives high praise, is contrasted with Voltaire's peculiar animosity towards Jews. Lehrman correctly labels Voltaire's historical views on the Jews as rather those "of a pamphleteer than of a conscientious historian." He sketches the biography of this sarcastic genius who preached tolerance to everyone but did not practice it himself. Voltaire, it seems, had some dealings with a French Jewish banker, dealings in which the French writer did not act quite honestly. A court case ensued. As a result, says Lehrman, Voltaire, "characterized by inexhaustible spite . . . persecuted not only his personal enemy but the whole Jewish nation." Shades of Haman! Diderot, another genius of French literature, also nurtured negative sentiments against the Jews. They served as a subtle medium for his argument against Christianity. To Diderot, "the incredulity of the Jews" is a far greater miracle than any of those mentioned in the Gospels. But Lehrman is too forgiving when he says, "Diderot, unlike

Voltaire, does not harbour any personal resentment against the Jews." His works deny it. These two great Frenchmen, who lived in the pre-revolution France, the era of humanitarian preachments, are aptly called by Lehrman "shadows in the Century of Light."

Lehrman devotes one chapter to the Romantics. At the end of the eighteenth century there was a revival of Shakespearean drama. Shylock, who is a prominent character in the English bard's repertoire received a simultaneous awakening. We therefore find Victor Hugo writing a drama "Cromwell," in which the evil traits of the Jewish character, Rabbi Menaseh ben Israel, are magnified to the grotesque proportions of a super-Shylock. The rabbi is a vicious secret agent of Cromwell and spouts such lines as, "To steal from Christians is a meritorious thing." Unsavoury Jews appear in one or two more of Hugo's plays. Lehrman calls attention to the duality of the Romantics, of which Hugo is representative, believing on the one hand in the great revolution, yet on the other adding credibility to anti-Semitic myths which the enlightened previous Classical period had resisted. He considers two factors responsible: the Romantic conception of "historical truth" (myths represent real truth) and the simple desire for popularity another. Lehrman might have added pre-occupation with demonic as a third. This factor is largely responsible for the easy shift from liberal preachment to the Shylockian portrayal of the Jew. It is perhaps not anti-Semitism so much as a fascination with the dark and

mysterious as a source of poetry and art that prompted the Romantics to handle Jews as a medieval legend. For this reason Moses Debre correctly begins his study of the Jewish image with the nineteenth century and Balzac. As he says, "Honore Balzac was the first nineteenth century French author to assign a specific role to the Jews." Instead of myth and Bible, in nineteenth century literature, we encounter "real" Jews. And the best of Debre's and Lehrman's books deals with the nineteenth century, a period in which many prominent French pens artistically dipped into Judaic elements to portray Jewish literary characters.

From Balzac to Zola, the French nineteenth century novel developed with Jews and the Jewish problem liberally exploited. In Balzac's novels the Jewish characters are usually money men. Debre, though admitting that Balzac approaches his Jews with "much human understanding," places him in the category of anti-Semitic writers. Lehrman, though, detects a certain admiration by Balzac of the "grandeur" of the Jews. Money is sought not for itself, or even for what it will buy, but as some abstraction, like power, philosophy or intelligence.

The Jew's alleged paradoxical craving for money and simultaneous disdain of it, described by Balzac, intrigued Sartre. Taking it as a fact, he attributes it to the passion of the Jew for the rational and the abstract, in contrast to the material. Money is his passport to the world. If all material things can be reduced to money, and mon-

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ey itself to nothing, then there are no innate values which can exclude the Jews.

The Dreyfus affair sparked much French creativity involving the Jew. Zola's fearless novels project the philosophy of a new society when the church will disappear. As a result the evil of anti-Semitism will be eradicated. Anatole France thinks that ignorance is the basis of social evils. It must be banished. He is more skeptical of an impending idealistic Utopia than Zola. For both writers the solution of the Jewish problem is complete assimilation. Martin de Gard's *Jean Barois* is, in Lehrman's words, "the most intense literary expression of the Dreyfus affair." Anatole France's skepticism, carried still further, pervades de Gard's novels. The protagonists die disillusioned at their inability to bring a better world. Jacques Lacretelle's *Silbermann*, and its sequel *Le Retour de Silbermann*, represent an example of a sharp turn about by an author who has generous opinions about Jews and then revises them after election to the French Academy.

Lehrman comments at length about the distaff side of his subject. French writers spare the Jewish woman much of the odium they heap upon her brother. Even when she is depicted with vices some redeeming qualities of nobility and generosity are also present. Often she is endowed with a mysterious eroticism. Examples abound. Only Alphonse Daudet could not relent even in this area. Sephora, in *Les Rois en Exil*, is portrayed as a completely unfeeling, immoral woman, who cheats and lies. She

feigns love to bring ruin to a royal monarch, pointedly called King Christian. Some French writers attribute the nobility of the Jewish woman to the fact (rather the alleged fact) that she did not participate in the crucifixion. Balzac seeks the reason in her distant Oriental origin. Heinrich Heine says that the awareness of her people's suffering transfigured her beauty. Sartre invests her with a sexual, sadistic symbolism. Her innocent beauty serves to sharpen the "aura of rape and massacre" that the anti-Semite wishes to create.

A prime asset of Lehrman's study is his focus on the twentieth century. Romain Rolland, says Lehrman, "is the one who best formulates the various tendencies of emancipated Judaism." There are three alternatives: assimilation; a Jewish state; and being "God bearers." The last defines as becoming "the nucleus of a new universal humanity." These alternatives are not mutually exclusive for the Jews as a people. Each applies to a certain grouping of Jews.

In *Jean Christophe*, his most celebrated novel, the author depicts his Jewish characters with perspicacity and ingenuity, but an alert reader can detect evidence of a certain condescension. Lehrman omits or ignores it in his study. Francois Mauriac, too, though contemptuous of prejudices, magnifies some unfavourable traits found among Jewish intellectuals. His personal conduct during the war, however, was always beyond reproach.

Gide describes Marcel Proust as a "camouflage" who masked his Judaism as well as his homosexu-

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ality. Lehrman, analyzing Proust's characters, with precision and sensitivity, concludes that Gide is right. Sartre is treated very sympathetically in Lehrman's book.

Among Jewish French writers immediately before the war Lehrman senses a renewal of cultural and messianic aspirations. The poems of Andre Spire, Henri Franck and Edmond Fleg are a reflection of this spirit.

The war produced mainly holocaust themes. Lehrman brings to our attention a most perceptive observation by Manès Sperber, a holocaust novelist, which has relevance to the moral and religious position of the Jew regarding Israel today. In a section of his novel *La baie perdue* (The Lost Bay), a section which was so outstanding that it was published separately with an introduction by Malraux under the title *Qu'une larme dans l'océan* (Only a Tear in the Ocean), Sperber says, "try to describe a battle, you'll notice that the sum of all exploits is more insignificant, more formless than a tear in the ocean." The implicit argument is summed up by Lehrman:

Perhaps the greatest, the supreme trial, imposed on the Jewish soul, is to resign itself to hastening its redemption by acts of violence.

The Jews have had a profound and searing knowledge of both battles and tears, and are in an incomparable position to speak about both.

Three contemporary Jewish writers won the prominent Goncourt prize in France in succession. Romain Gary, Roger Ikor and Andre Schwarz-Bart. The English reading

public knows Schwarz-Bart's book, *The Last of the Just*, for it was translated from the French and became a best seller in North America. The book is severely criticized by Lehrman for its clumsy writing and sloppy theology. It tells the story of the Just family whose members constantly seek suffering and martyrdom. They represent the *lamed vav zaddikim*, the thirty-six righteous men for whose merits each generation is sustained according to Jewish tradition. Symbolic of the Jew in history, this family projects Schwarz-Bart's thesis that

The Jews must suffer as an atonement for all the evil of the world. The Jewish heart must break a thousand times for the greatest good of the world.

Lehrman attacks this "paradoxical" idea as a Christian dogma made to serve a distorted interpretation of Jewish history.

On reading Schwarz-Bart's book, it is true that the Christological aspects do register strongly, but the passionate writing and the depth of emotion attenuate this egregious element to such an extent, even in translation, that the novel emerges as a moving "Jewish" book. Furthermore, while Lehrman is basically correct that suffering for another's sins as an atonement is an elementary Christian dogma, the idea is not foreign to Judaism. The popular commentary Rashi (commentary to Numbers 20:1) cites a Talmudic Midrash T.B. *Mo'ed Kattan* 28a) which introduces the idea that the death of the righteous atones for the sins of the genera-

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tion. There are many classical sources in which this idea is developed. It is all a question of theological emphasis whether one may legitimately object to it as Christological in any given "Jewish" work. Lehrman's evaluation of the novel as "clumsily written" is perhaps a little too harsh, although one cannot deny that there are lapses of style. In his final words Lehrman does confess, grudgingly though, that Schwarz-Bart "draws from his harp such heartbreaking accents that the reader is overwhelmed."

On the whole the English public will appreciate Lehrman's study better than Debre's. It outlines the philosophy of each writer clearly and offers background material. One may disagree with Lehrman's interpretations but one must admit they are not casually arrived at. The order of writers is chronological which gives a better framework for the reader and makes the subject easier to assimilate. Even so, some basic information, such as dates of publications and other bibliographic material is missing. The most debatable point in the book is the author's pretentious thesis that a "Jewish element" has been responsible for a large share of the genius of French literature. Jewish themes may be critically examined without the arrogance of this claim! One must also be careful to adjust one's perspective after reading such a book. Not all of French literature was or is so preoccupied with the Jews as the impression of this book would suggest. There is more to French literature than its Jewish element, even as subject matter.

Charles Lehrman's biography is quite impressive. He is a rabbi and has written extensively on French literature. Though disagreeing with his main thesis, one may read his book with pleasure and profit.

Jean Paul Sartre's *Antisemite and Jew* is divided into four parts, each occupying a chapter. The first is addressed to the anti-Semite. Sartre tells us that he is materialistic and overemphasizes the concrete. He is a man of passion who chooses not to be reasonable and is certainly remote from the exalted position of existentialism. The anti-Semite insists on a Manichean interpretation of his world, with the Jew as Evil. In the second brief part, almost an aside, Sartre berates the liberal democrat who pretends to be the friend of the Jew. He cannot see the Jew as a Jew, only as a person. Like the scientist, he sees only the general and not the particular. "Thus there may be detected in the most liberal democrat, a tinge of anti-Semitism." The liberal democrat is hostile to the Jew for his inability to be universal and un-Jewish. On the opposite pole of the existential axis is the Jew, who is the subject of the lengthy third part of the book. The Jew is the extreme rationalist. This propensity for the abstract, the rational and the intellectual is necessary for the Jew to escape the anti-Semite and enter society. Universal logic follows its own inexorable rules and does not respect the differences in types of people. To the Jew, then, it is his portal to the world from which the anti-Semite wishes to exclude him. Implied, however, is Sartre's condemnation

of this position too. Existentially it is not proper to concentrate so desperately on the rational. Such a distortion deprives one of the metaphysical anxiety which leads to the contemplation of the true condition of man. Chased into this position by the anti-Semite, the Jew becomes more "Jewish" even as he attempts to extricate himself from it. The fourth chapter is a rather pallid appeal to restructure society and to convince the anti-Semite of his immorality.

The fundamental argument of Sartre's book is existentialist and Marxian. Reduced to its simplest terms it runs like this: The condition of man is defined, not by any intrinsic elements, but by his situation. He chooses this situation freely within limits. The anti-Semite has created the situation of the Jew and thus denied him the freedom of choice. The Jew, in most cases despite himself, is forced to accept the situation created for him. The arbitrary distinction between Jew and society, created by the anti-Semite, is in reality "a mythical bourgeois representation of the class struggle . . . it could not exist in a classless society." Therefore, by changing the conditions of society anti-Semitism will disappear, ideology following sociology. Until this happens, Sartre suggests the standard palliatives: a) organize to resist the anti-Semite; and b) make him realize that he is responsible for the Jew.

In the course of setting forth his arguments, Sartre makes many brilliant and penetrating comments about both Jews and anti-Semites. Whether they are true or not in

an objective sense can be debated in many cases. Some may be proven wrong. The attraction of the book lies in Sartre's ability to tie all his assertions together into a single logical structure supporting his thesis—like a *pilpul*. And like a *pilpul*, the beauty of the argument has to be admitted though the validity of the premises and the interpretations may be questionable.

The original title of this most significant work by Sartre relating to Jews is *Reflexions sur la question juive*. The English title, *Anti-Semite and Jew* implies a study of both parties to the Jewish problem but in truth the book is Sartre's subjective thoughts upon the issue as connoted by the French title. He himself states the limits of his consideration as the Jews of France and presumably this also applies to the anti-Semite. The proofs of many of Sartre's contentions in the book come from personal encounters with Jews of his acquaintance which he has universalized and not from many objective studies of the behaviour of the Jew in France or anywhere else. And the same applies to the anti-Semite. An excerpt from the *New York Times* review of the book, found on the back cover (the publisher's blurb) reads "The Existentialist philosopher attacks the problem without statistics and case histories, but with a poet's deep insight." This, no doubt, is meant as praise for Sartre, but it is also the cause of many highly doubtful statements about anti-Semites and Jews which he accepts as true, but which do not have the slightest shred of objective evidence to support them.

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For example, Sartre states:

we find scarcely any anti-Semitism among workers (p. 35) . . .

the engineer, the contractor and the scientist . . . are infrequently anti-Semitic (p. 37) . . .

the Jew has a marked inclination to believe that the worst difficulties can be solved by reason (p. 125) . . .

for him (the Jew) money often assumes the abstract form of shares of stock, checks, bank deposits (p. 126).

Klineberg's statement about generalities on Jews being suspect keeps coming to mind when reading these bland assertions. What makes the matter even more puzzling is that Sartre uses the absence of objective facts as an argument against the anti-Semite! "But why did she choose to hate Jews rather than furriers?" he asks about one woman anti-Semite (p. 12). "Suppose Jews had been excluded from the competition; would that have done him any good?" he argues with his fellow student who was too lazy to study for his examination and was therefore outclassed by a Jew (p. 13). "I don't know whether this is true or not," he questions the ones who accuse the Jews of Poland of siding with the repressive overlords in the nineteenth century insurrection in that country (p. 15).

There are other contradictions in the book which are even more amazing. Few reviewers discuss them. Sartre scoffs at the anti-Semite's facile talk about "a Jewish will to dominate the world," that

"behind the Jew lurks international capitalism" and "imputing responsibility for communism to Jewish bankers" (pp. 38, 39). He proves that the Jew has no peculiarities "as a condition determining his nature" (p. 60). Yet we find Sartre giving philosophical explanations for most of the Jewish stereotypes! He explains the Jew's "masochism" (p. 107), his being an "abstract, rationalist intellectual in the pejorative sense" (p. 109), his lacking "creativity" (p. 113), his having a "destructive intelligence" (*ibid.*), his "universalism" (p. 119). He even gives a philosophical basis for the anti-Semite's claim of Jewish physical ethnicity. The Jew disdains his body because of his over-emphasized rationality. This leads to the extremes of a lack of shame or its reverse, drastic modesty, which appears as ethnicity (p. 122). There is also a foundation for the Jewish "lack of tact" (p. 124). The Jew's involvement with money, he says, is due to his rational nature. "Indeed it is the taste for abstraction that explains the Jew's special relationship to money. Jews love money, we are told . . . Actually it is the power to purchase that appeals to him" (p. 126). No amount of exertion on Sartre's part to "ennoble" the bases of these stereotypes, or re-interpret them, can eradicate the authentication the images receive from his arguments. Otto Klineberg's sociological comments on stereotypes, which are logical and consistent, come to mind (*Aspects*, pp. 2-3).

One might logically expect that stereotype generalizations would be

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challenged and modified by experiences to the contrary . . . The trouble with attempting to destroy a stereotype by supplying facts to the contrary is that a number of mechanisms are called into play which aid in keeping the stereotypes intact. These may include *selection*, paying attention to those Jews who fit the stereotype, ignoring those who do not . . . *distortion* of our perceptions, as when girls 'known' to be Jewish look more ambitious than others (Klineberg refers to an experiment in which photos of the same girls were shown to a class two months apart, one time with Irish names attached and another with Jewish names), *re-interpretation* of the same behaviour (so that ambition in one of *them* is a very different phenomenon from ambition in one of *us*, again referring to the above experiment) and finally *dismissal* of contrary experience as exceptions — and no one has as yet demonstrated how many cases may be so dismissed.

Re-interpretation, as attempted by Sartre, even if it is to dignify, has the same deleterious effects as the original interpretation, for on a speculative plane one can merely disagree with the dignifying interpretation.

Most Jews writing about Sartre treat him with a great deal of respect. Lehrman, in his study of twentieth century French literature, is no exception. If one dared to express the universal Jewish admiration of the French philosopher and his essay on the Jews, it might be this:

Here is this great existential philosopher whom all respect. He takes time to write about Jews. We are grateful to him for doing so and for writing sympathetically. Imagine what could have happened

if he had been on the side of the anti-Semite, or even equivocal.

To support this interpretation I point to Sartre's own perspicacious statement concerning a few insignificant words he wrote about the Jews after the war and the reaction they evoked (p. 72):

In my *Lettres Francaises*, without thinking about it particularly, and simply for the sake of completeness, I wrote something or other of the prisoners of war, the deportees, the political prisoners . . . and the Jews. Several Jews thanked me in a most touching manner . . . to think of thanking an author for merely having written the word "Jew" in an article!

But there is much that Jews must consider negative in the book. Sartre says that the Jews have no national or religious community today. Nor does their dispersion allow them to have a history (pp. 66-67). They only have an identity of situation, which not the Jews have created, but the anti-Semites. If the attainment of existential *angst*, the metaphysical anxiety that "moves us to a consideration of the condition of man," is a valuable goal, then Sartre has yet one more negative assessment to make of Jews. Because of their social condition, they cannot arrive at this metaphysical state (p. 133).

The tone of the whole book is infuriatingly dispassionate. There is sympathy for the plight of the Jew but not empathy, or *mitleid*. The horror, the bloodshed, the suffering, the despair are bleached in the clinical atmosphere of philosophical analysis. What I mean is epitomized by a revealing passage

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in the book which is often overlooked because it is merely part of a philosophical argument. In this passage Sartre makes what seems like a rather painful confession of his sentiments during the war, when the Jews of his country were singled out for shame (pp. 76-77).

We have been indignant, and rightly, over the obscene "yellow star" that the German government forced upon the Jews . . . There were some who tried by all possible means to indicate their sympathy for the unfortunates so marked. But when very well-intentioned people undertook to raise their hats to Jews whom they encountered, the Jews themselves felt that these salutes were extremely painful. Under the looks of support and compassion, they felt themselves becoming an object . . . In the end we came to understand all this so well that we turned our eyes away when we met a Jew wearing a star . . . The supreme expression of sympathy and of friendship lay here in appearing to ignore.

"Not quite, Mr. Sartre," one is tempted to say, "the Danes offered the supreme expression. The French had sympathy and turned away. The Danes had *mitleid* and donned the 'yellow stars' themselves from the King down!"

There is one critical point in all philosophical, sociological and psychological (in contradistinction to anthropological and, of course, religious) theories about anti-Semitism I have encountered. Like an Achilles' heel it robs them of their iron-clad logic. This point may be raised in Sartre's argument as well. With all the myriads of ethnic groups available to create as a "Jew," why has the anti-Semite con-

sistently throughout history chosen the Jew? If there is any other reason than pure free choice of this people, then Sartre's thesis of the anti-Semite "creating" the Jew falls, for then this factor, rather than the anti-Semite's creation of a situation, would be responsible for the tragedy of anti-Semitism.

At the end of the chapter on the Jew, Sartre speaks of the "authentic" and the "inauthentic" Jew. Although he protests there is no moral judgment to this distinction, he tips his hand by apologetic statements such as, "No doubt authentic Jews are today much more numerous than one may suspect." He adds, ". . . and it seems to me even probable that there are more authentic Jews than authentic Christians" (p. 138). The difference between the "authentic" and the "inauthentic" Jew is that the latter tries to flee the reality of the condition the anti-Semite has created for him by pretending to be just a person. The former willingly chooses to be a Jew knowing full well that he is a "damned creature." At this point Sartre becomes ambiguous. He seems to be saying that all of the statements about Jews in his book apply to the "inauthentic" Jew. Since the "authentic" Jew, says Sartre, chooses his situation and condition, the anti-Semite "can no longer touch him" (p. 137). The "authentic" Jew may even reach the state which allows him the "metaphysical horizons that go with the condition of man" (p. 138). To the question, "Very well, since the Jew is free, let him be authentic, and we shall have peace," (p. 138), Sartre answers that the Jew must

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be given the choice to be "inauthentic" too. This moral decision must be his alone and is none of our business. Moreover, continues Sartre, even by being "authentic" the Jew is severely limited in the choices he may make. Certain careers are closed to him and he may not choose to support certain political movements, such as Zionism, which provoke the accusation of disloyalty to his country. Sartre then cites an example of his friend, an "authentic" Jew (with an Aryan wife!) whose career in journalism was in jeopardy because of his Jewishness.

If this reading of Sartre is correct, then the philosopher must believe that the majority of the Jews of France are "inauthentic." It seems pointless otherwise to write a book about Jews and consider only a small portion of them, reserving a discussion of the majority to a few lines at the end of a chapter. Sartre leaves himself open to a serious challenge, on this basis, for an objective study of the Jews of France may prove him wrong. (Are the majority of the Jews in the U.S. and Canada "au-

thentic" or "inauthentic"?)

Again if this reading is correct, there may be an answer to the critical question raised about Sartre's theory. The anti-Semite chooses the Jew because he is the only one of all ethnic groups having a majority of "inauthentic" members, who react to foster the situation which the anti-Semites create for them. But his reading is contradicted by many statements in the book and by the whole approach of the thesis.

Apropos this theme, it is interesting to speculate if Sartre ever met an authentic Jew, one who dons *tefillin*, prays regularly, observes the Sabbath and is a member of a religious, national and historical community, and what his reactions to meeting one would be.

The book is the product of one of the most brilliant minds in France. A harvest of ideas is bound to contain prickly barbs as well as germinal insights. Whatever the feelings raised upon reading it, the book is a significant contribution to the literature of a most painful and enigmatic phenomenon of the Western world.