



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.**

Series IV: Writings and Publications, 1952-1992, undated.

Sub-series B: Other Writings, 1952-1992, undated.

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Book reviews, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, by Meir Ben-Dov;  
*Jerusalem*, by F. E. Peters; *Jerusalem* by Martin Gilbert,  
correspondence and manuscript; *The Jewish Mind*, by Raphael  
Patai, correspondence and manuscript; *Jewish People and  
Palestine*, by Charles B, 1972-1985.

October 3, 1985

Mr. Walter Berkov  
The Plain Dealer  
1801 Superior  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Walter:

Here is my review of the three books on Jerusalem.  
I hope you don't mind that I placed them within a  
rather personal framework.

I trust all is well and I wish you well.



Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

(1985]

Meir Ben-Dov, In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem, Harper and Row, \$24.95.

F. E. Peters, Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and the Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times, Princeton, \$35.00

Martin Gilbert, Jerusalem: Rebirth of a City, Viking, \$25.00



[1985]

At the ripe old age of four I almost became a footnote in the history of Jerusalem. We were visiting my grandparents. My father's father administered what was then called, without embarrassment, an old folks' home. My grandmother did good works and gossiped in Rehavia, one of the first housing districts built outside the walls of the Old City.

Good friends planned a day's shopping in the Shuk and I was invited to come along. Little boys tend to wander off the world over, but Jerusalem in 1932 was a nervous place. There had been a series of Arab riots, and there was fear that I had fallen victim to foul play. The British Constabulary was notified. After a fruitless door-to-door search there was no choice but to break the bad news to my parents. When my ashen-faced companions came to the house, there I was playing with my grandmother's cats. Apparently I had decided that the best way for a lost four-year old to act was to act as if he was not lost and had walked home.

Jerusalem is a city where history touches ordinary events. My grandparents are buried there and that private event also got involved with history. Grandmother died full of years in 1947 and was buried in the family plot in the Mount of Olives. Grandfather died eight months later and was interred in a cemetery in the new city. In the intervening months, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine and to administer Jerusalem as an international trust. Jordan would not accept that decision and its Arab Legion forceably occupied the Old City. Jerusalem became a divided city and the cemetery on the Mount of Olives fell into Jordanian hands.

Jerusalem remained divided until 1967 when Jordan unwisely joined her neighbors in attacking Israel. Shortly after the Six Days War I went to Israel and began the process of reuniting their graves. This was no easy task. The headstones in the Mount of Olives had been taken away and used for building material. My grandmother's grave had been partially paved over to provide an access road to a new luxury hotel. In a matter of months that road was dismantled and the grave sites were remapped and marked. Finally, my grandparents were united in death as they had been in life.

Events in Jerusalem have been making history ever since David conquered the town from the Jebusites thirty centuries ago. Many have written about Jerusalem. The three volumes here reviewed are the latest of a long line. Fortunately, though each is profusely illustrated and has the look of a coffee table book, all three present fresh material.

Meir Ben-Dov, as Field Director of the Mount Moriah Project, has explored the city that lies below the present town. This twenty-year excavation has lifted the veil of pious legend from the town's past. A decade ago Benjamin Mazar, dean of Israel's archeologists, published In The Mountain of the Lord, an attractive report on the first decade of this extensive dig. Ben-Dov gives us an update on his mentor's work in an eminently readable book which is not only exciting for what it reveals, but full of arresting anecdotes about the diplomacy required to satisfy the qualms of traditional religious groups who have a vested interest in keeping Jerusalem's past legendary and the strength required to set aside the ~~calculated~~ interference of governments who ~~will~~ oppose

[1985]

Israel even in the matter of a scholarly project.

F. E. Peters provides an anthology of writings by those who visited and lived in Jerusalem at various periods from between David's conquest to the 1838 visit of Edward Robinson, the first archeologist to do serious work on the city's past. We can see Jerusalem as it was known to ~~various~~ soldiers, officials, pilgrims and tourists who came here over the centuries. Peters has provided the selections with useful explanatory notes. Unfortunately, in these notes the academic wins out over the stylist and the text will prove heavy going for those who simply want a taste of the past.

Michael Gilbert's Jerusalem: Rebirth of a City picks up where Peters ended though there is no indication that either knew of the other's project. Using, as Peters did, the journals and reports of visitors, Gilbert describes the slow rebirth of a city which by the 1830's had lost all its former glory and was little more than a poverty-ridden, run-down medieval town with a population of 16,000. Gilbert carries his sprightly account to the end of the nineteenth century by which time Jerusalem's population had tripled, the first hospitals and modern schools had been built and the city was again on the tourist route. This book might well have been subtitled: The Westernization of Jerusalem, since most visitors, whether adventurers, missionaries or the Kaiser, were from the west; its new institutions were supported by western funds and its citizens began to trade with the west. Like it or not, Jerusalem was on its way to becoming again a significant part of western history.

None of these books touches on twentieth century events; but since the past is always prologue, they remind us that Jerusalem has rarely been, and is not likely to be, a quiet place. Security

[1985]

is not the lot of those who live in cities where private events  
cannot escape the complications of history.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

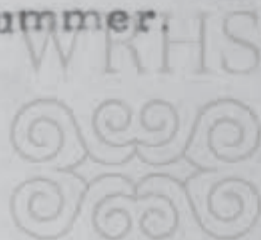


July 7, 1977

Mr. Alvin Beam  
The Plain Dealer  
1801 Superior  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Al:

Enclosed is my review of The Jewish Mind. I hope you  
have a pleasant summer.



AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

As always,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

[July 7, 1977]

THE JEWISH MIND

Raphael Patai

Charles Scribner's Sons, New York - 1977

\$14.95

Raphael Patai is one of the last of a long line of Jewish intellectuals who hovered on the edges of western culture because they were not allowed in. These men received a rabbinic education, came to the university curriculum as young adults<sup>and</sup> quickly mastered its language and disciplines only to find they were denied academic appointment and professional recognition because they were Jews. Denied teaching positions, many financed themselves by interpreting the new sciences to a popular audience. Denied admittance to professional societies, they did not hesitate to write in many fields and pioneered interdisciplinary studies. These maverick intellectuals are no more, either they were killed by the Nazis or finally absorbed into the western universities; but in their heyday they added brilliance to the European cultural scene and in so doing provided an object lesson in the stupidity of restricting the world of letters to an established class.

Patai was born and educated in Hungary. He spent his young adult years in Palestine before settling in 1947 in the United States. Now a septuagenarian, he has written several dozen books, edited several dozen more and authored hundreds of articles in a wide variety of fields including psychiatry, comparative folklore, Middle East history, Arabic literature, Biblical studies, modern Hebrew literature and cultural anthropology. His most recent book, The Jewish Mind, reflects all the strengths and weaknesses of his outsider background. It is original, multi-disciplined, full of information and unshaped. Addressed to a popular audience, Patai's style vacillates between sharp insight, fascinating incident and a pedantic display of erudition as if the writer still has to prove to the professors that he can beat them at their own game.

[July 7, 1977]

Patai's title suggests the reach of his mind and the impossibility of the task he has set for himself. There is no such thing as the Jewish mind and never has been; yet, the Jewish role in history has been distinctive. How? Why? In what way? Patai begins by exploring six distinctive eras in the Jewish past during which the values and attitudes of a host culture impacted on the inherited attitudes and interests of the Jewish minority. Patai is not interested in listing distinguished contributions by Jews, but in comprehending the "essential features which have informed the Jewish mind throughout history" (p. 8). He asks two sets of questions: how did such political factors as economic marginality and social dependence affect the Jewish mindset; and how much of that mindset is a result of factors particular to the special traditions of the Jews.

Patai knows a great deal and covers much ground, but much of what he presents is undigested and confusing. What is one to make of the following: "Whatever the circumstances of its preparation the Septuagint remained for several centuries the only Greek translation of the Bible (subsequently the other Biblical books were also translated)" (p. 83). Patai knows that the Septuagint was not a single accomplishment, but a series of translations initiated by the publication of a Torah translation (The Five Books of Moses) and completed over a period of several centuries by various hands. But how is the general reader to know this?

These introductory chapters do provide historic background and pay a few compliments to the humane value of the Jewish tradition, but they lack focus. His conclusion is hardly surprising: both the cultural environment and the tradition influenced the formation of the Jewish ethos.

[July 7, 1977]

Patai shifts from cultural history to the social sciences to describe the physical and psychological factors which created the Jewish group and affected their destiny. Patai, with the aid of his daughter, Jennifer Wing, covered much of this ground in a recent work, The Myth of the Jewish Race (1975). There they analyzed the impact of intermarriage, conversion of non-Jews, concubinage, slavery and rape on the emergence of the Jewish people. Their conclusion: the Jewish mind, if such there be, is not the result of genetic in-breeding. In this book Patai also explores such disparate fields as nutrition, family structure, alcoholism and drug addiction to discover their impact on Jewish identity. The right questions are asked and the answers are unexceptional - many factors are involved - but the writing is dense.

Patai does not succeed in defining his field. He offers a two-sided answer to the age-old question of 'who is a Jew': one who considers himself a Jew; and one who is considered so by others. There is a certain rude common sense to this position; though, as Patai well knows, it is not the one that the Jewish tradition accepts. But how far is it to be taken? What, for instance, are we to do with his discussion of Marcel Proust? "Proust, the son of a Christian father and Jewish mother, born and brought up a Christian, proved himself a Jew in making the hero of his great autobiographical model, Swann, a Jew, and endowing him with the traits which he considered most precious in man" (p. 25). Proust was raised as a Catholic. Except for a brief flurry of pro-Dreyfus talk during that infamous affair in which Proust expressed concerns shared by most of the Parisian literary world, Proust never involved himself with the affairs of the Jewish community. At no time did he renounce his Catholicism. By this argument any novelist who presents a sympathetic Jew as his major character becomes a Jew, a position which I submit is nonsense.

I cannot recommend The Jewish Mind which reads more like undigested notes than a finished volume, but the complete reader will enjoy getting to know Patai at his best in such books as The Myth of the Jewish Race and in his various writings on Middle East folklore and literature.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

July 7, 1977



August 16, 1974

Rabbi Joseph R. Narot  
Temple Israel of Greater Miami  
137 N. E. 19th St.  
Miami, Florida 33132

Dear Joe:

I was recently at Harvard and spent some time with Charles Berlin. The enclosed review suggested itself to me both because of the intrinsic merit of the publication and because of interest some of our men may have in using the Harvard collection. I hope you find it useful.

I have had a pleasant summer. The family has been well. I trust all is well with you. With all good wishes I remain

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

The Jewish People and Palestine - Bibliophilic Pilgrimage Through Five Centuries

being a catalog of an exhibition prepared by Charles Berlin from the Judaic College of the Harvard College Library commemorating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel (Harvard University Library - 1973).

by Daniel Jeremy Silver

The rabbinate is scattered and most of us depend heavily on the willingness of the HUC-JIR library staff to root out and to mail out books and materials that we need for our studies. Fortunately in recent years ~~the~~ library and research facilities have multiplied with the growth of Jewish studies in the universities. A small number of college libraries have developed impressive Judaic collections - none more impressively than Harvard.

Harvard began seriously to collect Jewish materials some forty years ago when Harry Wolfson secured the Ephraim Deinard library of some 12,000 volumes. The collection has grown steadily. It now numbers some 100,000 books - 40,000 in Hebrew, 10,000 in Yiddish - which occupy a whole wing of one of the massive sub-basements of Weidner Library. Under the energetic and determined guidance of its first full-time bibliographer, Charles Berlin, the collection has grown in breadth and depth and now can provide the necessary complement to Harvard's own graduate program in Jewish studies as well as offer itself as an important asset to Jewish studies throughout the country.

A catalog of this collection was published in six volumes in 1968 by the Harvard College Library. There is a one-volume shelf list which brings the collection up to 1970 and a catalog of Judaica in the Houghton Library, Harvard's

rare book depository, which includes all such materials registered before 1972. Unlike some Jewish deposits those responsible know where the books are and take good care of them.

To signal the emergence of this collection as well as to provide some indication of its range Berlin prepared in 1973 an exhibition of printed materials relevant to Palestine's history before 1948 and published concurrently an impressive catalog of that exhibit. The lecture Yosef Hayin Yerushalmi gave at the exhibition preview opens the book and provides a Baedeker guide to the 120 items which were included and are reproduced here. Yerushalmi presents a simple and lucid explanation of this exhibit and a short, clear review of the development of the printed book in the Holy Land. He draws effective pencil sketches of Eliezer Ashkenazi, the first printer of Hebrew books in Palestine (Safed - third quarter of the 16th century) and of the indefatigable Israel Bak who revived Hebrew printing in the early 19th century and published the <sup>First</sup> Hebrew book to be printed in Jerusalem (1841). Appropriately this book was a collection of the writings of the Sfardic proto-Zionist, Hayyim Yosef David Azulai.

In those centuries printing was not a quiet profession. Publishers had not only the usual financial troubles but were beleaguered by censors, political interference and even angry mobs who were quite prepared to wreck their presses.

The exhibition includes a frontispiece of one of Azulai's books and much else. The first item is a page from a fifteenth century travelogue in which a German ~~and gentile~~ visitor to Palestine tells of his trip amid stereotype pictures of the Jew as usurer and money lender. The last item dated May 14, 1948

presents the front page published by the Hebrew Press of Israel on Independence Day. Materials range from pages from Cabbalistic works, to a poster issued by the chief rabbinate protesting the sale of non-kosher meat, to a 1914 advertisement in Hebrew of the film "The Last Days of Pompeii." This fascinating catalog is available in hard cover from the Hebrew Department of the Harvard College Library, a place most of us ought to be ~~better~~ acquainted with.



November 21, 1972

Rabbi Joseph R. Narot  
Temple Israel of Greater Miami  
137 Northeast 19th Street  
Miami, Florida 33132

Dear Joe:

Enclosed please find my review of the Zuckerman book. I enjoyed doing it and will be happy to review other books of this quality for you.

Please forgive the few editings. I hope they are all legible. With all good wishes I remain

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

I once wrote an essay on biblical and rabbinic political theory in which I had to deal inter alia with the traditional assumption of <sup>the</sup> necessity of a reestablished monarchy. Gen. 49:10 is the classic text which seems to require this political construction: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes. . . ." According to one well known interpretation Ad Ki Yavoh Shiloh means "until the royal Messiah comes" (Gen. Rab. 98:8). In the polemic literature this meaning was often insisted on as proof that the true Messiah had not <sup>appeared</sup> since a king of the House of David still ruled the people of Israel, the exilarch. In Sassanian and Muslim times the near royal powers and the claim of Davidic blood established the exilarch as tangible evidence that ~~the~~ Christ or the Mahdi whom other faiths claimed as the true Messiah was in fact not the authentic one.

Christians and Muslims turned this text around. There was no longer a king in Israel, QED the Messiah has come. This rather unedifying debate is well known and reflected in many commentaries. What I had never understood was the midrash which begins: "'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah,' that is Machir" (Gen. Rab. 98:8). Why Machir? One school identifies Machir as Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo Debar, one of ~~the~~ three who welcomed David when he fled from Absalon, (II Sam. 17:27) but this identification yields no substantial meaning. Another suggestion related ~~to~~ Machir to a man of the same name in ~~the~~ Deborah's song (XXXIV) "out of Mahir came down governors" (Jud. 5:14), but again the midrash sheds no meaning. Now Arthur Zuckerman, in this fas-

cinating historical reconstruction of the political situation of the Jews of Narbonne and the Spanish March during Carolingian times provides a solution which finally makes sense. Machir refers not to a Biblical figure, but to an historical person, an eighth century member of the exilarchic house in Baghdad, also known as Natronai, who having lost out in the struggle for the high office was brought to Narbonne where a happy set of events made it desirable that <sup>the</sup> Carolingians allow the Jews of Septamania to be ruled by a king. The midrash is to be dated in the eighth or ninth century and offers a specific defense of the proposition that a king still rules in Israel, Machir or one who descended from him. Therefore, the Christian Messiah is no messiah.

<sup>Various</sup> The medieval legends about a King of the Jews situated in Narbonne have long been known and almost universally dismissed as <sup>Fiction</sup> ~~legendary~~, although the existence of large land holdings by Jews in the area, including control of a major part of Narbonne, is accepted as well as the presence of several Jews in Charlemagne's court. Zuckerman's book is a tightly reasoned defense of the proposition that there actually was a Jewish king, that he was among the high nobles of the land and was entrusted with the defense of the Spanish March against the Muslims of Spain. Zuckerman has ~~carefully~~ reviewed the capitularies and notarial records of the time, ~~analyzed~~ the chansons de geste, relevant rabbinic chronicles and ~~various~~ apocalyptic readings. His conclusions are these: Narbonne was the principal fortress of Septamania. A Jewish community existed here in Roman times. Many more Jews came with the Muslim invaders who were shy on man power and favored Jewish settlers. When Pepin besieged Narbonne the Jewish community

opened the gates for him. In return for this favor, because of the Jews' importance as feudal land holders ~~in the area~~ and because of the Carolingian policy of <sup>opening</sup> ~~opening~~ <sup>an alliance with</sup> ~~bridging~~ the Abbasid east ~~to organize an alliance~~ against Ommayad Spain, a Carolingian embassy to Baghdad encouraged a member of the exilarchic house to come to southern France. The scholar prince who came was Machir-Natronai, ~~also~~ known in court circles as Theodoric, and in the chansons as the fabled Aymeri (according to A. Z. a popularization of Al-Machiri). To add to the medieval glory of this tale Machir probably married Alda, a sister of Pepin and their son, William, Count of Toulouse, <sup>was</sup> ~~would have been an heir~~ <sup>of</sup> to the House of David and of the Carolingians. Zuckerman makes bold claims, but his reasoning is careful and he has reviewed thoroughly all the available literature. This is a book based on first rate historical argument.

Zuckerman's thesis raises an interesting question concerning the psychological impact of the end of the exilarchate among Jews. If Machir was a Jewish "king" and we know of other Nesim <sup>at the time</sup> who claimed Davidic blood in Palestine and Cairo, what happened in the eleventh century when these claims became empty of all substance? The exilarchate was no more. No Nasi had even a vestige of authentic power. How did Jews accept the failure of the prophecies of Gen. 49:10? A commentator like Nachmanides suggests the new look! "Gen. 49:10 is not a prophecy dealing with the Messiah. Its purpose is simply to indicate that Judah will always be the tribe from which the king will come. . . For a long time there has been no king in Israel. . . (its purpose is to say) that once the sceptre has

come to Judah it cannot be taken away by another tribe. Thus the Hasmoneans were not authentic kings. . . It would be interesting to know whether there was a loss of faith as the various exilarchic lines came to their end. The Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, <sup>was</sup> a good missionary. He might well have won a few souls for Christ when he challenged the Jews to produce a king of the House of Judah or at least a duke, "as for me I will not accept that king (as something worthy of ridicule) whom some of you claim to have in Narbonne, the city in Gaul, others in Rouen. I will not accept a Jew as king of the Jews except one residing in and ruling the kingdom of Jews (namely Palestine.)"

Whether Zuckerman's thesis will win universal approval, Machir and I thank him for it.



# The Temple

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER - RABBI

STUART GELLER  
Associate Rabbi

STEPHEN A. KLEIN  
Assistant Rabbi

ALVIN CRONIG  
Executive Secretary

UNIVERSITY CIRCLE AT SILVER PARK • CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106 • 791-7755  
BRANCH: 26000 SHAKER BLVD. • BEACHWOOD, OHIO 44122 • 831-3233

July 20, 1979

Mr. Walter Berkov, Book Editor  
The Plain Dealer  
1801 Superior  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Walter:

Enclosed please find copy of my review of the  
Shanks book. I hope it is satisfactory.

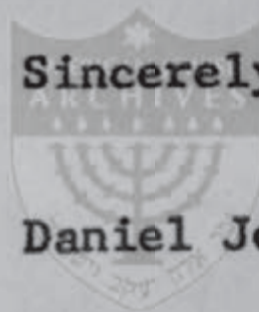
I am pleased that you asked me to this review.

DJS:fdb  
Encl.



Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver



JUDAISM IN STONE  
The Archaeology of Ancient Synagogues  
By Hershel Shanks  
Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

I am a sucker for a good mystery and if the mystery focuses on an historical question, well, for me that's a bit of heaven. This is a gloss coffee table book, obviously designed for the Israel-bound tourist; but if you take the time to read the text which weaves its way around innumerable photographs, you will find yourself smack in the middle of one of archeology's most interesting and unsolved problems: how did a unique institution come into being?

The synagogue represents a major breakthrough in man's concept of a religious place. Man's earliest shrines were consecrated places heavy with taboo which could not be entered by ordinary folk, featuring altars where priestly activity occurred. The synagogue was the world's first open sanctuary, simply a home for a congregation. There was no altar. No part of the building was taboo. Here people could gather to conduct worship or public affairs.

Because of its holiness, each shrine had been unique and had had its own ceremonial forms. The early synagogue was little more than an ordinary room and similar patterns of worship could be used wherever people set a room aside. The synagogue bound Jews together and such was its success that Islam and Protestantism copied its basic structure for mosque and church.

For some time before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (70 C.E.), which for all its grandeur, was an old-fashioned shrine;

synagogues developed as meeting houses. When the Romans plowed the Temple under, the synagogue became Judaism's sanctuary. The Temple ceremony had centered on an altar and sacrifices. Synagogue liturgy centered on the reading of Scripture and its explanation. Little is known of the period of transition, but the recent excavations which this book reports have helped fill in the picture, although mysteries aplenty remain for buffs like myself.

In Israel, tourist busses routinely stop at Kfar Nahum (the village of Nahum, better known by its Latin name, Capernaun, a wooded spot on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus lived here until he left for Jerusalem and is reported to have preached in the town's synagogue. The remnants of an imposing white limestone basilica rise in the center of the site and guides readily identify this building as that synagogue. The site is worth a visit, but was this synagogue where Jesus preached?

The Franciscan Fathers who control the site and have done careful archeological work here found recently a bag of coins underneath the platform floor. The hoard was buried in a way which suggested that it had been placed there before the present building was completed. To everyone's surprise, the earliest coin in the group bore a date four centuries after Jesus' time.

The mystery deepens. If this building is as late as the coins suggest, it would be the only known fifth-century synagogue without a Torah shrine. After the destruction of the Temple, synagogue

mosaics began to feature pictures of the shrine everyone mourned, and synagogue architecture began to provide a niche for the Torah scroll. What had been simply a meeting place became a sanctuary.

If, armed with this information, you challenge the guide, he will silence your doubts by showing you a stone frieze which bears a deeply incised Star of David. What better proof, unless you remember that the six-pointed star did not become a Jewish symbol until modern times. The bottom line of all this may be that the synagogue of Capernaun was not a synagogue at all, but a Roman basilica built for some public purpose. If this be so, it would explain much, since for the Jews of the Galilee the fifth century was a time of severe political oppression by zealous Christian emperors and it is doubtful that they would have had the means or permission to build a grandiose building.

As editor of the Biblical Archaeological Review, Shanks knows the professionals in the field and is an informed guide to this world of beauty and mystery.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

GERSHOM SCHOLEM  
KABBALAH AND COUNTER-HISTORY  
Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Mass. and London, England 1979  
Reviewed by Daniel Jeremy Silver

The conventional manuals treat Gershom Scholem as the researcher who mapped the mysterious world of the Kabbalah. Armed with the tools of German scholarship and sharing the then current fascination with myth and religious experience, Scholem pioneered in the study of the Jewish mystical tradition and brought that previously uncharted field into critical focus.

It is to David Biale's credit that he has presented Scholem as more than a brilliant researcher. This is an analysis of a seminal and many-sided mind deeply concerned with the major philosophic questions of our times. I had always thought of Scholem as the Zunz of our century. By careful and critical reading of rabbinic texts, Zunz revealed the flow of rabbinic thought and the omnipresence of change in Jewish practice. In his turn Scholem, who delighted to quote Aby Warberg's wonderful line, "God is in the detail", and whose studies are characteristically meticulous, revealed the flow of the mystical tradition and its dynamic role in the unfolding of the Jewish experience.

Counter-history is a term Biale chose to describe Scholem's methodological relationship to Zunz and the Wissenschaft. Scholem valued Zunz's approach as philologically sound and non-dogmatic, but he faulted it for neglecting the transforming experiences of the mystics and the commentary which grew out of these experiences which he insisted represented the sources of Jewish religious vitality. Scholem borrowed from a good friend, Walter Benjamin, the phrase to "rub history against the grain" to explain his unconventional perspective on the Jewish tradition. In conventional history halacha and theology comprise Judaism. Scholem insisted

[May 16, 1979]

that: "Kabbalah explained the survival of the consolidated force of the Halachic Judaism" (77) and that the esoteric tradition was "the secret life of Judaism" (76).

Biale ranges Scholem with Buber, Berdichevsky and S. I. Horwitz as contemporaries of a generation which had outgrown the simplistic rationalism and romanticism of the nineteenth century, rediscovered myth and the irrational; yet, found itself shackled to critical methodologies. They knew that the religious life begins in experience, and that theology and institutions follow haltingly after. What they did not know is how to expose and express a Judaism which rested on personal encounter and religious experience rather than a substantive body of truth and theology.

Buber placed the source of religious vitality in the meeting between man and God. Since he argued that this experience was private and incommunicable, Buber never successfully related tradition to meeting and his thought always has seemed Jewishly naked. God and the religious life regained immediacy, but historic continuity and halacha no longer fit.

Scholem agreed that God is beyond meaning; but, unlike Buber, he insisted that the experience of meeting God is meaning-bestowing. The esoteric tradition had been expressed in myth and metaphor which in turn had been bound into Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah and could be confronted in that form. "The tradition is itself testimony to the original impetus of divine revelation (though) it does not permit any meaningful statements about revelation itself or its divine source" (109).

Since the Kabbalah refracts intense personal experience it is necessarily varied and unsystematic. "What had originally been believed to be consistent, unified and self-enclosed now becomes diversified, multifold and full of contradiction,

[May 16, 1979]

It is precisely the wealth of contradictions, of differing views, which is encompassed and unqualifiedly affirmed by (this) tradition" (98). Scholem calls the Kabbalah an "anarchist" tradition and was attracted rather than repelled by this lack of consistency which runs counter to Judaism's supposed penchant for unity. In this he shared the existentialist insistence that life cannot be ordered into neat and closed philosophic categories. "The right to interpret revelation in an infinite number of potentially contradictory ways comes from the revelation itself. . . . Since the source of revelation is a name unbound by any specific meaning, each word of the Torah can be interpreted equivocally in an infinite number of ways" (93-4). The rabbis had fought to limit the Kabbalah's appeal because the authority of Judaism presumably rested on the immutable truths of the revelation and the authority which derives from authentic experience tends to subordinate and override all claims to inviolability made in behalf of familiar norms; yet, Scholem now insisted that highly individualized experiences were the wellspring of the faith tradition.

To those of us who run well-administered synagogues and preach a neat and rational theology, I commend Scholem's observation: "It is a profound truth that a well-ordered house is a dangerous thing" (pg. 153) and, I would add, deadly to the spirit. The historian in Scholem insisted that Reform was a stepchild of the secret tradition and I suspect that he must feel that we would have fared better had we had the courage to remain close to our anarchistic patrimony.

I was intrigued by Biale's analysis of the famous Scholem-Buber confrontation. This exchange clearly cut deeper than Scholem's published argument that Buber had minimized the force of the halacha and of theoretical Kabbalah in Hasidic thought. Buber and Scholem were near contemporaries, products of the same German Jewish academic culture, both young Zionists. Buber was comfortable with his conventional surroundings, glorified Germany's entry into the first World War

[May 16, 1979]

and did not attempt to learn Hebrew or make aliyah until circumstances forced him to do so. He remained a European and Scholem dismissed Buber's early Zionism as little more than a Jewish version of then popular romantic nationalism of German youth.

Scholem had been a young rebel who spoke openly his contempt for the narrow and class-limited values of his native surroundings. His Zionism represented a commitment to aliyah and the liberation of the Jewish people and its spirit. At war with the bourgeois values of his home, university and fatherland, Scholem looked at Zion as a new place and a natural environment in which Jews could escape the conventional, soul-stifling values and institutions of Europe and become fully human and humanly Jewish. Being Jewish was a matter of becoming, of opening oneself to the experiences being Jewish made possible. Being Jewish was a process, an exposure of self; as such Jewish life necessarily would remain shapeless and idiosyncratic if Jews did not share daily experience in a place where their concerns could be institutionalized. Only in Zion could the dialectic of Jewish life develop significantly. Scholem went to Jerusalem in 1924, years before the rise of Hitler, and began to serve as librarian at the Hebrew University before there was a university.

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dition. As Scholem studied he bound the record of experiences past to himself and came to understand the real wellsprings of Jewish vitality. His studies and his Zionism were his way to be an enlivened Jew.

Whether Biale succeeds in convincing the reader that Scholem's approach provides a "useful alternative response to the crises of theology" (p. 109) will depend upon our private judgment; but every reader will feel himself in Biale's debt for having analyzed most suggestively Scholem's works and life and for having placed his oeuvre intelligently within the matrix of modern critical thought.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

May 16, 1979



# Book Reviews

*Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History.* By David Biale. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1979. 279 pp.

The conventional manuals treat Gershom Scholem as the researcher who mapped the mysterious world of the Kabbalah. Armed with the tools of German scholarship and sharing the then current fascination with myth and religious experience, Scholem pioneered in the study of the Jewish mystical tradition and brought that previously uncharted field into critical focus.

It is to David Biale's credit that he has presented Scholem as more than a brilliant researcher. This is an analysis of a seminal and many-sided mind deeply concerned with the major philosophic questions of our times. I had always thought of Scholem as the Zunz of our century. By careful and critical reading of rabbinic texts, Zunz revealed the flow of rabbinic thought and the omnipresence of change in Jewish practice. In his turn Scholem, who delighted to quote Aby Warberg's wonderful line, "God is in the detail," and whose studies are characteristically meticulous, revealed the flow of the mystical tradition and its dynamic role in the unfolding of the Jewish experience.

"Counter-history" is a term Biale chooses to describe Scholem's methodological relationship to Zunz and *die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Scholem valued Zunz's approach as philologically sound and

non-dogmatic, but he faulted it for neglecting the transforming experiences of the mystics and the commentary which grew out of these experiences, which, he insisted, represented the sources of Jewish religious vitality. Scholem borrowed from a good friend, Walter Benjamin, the phrase to "rub history against the grain" to explain his unconventional perspective on the Jewish tradition. In conventional history *halacha* and theology comprise Judaism. Scholem insisted that "Kabbalah explained the survival of the consolidated force of the halachic Judaism" (77) and that the esoteric tradition was "the secret life of Judaism" (76).

Biale ranges Scholem with Buber, Berdichevsky and S. I. Horwitz as contemporaries of a generation which had outgrown the simplistic rationalism and romanticism of the nineteenth century, rediscovered myth and the irrational, and yet found itself shackled to critical methodologies. They knew that the religious life begins in experience, and that theology and institutions follow haltingly after. What they did not know is how to expose and express a Judaism which rested on personal encounter and religious experience rather than a substantive body of truth and theology.

Buber placed the source of reli-

gious vitality in the meeting between man and God. Since he argued that this experience was private and incommunicable, Buber never successfully related tradition to meeting and his thought always has seemed Jewishly naked. God and the religious life regained immediacy, but historic continuity and *halacha* no longer fit.

Scholem agreed that God is beyond meaning. But, unlike Buber, he insisted that the experience of meeting God is meaning-bestowing. The esoteric tradition had been expressed in myth and metaphor, which, in turn, had been bound into Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah and could be confronted in that form. "The tradition is itself testimony to the original impetus of divine revelation (though) it does not permit any meaningful statements about revelation itself or its divine source" (109).

Since the Kabbalah refracts intense personal experience it is necessarily varied and unsystematic. "What had originally been believed to be consistent, unified and self-enclosed now becomes diversified, multifold and full of contradiction. It is precisely the wealth of contradictions, of differing views, which is encompassed and unqualifiedly affirmed by (this) tradition" (98). Scholem calls the Kabbalah an "anarchist" tradition and was attracted rather than repelled by this lack of consistency which runs counter to Judaism's supposed penchant for unity. In this he shared the existentialist insistence that life cannot be ordered into neat and closed philosophic categories. "The right to interpret revelation in an infinite

number of potentially contradictory ways comes from the revelation itself. . . . Since the source of revelation is a name unbound by any specific meaning, each word of the Torah can be interpreted equivocally in an infinite number of ways" (93-4). The rabbis had fought to limit the Kabbalah's appeal because the authority of Judaism presumably rested on the immutable truths of the revelation, while the authority which derives from authentic experience tends to subordinate and override all claims to inviolability made in behalf of familiar norms. Yet, Scholem now insisted that highly individualized experiences were the wellspring of the faith tradition.

To those of us who run well-administered synagogues and preach a neat and rational theology, I commend Scholem's observation, "It is a profound truth that a well-ordered house is a dangerous thing" (153), and, I would add, deadly to the spirit. The historian in Scholem insisted that Reform was a stepchild of the secret tradition, and I suspect that he must feel that we would have fared better had we had the courage to remain close to our anarchistic patrimony.

I was intrigued by Biale's analysis of the famous Scholem-Buber confrontation. This exchange clearly cut deeper than Scholem's published argument that Buber had minimized the force of the *halacha* and of theoretical Kabbalah in Hasidic thought. Buber and Scholem were near contemporaries, products of the same German Jewish academic culture, both young Zionists. Buber was comfortable with his conventional surroundings,

glorified Germany's entry into the first World War, and did not attempt to learn Hebrew or make *aliyah* until circumstances forced him to do so. He remained a European and Scholem dismissed Buber's early Zionism as little more than a Jewish version of then popular romantic nationalism of German youth.

Scholem had been a young rebel who openly spoke his contempt for the narrow and class-limited values of his native surroundings. His Zionism represented a commitment to *aliyah* and the liberation of the Jewish people and its spirit. At war with the bourgeois values of his home, university and fatherland, Scholem looked at Zion as a new place and a natural environment in which Jews could escape the conventional, soul-stifling values and institutions of Europe and become fully human and humanly Jewish. Being Jewish was a matter of becoming, of opening oneself to the experiences being Jewish made possible. Being Jewish was a process, an exposure of self; as such, Jewish life necessarily would remain shapeless and idiosyncratic if Jews did not share daily experience in a place where their concerns could be institutionalized. Only in Zion could the dialectic of Jewish life develop significantly. Scholem went to Jerusalem in 1924, years before the rise of Hitler, and began to serve as librarian at the Hebrew University before there was a university.

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*Daniel Jeremy Silver*

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DANIEL JEREMY SILVER is rabbi of The Temple, Cleveland, and adjunct professor of religion at Case Western Reserve University.

*Conversion to Judaism from the Biblical Period to the Present.* By Joseph R. Rosenbloom. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press. 1978.

This is a good handbook compressing into 145 pages much valuable material on conversion: individual and group, Judaizing, rate of intermarriage, decline of Jewish population and the desirability of more converts. Now and then the author's compression results in a measure of obscurity. Instances: the summarizing of early Jewish history as done by several higher critics, each of whom contradicts the others (pp. 17-21), Christendom's resolution that, when all is said and done, taking interest is kosher (pp. 88-89).

However, Rabbi Rosenbloom meticulously indicates the sources he read and used, and the curious reader may follow up on his own the many ideas briefly adverted to.

To come back to the book's final thrust: the desirability of converting non-Jews to Judaism. Religious life is not policy, social, economic, political, or "survivalist." For their own purposes, governments may have made use of Christian missionaries. But in the main, the missionaries themselves, Catholic and Protestant alike, were determined to carry the Gospel to the heathen. In a word, religious life is a "raging fire within us," or it is nothing at all—it cannot kindle a match, let alone a heart. Accordingly, unless the faith of those who profess Judaism from birth is deep, the desirability of making converts and the promulgation of a missionary policy are not likely to gain new adherents for Judaism.

The major shortcoming of the book is its "historicism." To quote the author: "One may anticipate or describe particular historical conditions from a knowledge of the attitude [toward] and practice of conversion by Jews at any particular time" (p. 35). The fact is that one cannot do this. Thus, according to Ben Zion Wachholder, whom Rabbi Rosenbloom quotes, medieval rabbis, the Church's threats notwithstanding, did not discourage proselytes. Indeed, Shimon ben Zemach Duran asserted the seeking of proselytes to be one of the 613 commands (pp. 76-80). How, to go on, explain in "historical terms" the welcome given by the Jews of Vilna to the proselyte Count Valentine Potocki (died 1749)? Such welcome entailed great risk, as indeed, Potocki's death at the stake was ultimately to prove. Rabbi Rosenbloom is inwardly aware that "historicism" is an uncertain guide. For, as he says, "Christianity became a world faith through a series of unpredictable circumstances"—none of them, presumably, "historical" (p. 68). And so did Islam.

But Rabbi Rosenbloom, driven by the musts of historical "science," writes: [Following Alexander's conquests], "the conditions and transitoriness of life brought an interest in immortality, and a desire to escape from an uncomfortable present" (p. 54), as though never before had "conditions" existed, and never before had people been aware of "the transitoriness of life."

In any event, the affirmation of immortality is not merely to escape from "an uncomfortable present." It is primarily an assertion of the soul's transcendence and nobility. Historical "science" also impels Rabbi Rosenbloom to say of the exiled Jews in Babylonia (after 586 B.C.): "Their survival patterns rested on stressing specialness in both religion and role." Inconsequently and inexplicably, but accurately, in the very next sentence, he says of them: "They were to keep themselves holy, witnessing to God's existence and uniqueness that they might bring all men eventually to acknowledge Him and live in accordance with His will" (p. 84). Now "holiness" and *tikkun ha-olam*, it seems to this reviewer, do not result from "survival patterns" or from "stressing specialness."

Elsewhere, of heresies in medieval Christendom, Rabbi Rosenbloom writes: they "grew out of social forces in the communities which spawned them" (p. 71). Fish eggs are "spawned," but not

heresies. Heresies are born out of the dreams and yearnings of visionaries, true or false; and should a particular heresy win, it ceases to be a heresy, but "through a series of unpredictable circumstances" becomes a "world faith."

Now Rabbi Rosenbloom knows that in the end, neither "survivalism" nor social forces "spawning" explain the Jew and his persistence. For he says, eloquently: "Jewish leaders saw the Jewish people as a holy enclave, the carriers of a divine message. The people and the message were to be kept pure at all costs in the face of dramatic political and cultural threats. If the world could not now be converted to the truth, this truth and its carrier would be protected and maintained until God in His wisdom and mercy delivered them. Meanwhile, neither the message nor the mission was to be abandoned" (p. 37).

William G. Braude

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WILLIAM G. BRAUDE is rabbi emeritus of Congregation Sons of Israel and David, Temple Beth-El, Providence, Rhode Island.

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***The Vision of the Void: Theological Reflections on the Works of Elie Wiesel.*** By Michael Berenbaum. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979. 220 pp.

In *The Vision of the Void* Michael Berenbaum presents the first major book-length treatment of Wiesel's literary corpus primarily from a theological viewpoint. Professor Berenbaum's thesis is that "Wiesel's theological vision is of

the void," or absence of God in the universe. This interpretation differs significantly from that of most other critics, but Berenbaum logically and clearly presents his position and shows why he has chosen this radical view.

In this ambitious study the author treats all of Wiesel's published writings. He proceeds in his examination by using an inductive method which draws heavily on each of the works and shows his thorough knowledge and extensive research in regard to his subject. He also draws on other religious thinkers and Holocaust writers.

The book is divided into eight chapters: The first five chapters, through an analysis of Wiesel's writings, show a steady progression in thought which finally leads to what Berenbaum calls Wiesel's belief in the absence of God. He traces Wiesel's vision "from a world in which God is present (at the beginning of his first work *Night*) to a world in which God is killed so that man can live (in his first novel *Dawn*), and finally to a world in which God is absent (in *Le Jour* — translated as *The Accident* but literally meaning "The Day"). Berenbaum systematically shows how the young Wiesel rejects traditional Judaism's various explanations for the presence of evil and suffering: first, seeing it as punishment for the sins of man; then, explaining it as the period before ultimate justice comes with the Messiah; and finally, using it as God's test of Israel's love and obedience. In each case, drawing examples from *Night*, Berenbaum shows how these traditional solutions proved inadequate for Wiesel's actual (or what he terms existential) situation, and how their ineffectiveness led to his ultimate awareness of his personal separation from God, the meaninglessness of life, and the absence of God from history. In his

discussion of *Dawn* and *The Accident*, he also traces the author's further rejection of God and his new belief that man must become God in order to change history. To prove his point Berenbaum refers often to Wiesel's use of certain names, such as Elisha (from the Hebrew, meaning a "saving God" or "God will save") and the rejection of the notion of a saving God implied by the hero's words, "I've killed Elisha," in *Dawn*.

In chapter II (*The Way Back*) and chapter III (*The Gates of the Forest: The Partial Reconciliation with the Traditions of Israel*), Berenbaum examines the healing process through which Wiesel comes to terms in his duel with God and begins the long journey back from "the kingdom of night" to "the world of the living." Again he stresses that this "healing process" highlights Wiesel's vision of the void and his new belief in the power of man to assume God's role. Berenbaum accents the positive force of the characters who hold this view and use it to encourage the heroes' affirmation of life. However, I do not think he has given enough attention to those characters who show man's, and especially Wiesel's, spiritual need for God, despite their knowledge of Auschwitz and His failure to act in their time of greatest need. Berenbaum insists that "the reconciliation that Wiesel expresses applies to an acceptance of life in the face of the void rather than to an acceptance of God and His universe" (p. 55). It is on the continued stress of this thesis that I differ with Professor Berenbaum. Although I believe that

Wiesel never accepts suffering and injustice in God's world but always stresses rebellion against it. I also believe, as do many critics, that at this point he sees God as a force transcending complete understanding but necessary to give ultimate meaning to life. His need for God and refusal to acknowledge a world without Him is, indeed, part of his rebellion.

In this same section on reconciliation Berenbaum also skillfully shows the power of love and Wiesel's intertwining of the theme of love for a dead character with the hero's present love for a living person. I question, however, his attempt to project a psychoanalytic "oedipal complex" explanation on to Wiesel's relationship with his mother and the parallel drawn between Wiesel's sense of abandonment by God and by his mother. This comparison seems rather out of place and a bit awkward.

In chapters IV and V Berenbaum aptly interprets Wiesel as saying, "We of the post-Holocaust period must reaffirm life, but not with the grandiose hope of redemption that was the root of Hasidic affirmations" (p. 90). He also explains Wiesel's radical interpretation of the covenant relationship between the people of Israel and their *memory* of pain, meaning and God. This covenant is based on the idea of the *solidarity* or mutual responsibility of all Jews for each other. Berenbaum further expounds Wiesel's notion of the *sanctification* of life, which implies survival and the refusal to give up, always trying to improve the quality of human life, as

well as his view of *witness*, or the Jew's role as messenger of the past, its "heights of holiness and depths of inhumanity."

In the last two sections Professor Berenbaum contrasts Wiesel's theology with such contemporary Jewish theologians as Emil Fackenheim, Richard Rubenstein and Eliezer Berkovits. He also compares his theory of the Holocaust with Hannah Arendt's objective, historical analysis and Bruno Bettelheim's psychological explanation. In comparing theological attitudes he never veers from his original thesis. Notably absent from this section, however, are references to Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Buber and their influence on Wiesel's religious views.

Professor Berenbaum's *Vision of the Void* is an articulate, scholarly and thorough presentation of Wiesel's theology. His clear, succinct prose style is always readable and never pedantic or mawkish. I agree with many of his ideas but not with his general thesis, reiterated in a final statement: "... he (Wiesel) fears Him (God) and yet tries to live without Him" (p. 202). Rather, I believe that Wiesel is torn by ambivalence as he confronts not the void but the presence of God and life with Him. Perhaps our difference lies in the interpretation of the word "void." Does it mean, as Berenbaum continually implies, a Godless world, or one in which man can count on God's presence but not on His benevolent help or intervention? My concept of Wiesel's vision of God incorporates this knowledge and his need for belief in the Al-

mighty, as well as his awareness of the awesome responsibility of man to rebel against injustice and evil and create beauty and meaning to aid in the "repair" of this world. Despite our differences in interpretation of Wiesel's vision of God, I believe

this is an excellent study of the theological implications of his writings and a "must" for all serious students of Wiesel.

Reva B. Leizman

REVA B. LEIZMAN is a member of the faculty of the English Department at Cleveland State University.

*The Jews in the California Gold Rush.* By Robert E. Levinson. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978. xvii, 232 pp.

California was, alas, no more a *gan eden* in the 1800's than it has been in the 1900's. Hinton R. Helper's attack on slavery during the 1850's made him a hero of American history, but, Dr. Levinson reminds us, his attitude to the Jews of the West was decidedly unheroic—and mistaken to boot. When Helper visited Gold Rush California, he accused the Jews there of refusing to honor "the law requiring man to get bread by the sweat of his brow." Such prejudices were not uncommon, to be sure. Dr. Levinson, while not intending his book as a rejoinder or apologia, has marshalled considerable evidence of mining exertions on the part of Jews in the Mother Lode country: some Jews, he finds, "made the greater portion of their incomes from mining." More significantly, however, *pace* Helper and company, it was as businessmen, traders, that Jews made their most substantial contribution to the nineteenth-century West: "the credit for the settlement

of urban areas in the mining regions of the West belongs to the Jewish merchants and not to the romantic miner or transient prospector."

*The Jews in the California Gold Rush* pays detailed attention not only to Jewish economic enterprise, a varied enterprise which rendered Jews "among the wealthiest residents" in California and the West; it also takes notice of Jewish participation in California communal and political life—which was surely no negligible achievement in view of the immigrant background of virtually every Jewish settler—and it documents the desire of California Jewish businessmen "to maintain a relationship . . . with the ancestral faith they had left behind them in Europe."

Dr. Levinson, who serves as professor of history and coordinator of the Jewish studies program at California's San José State University, has been at pains to present a lucid, coherent—and helpfully illustrated—account of the


Jewish experience in mid-nineteenth-century California. His effort has the virtue of narrative succinctness and documentary amplitude. It deserves to be welcomed as a

most worthy addition to the still modest but expanding body of research on West Coast Jewry.

*Stanley F. Chyet*

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STANLEY F. CHYET is Professor of Jewish History, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles.



### ANNOUNCEMENT

The American Jewish Archives is making a comprehensive search for correspondence and other papers of Isaac Mayer Wise to be included in a microfilm edition of his writings. Persons or repositories holding original items or copies are requested to contact Doris C. Sturzenberger, Project Coordinator, Writings of Isaac Mayer Wise, Microfilm Edition, American Jewish Archives, 3101 Clifton Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45220.

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JOSEPH B. GLASER, Executive Vice President

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April 21, 1978

Mr. Alvin Beam  
The Plain Dealer  
1801 Superior  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Alvin:

Here is the book report I promised you. I hope all is well.



Sincerely,



Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

[Apr 21, 1978]

Arendt, Hannah  
THE LIFE OF THE MIND:  
Vol. I: Thinking.  
Vol. II: Willing.  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich  
\$25.00 set; \$12.50 per vol.

Hannah Arendt took pride in smashing conventional ideas and unmasking sentimentality, so it is surprising that her close friend and literary executor, Mary McCarthy, posthumously inflated Arendt's never-completed Gifford Lectures into an ornate, two-volume production, clearly conceived in an excess of conventional sentimentality.

Before she died in 1976, Arendt delivered at the University of Aberdeen two of an intended three series of public lectures. After her death McCarthy prepared Arendt's text for publication, apparently not only editing her language - Arendt never ceased thinking in German - but also enlarging the text with excurses and citations. ~~Realistically~~, There was little excuse for turning a long and incomplete essay of some 160,000 words into two expensive volumes. Indeed, to make the work seem more substantial than it is, McCarthy's explanatory essay is reprinted in both volumes.

Arendt was truly learned and like so many who were trained in the continental academic tradition, she could not resist displaying her erudition. These volumes are larded with citations and quotations. I found that the only way I could keep track of her argument was to skip over these displays of brilliance. When I did I found the gist of her argument was unexceptional or, to use a favorite word of hers, philosophically banal.

A tough-minded secularist, Arendt rejected all the value assumptions of the traditional faiths and well-known philosophic systems. God is dead. Philosophy is dead. The question then becomes where can modern man locate his values.

[Apr 21, 1978]

Arendt found her answer while covering the Eichmann Trial. She was struck by the way this mass murderer endlessly repeated the conventional stock phrases and political cliches of Hitler's Germany. In an Israeli court that conventional wisdom obviously was outlandish; yet, Eichmann could not get beyond it. Arendt's conclusion: "Cliches, stock phrases, adherence to the conventional standardized codes of expression have the socially recognized function of protecting us against realities, that is, against the claim of our thinking attention."

Obviously, the antidote for thoughtlessness, the parroting of conventional ideas, is thought, but not just any thought. Hitler's professors had well-trained minds. A trained mind is not necessarily proof of character or sensitivity. Arendt argues that we must separate our awareness of the mind as an instrument for achieving objective truth from the mind as it searches for meaning. Cognition is one thing. Reason is another. Reason, thinking in its highest sense, she argues, develops the self-consciousness which, ultimately, makes it possible for us to discern right from wrong.

Perhaps. In any case, Arendt is not the first to discover that thought helps us get beyond the limitations of conventional assumptions. Unfortunately, she fails to indicate why the process which she calls thinking must lead to the virtue-laden and humanly sensitive conclusions which she and most of us prize. Arendt has not cut through the Gordian knot which binds all existential thinking. When you deal in process there is no way of guaranteeing the conclusion.

Obviously, once you have seen the limitations of conventional attitudes, you should put your insights into practice. The second volume, "Willing", presents an elaborate defense of human freedom. Arendt offers no new arguments, but

there are a few good paragraphs in which she castigates her favorite bete noire, dialectical arguments in favor of Progress, as arguments which provide excuses for inaction rather than a rationale for taking life in one's own hands.

When I was at the University of Chicago I had the privilege of sitting in on some of Arendt's classes. These lectures are not Arendt at her best.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

April 21, 1978



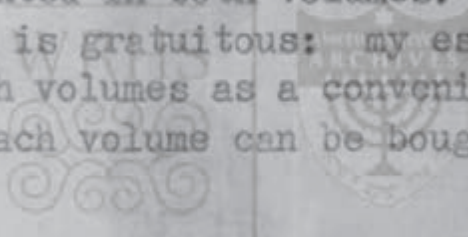
141 rue de Rennes  
Paris 6

June 29, 1978

Dear Sir:

In his April 30th review of The Life of the Mind by Hannah Arendt, Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver allows himself two false assumptions. First, that I, as editor, "enlarged the text with excursions and citations." I can't imagine where Rabbi Silver got this idea but in fact I have added no excursions or citations. Second, "to make the work seem more substantial than it is, Mary McCarthy's explanatory essay is reprinted in both volumes." His assignment of motive is gratuitous: my essay has been printed in both volumes as a convenience to the reader since each volume can be bought separately.

Sincerely yours,



*Mary McCarthy*

Mary McCarthy,  
Literary Executor  
to Hannah Arendt