The Edinburgh Star

Journal of the Edinburgh Jewish Community

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The Edinburgh Star
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Natalya Goncharova's *Rabbi with Cat* (1912). The original may be seen in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Belford Road. We are very grateful to the Gallery for permission to reproduce it. See Robin Spark's article for an account of other Jewish artists of the Twentieth Century.

Contents

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The Board would also like to thank
Mr & Mrs Harold Mendelssohn for kindly defraying the cost of sending ***The Edinburgh Star*** *overseas.*

In writing the first editorial of this nominally Christian but, in practice, largely secular millennium, I was reminded of an inscription on a Valentine's Day card I once received:

'Roses are reddish, Violets are bluish,
If it wasn't for Jesus, We'd all be Jewish.'

Although it is clear that, but for Jesus, the world today would be very different, it does not, of course, follow that Judaism would occupy the dominant position that Christianity now does. Dispersion, migration, minority status and persecution have been all-too-common experiences for the Jews in the two millennia of Christian (and Muslim) dominance. Perhaps these experiences would have been avoided. But what would have been the fate of Judaism if Christianity and Islam had not emerged as dominant world religions? No-one can say but the fact that, despite some large-scale conversions to Judaism, Judaism is not a proselytising religion suggests that it would almost certainly never have occupied the dominant position (at least in terms of numbers) that Christianity (and Islam) do today.

I was also reminded of a Jewish joke that I used to find very funny. On hearing about some natural disaster, for example, a hurricane or earthquake of seismic proportions, various people are asked for their reactions. Jill asks 'How can the survivors be rescued?', Bill asks 'How can the area in question be rebuilt?' and Moishe asks 'Is the disaster good (or bad) for the Jews?'. Although the millennium is not an event of relevance to Judaism as a religion, and it is certainly not a great disaster, we cannot ignore it because we live in a largely secular, albeit nominally Christian, world and it is therefore relevant to ask about its significance for us as Jews. Is it a good thing or a bad thing? The last millennium, which embraced the inquisition, the dark days of the Middle Ages and the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, could hardly have been worse for the Jews and, viewed against this background, there must be reasonable grounds for optimism. There are clearly some good omens. Foremost among them has been the establishment of the State of Israel and the provision of a national home for Jews who continued to be the victims of persecution in countries too numerous to elaborate, as well as for others who, for whatever reason, preferred a future in Israel to one in the Diaspora. But of almost equal importance has been the growth of multi-culturalism and the concomitant acceptance of Jewish communities, as well as Jewish individuals, in the political, social and cultural life of most countries of the so-called Christian world.

Sadly, however, there are clearly some exceptions. One such exception is Austria where the electoral success of Jörg Haider's far-Right Freedom Party and its inclusion as a major partner in the new coalition government, should be a source of a great concern, not only for Jews but, more generally, for all opponents of intolerance, racism and xenophobia. It is worth recalling that the Second World War does not appear to have extinguished support for anti-Semitism in Austria or, indeed, elsewhere. However, a comparative survey of anti-Semitism in European countries revealed that anti-Semitism continues to enjoy more support in Austria than in any other European country, even than Poland, infamous for its anti-Semitism despite the fact that there are hardly any Jews left in that country. Against this background, Haider's success should not come as a complete surprise. However, it does raise the issue of what, if anything, should be done about it. It is heartening to read of the large-scale demonstrations against the government in Austria itself. But the question also arises as to how governments, including the European Commission and our own government, and outside opinion should react. My own view is that it would be a serious mistake to continue with a 'business as usual' approach. We need to express our outrage at the recent course of events in Austria and, individually and collectively, to do what we can to ensure that the extremist Freedom Party's involvement in government is as short as possible. A temporary boycott of Austria and things Austrian has much to commend it – readers of **The Edinburgh Star** should think twice about skiing in the Austrian Alps or going on cultural holidays to Salzburg or Vienna.

Another cause for concern is the libel action brought by the controversial 'historian' David Irving against Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher Penguin Books for branding him 'one of the most dangerous of the men who call themselves revisionists' and for claiming, in her 1993 book **Denying the Holocaust**, that he 'bends [historical evidence] until it conforms with his ideological leanings and political agenda'. Fair comment one might think but Irving says that it is not only a slur on his reputation but also untrue. Irving insists that he is not a denier of the Holocaust, and admits that some Jews were treated badly by the Nazis while quite a few died. However, he does deny three key defining aspects of the Holocaust: first that Jews were killed in gas chambers at Auschwitz; second that Hitler directly ordered their slaughter; and third that there was any systematic plan to destroy European Jewry. It almost baffles belief. As Jonathan Freedland wrote, in an excellent article on the trial in **The Guardian** ('Court 73 – Where History is on Trial', 5 February 2000), 'We have all seen the archive footage of the camps, the shocking images of human skeletons bulldozed into pits … [and] read the countless volumes of testimony provided by survivors of the Holocaust, the Primo Levis, Elie Wiesels and Hugo Gryns, who along with others, described the same deathly process. Surely, that evidence settles the matter?' Well, apparently not since David Irving perversely manages to dismiss the evidence of tens of thousands of witnesses and to reject the basic rules of evidence by setting standards of proof which no human event could ever fully satisfy. This is no ordinary trial, as Jonathan Freedland notes 'history is itself on trial here', and we can only hope and pray that Irving's action is a resounding failure. That would be an auspicious beginning for the new millennium. Success for Irving would be a disaster.

Whether we like it or not, we will not be adopting a 'business as usual' approach to the new millennium in Edinburgh. In May, Rabbi David Sedley will leave his post as Minister of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation to take up the post of Minister to the much larger Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Synagogue in Leeds. This is therefore the last issue of in which he will be our Minister and it is appropriate that we should carry a profile of the Sedleys and a contribution from the Rabbi to our occasional series 'What does it mean to be Jewish?'. He has undoubtedly left his mark on the Edinburgh community and will be very much missed – **The Edinburgh Star** wishes him continuing success in rising to and surmounting the new challenges he will undoubtedly face in Leeds. In addition to the two items mentioned above, this issue of **The Edinburgh Star** also contains the usual mix of community news, articles of general interest, serious and not-so-serious items. We hope that it will be of interest to readers. It is hard for the Editorial Board to gauge and more feedback from our readers would be very helpful. We do not always have as much material as we would like and unsolicited contributions are always welcome.

We will not be adopting a 'business as usual' approach on **The Edinburgh Star** either. Concerned that it could be in danger of becoming a self-perpetuating group, the Editorial Board has adopted the principle of rotating membership. A major restructuring of the Board is now in hand and changes will be announced in the next issue. Your editor has been responsible for the last 14 issues and feels that, when a suitable successor has been found, it will be time to step down. Anyone who might be interested in occupying the editor's chair should contact the present chairman of the Editorial Board, John Cosgrove. All enquiries will be treated in confidence.

STOP PRESS

Issue 33 of **The Edinburgh Star** received a 'Special Commendation' and was one of the runners up in the competition for best Communal Magazine at the Annual Convention for Communal Editors which was organised by the Board of Deputies and held in London on Sunday 20 February 2000. Not least because this was the first time we had entered the competition, but also because of the very large number of entries, this was a most gratifying result. First prize and a gold plate were awarded to Northwood Synagogue in Middlesex. Esti Sheinberg's article 'Anti-Semitism in Music' received an 'Honourable Mention' in the competition for best article and the Editorial Board offers its congratulations to her.

MA

FREDA RIFFKIN REPORTS....

ANNUAL CIVIC SERVICE
21st August 1999

The Annual Civic Service was held in the Synagogue on *Shabbat*, 21st August 1999. The Lord and Lady Provost, Members of the City of Edinburgh Council, attended by the High Constables and City Officials, were welcomed by the President, Dr. Ian Leifer. The Service then recommenced with the *Sefer Torah* being returned to the Ark to the singing of the Choir conducted by Mr. David Mendelssohn. After the Service a *Kiddush* prepared by the Ladies Guild took place in the Communal Hall. The President formerly welcomed the Lord and Lady Provost and the members of the Council and presented Lord Provost Milligan with a copy of the Dictionary of Jewish Humour.

Before his formal address, the Lord Provost expressed his sadness at the passing of Dr. Nathan Oppenheim, who in the past had welcomed him to the Annual Civic Service. He said that his passing would not only be a loss to the Jewish Community but also to the city. He thanked the President for his gift and said how much he enjoyed visiting the Synagogue and how much the Jewish Community added to the cosmopolitan character of the city which Edinburgh had become.

With reference to Dr. Leifer's comment that he was the first Lord Provost of Edinburgh to have been elected to a second term of office, he said he would definitely be present next August, which was more than Rabbi Sedley could say. He referred to the opening, after 52 years, of the new Festival Centre in the Lawnmarket. He had suggested that the opening ceremony should be conducted by the harmonica player Larry Adler, a long time hero of his for his stand against McCarthyism, and he was delighted to have been present on that occasion.

COMMUNAL HALL LADIES COMMITTEE FASHION SHOW
27th October 1999

The Communal Hall Ladies Committee held an extremely successful Mannequin Parade on the 27th October. There was a large attendance of ladies to enjoy a very professional show consisting of hair styles by Raymond of Morningside followed by a display of beautiful clothes by the following firms all of which excelled themselves: The Cashmere Store, Variations of Bruntsfield, Wilkies, Butterflies of the Grassmarket, and 45 William Street.

Great credit must go to the hardworking committee and many thanks to Raymond who, I am given to understand choreographed the whole show and contributed generously to the costs.

Members of the Friendship Club with the Lady Provost.

WIZO LUNCH
10th November 1999

A very successful lunch was held at the home of Mrs. Robertson, 34 Coltbridge Terrace. There was a good attendance of ladies and a delicious lunch was served. The Chairman, Mrs Katie Goodwin welcomed the ladies and was able to announce that 100 Pounds had been made for Wizo Funds.

LUNCHEON CLUB
18th November 1999

The members of the Luncheon Club were honoured by an invitation from the Lord and Lady Provost to have tea with them at the City Chambers. This proved to be a most interesting and pleasant occasion.

The party were warmly welcomed by the Lord and Lady Provost and were then shown the European Room where the history of Edinburgh is told in pictures. The Lord Provost kindly gave us a talk telling the story of the pictures and we were all enthralled. More good things were to follow. We were taken to the Lord Provost's Office where we were shown and indeed allowed to handle the chains of office and, most thrilling to the ladies, the beautiful Rosebery sapphire pendant which the late Earl of Rosebery had presented to the city for the use of the Lady Provost when he had been made Lord Lieutenant of the City of Edinburgh.

Tea was then served and it was agreed by all that this was an

afternoon none of us would have wanted to miss. Mrs. Joyce Cram thanked the Lord and Lady Provost on behalf of the Club and invited them to have lunch with us in the future.

COMMUNAL HALL CHANUKAH DINNER
4th December 1999

The Communal Hall *Chanukah* Dinner was as usual with this Committee a great success. Over 90 people attended and a most appetising meal was served to a most appreciative group.

Rabbi Sedley lit the *Chanukah* candles and all joined in the singing of *Moaz Tsur*. He also recited Grace both before and after the meal.

The entertainment was provided by our own Faye Levy and dancing took place to a band which she had organised. Many thanks and congratulations to her for helping to make this the successful evening it undoubtedly was.

Once again the Communal Hall Committee led by Anita Mendelssohn and her extremely hard working committee had come up trumps. At time of writing the full sum raised is not known to your correspondent, but it must have been considerable.

FRIENDSHIP CLUB BIRTHDAY PARTY
12th December 1999

The Friendship Club held a very successful 43rd Birthday Party in the Communal Hall on Sunday 12th December 1999. This club is very popular with the Senior Citizens of our Community and has concluded another very busy year. Meetings are held every fortnight in the Communal Hall and the club can be. recommended to everyone.

The Chairman, Mr. Willie Caplan welcomed all present, both members and invited guests. A most delicious tea was then served, followed by entertainment provided by Bill Simpson and his Saxophone Quartet. This was greatly enjoyed by all.

COMMUNAL HALL LADIES COMMITTEE BURNS SUPPER
23rd January 2000

A most enthusiastic audience enjoyed an entertaining evening at the Communal Hall Ladies Committee's Biennial Burns Supper. The tables were beautifully set and adorned with tartan ribbons and napkins and the meal was up to the Committee's usual standard. Many of the gentlemen wore the kilt including our Rabbi and it was a scintillating scene.

The 'Address to the Haggis' which was duly piped in was given by Mr. Fred Lowrie and he is to be congratulated on his histrionic abilities. To him also fell the honour of proposing the 'Immortal Memory' which he delivered in a most interesting manner, using examples of Burns' work to illustrate his life.

Margaret and Joe Aronson and Fiona Tumbull entertained with lovely renditions of some of the famous songs of our National Poet. Their pure and precise singing gave great pleasure to all listeners. We are very fortunate to have them in our Community.

Finally the evening was rounded off by the witty 'Toast to the Lassies' given by Ian Shein and the reply by his wife, Pearl, in verse. This was a wonderful conclusion to the function and was much appreciated. We all look forward to the next Burns Supper in two years time.

The Communal Hall Committee are to be congratulated on another successful function

CONGRATULATIONS

The Editorial Board offers its warmest congratulations to:

Rabbi David Sedley, Minister of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congegation since 1996, on his appointment as Minister to the much larger Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Synagogue in Leeds. He will take up his appointment in May.

Christine Burns on the birth of a grandson, Ben.

Ian Caplan, younger son of Sidney and Sandra Caplan, on his engagement to Rachel White of Pinner, Middlesex.

John and Lesley Danzig on the occasion of their second son Benjamin's *Bar Mitzvah* in the Synagogue on 19th February 2000.

Sheriff Gerald Gordon, QC on the award of a knighthood in the New Year's Honours List.

Joanna Highton on becoming a grandmother.

Lionel Levi on his engagement to Jacqui Ehiani. The wedding will take place in Paris in July.

Rabbi David Sedley on being invited to address the Scottish Parliament on behalf of the Jewish Community in Scotland on 26th January 2000.

Pearl and Ian Shein, on the birth of a grandson Joshua in Manchester (a sixth grandchild).

Readers who would like to have an item included in this column are asked to contact the Editor.

'MINE FAIR SADIE'
9th January 2000

Myrna Kaplan (Honorary Secretary of Edinburgh Hillel) writes: On 9th January 2000, a theatre supper evening was held in the Communal Hall. The idea originated from David Kaplan who pointed out that Chaplaincy/Hillel are always in need of extra funds. The meal was organised by Morris Kaplan and the show (based on the book, lyrics and music of Alf Fogel) was directed and produced by Lennie Berger who has directed and produced a number of very successful shows, for example 'Carmen Cohen', over the years. Norma Brodie adapted the music and played the piano throughout the show.

The cast were all members of the Edinburgh Jewish Community, with the lead parts played by Rowan Henry and Joe Aronson. They were more than ably supported by Margaret Aronson, Judy Gilbert, Andrea Cowan, Rose Newman, Gershon Mendick, Janet Mundy and David Gonshaw. In addition, there was a guest appearance by Rabbi 'Buddy' Sedley.

The cast in the Communal Hall.

Twenty-five people, including the Northern Region Chaplain, Rabbi Dovid Cohen and his wife Sara, came over from Glasgow to support the show. In all, over one hundred people had a most enjoyable evening. Edward Green kindly donated a bracelet for the raffle.

The Northern Region Chaplaincy Board and Edinburgh Hillel would like to record its thanks to those who came and those who sent donations. The proceeds from the event will be used to support Jewish students in Edinburgh, particularly those who are living away from home.

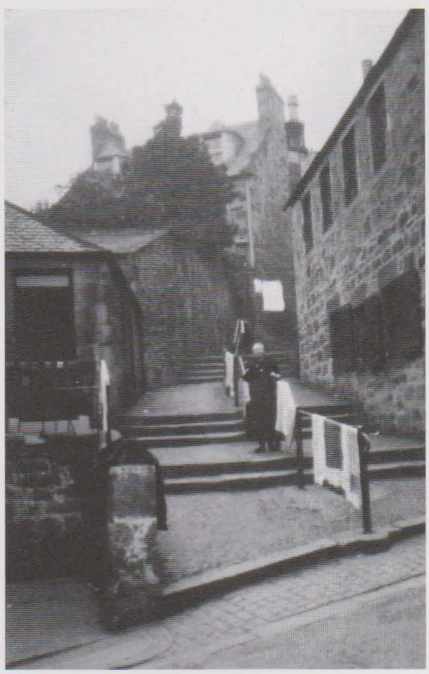
Mr Willie Caplan laying the "Star of David" wreath at the Cenotaph, City Chambers, Edinburgh, on behalf of the Edinburgh Jewish Branch of the British Legion during Remembrance Day.

A COMMUNAL REVIVAL IN FALKIRK?

by Jackie Taylor

Recently a *minyan* gathered in Falkirk for a joint Edinburgh and Glasgow *siyum* (completion of a section of the *Talmud*). This was to 'celebrate' the end of the particular section of the Talmud in the daily *daf hayomi* cycle. In a quest to find out when the last *minyan* was held in Falkirk, I spoke to Mr Hymie Cembler, who has lived in Falkirk all his life and was able to outline the history of the Falkirk Jewish Community.

The first *shul*, in Falkirk was probably in Sword's Wynd near where Marks and Spencer is now. At that time there were around a dozen Jewish families in the town. When this *shul* closed down, about seventy-five years ago another *shul*, on the High Street between where Boots and Woolworths are now, was opened. A Mr. Sidley would come from Glasgow to conduct the *Shabbat* service. He would arrive on a Friday afternoon, begin by taking the *Cheder*, which comprised some seven or eight children, and then conduct the service. The High Holy Days were conducted by a Mr. Dishkant. In 1946, the *shul* moved again but this one (in Glebe Street) only remained open for about one year. The Falkirk *Shul* had a few *siddurim* and *Torah* of their own. When the *shul* closed, the *Torah* was sent to Israel but some of the *siddurim* are still in the possession of the Jewish families who still live in Falkirk.



Sword's Wynd, circa 1900. Courtesy of Falkirk Museums.

Falkirk High Street, looking East, circa 1900. Courtesy of Falkirk Museums.

Minyans for *Yahrzeit* were carried out on a regular basis until about 1980 – latterly in private homes. Seemingly, the man who conducted the service was also the porter at Falkirk High Station, and so the *minyan* had to be timed to coincide with the train timetable. He was collected at the station as soon as the Edinburgh train had left, taken to the *minyan*, and then back to the station in time to meet the Glasgow train.

The Jewish families who lived in Falkirk mainly ran their own businesses, which included jewellery, decorating, drapery and furniture. Some of the younger families, those with children, left Falkirk to settle elsewhere, but several of the older generation lived out their lives in the town. There are even recollections of a Jewish Old Age Home in Slammanan, a small mining village about seven miles south of Falkirk. They used to obtain their meat from a *kosher* butcher in Glasgow and have it sent to them by bus or train and this practice continued until the butcher closed down. Apparently, during the war, chickens were taken through to Glasgow to be slaughtered.

The Falkirk Jewish Community is now extremely small and there are not even enough men to make a *minyan*. However, two Jewish families are still involved in business in Falkirk.

Any reader who has any recollections of Falkirk Jewry, or of the Old Age Home in Slammanan, is asked to contact Jackie Taylor (01324 612126 or e-mail Ray.Taylor @lineone.net) who is trying to gather information on the very small but select Falkirk Jewish Community.

STAR TREK INTO THE PAST

In our last issue, the First World War soldier seated at the table and writing to his wife, who is also featured, was Abraham Lurie, the father of Joshua Lurie.

The group photograph is of a Lodge Solomon dance and was taken around 1955. Those who appear in the photograph are:

Back Row (left to right): Norman Cram, Alec Strachan, Joyce Cram, Jack Levey, Alec Edelman, Jackie Jackson, Elinor Gandz, Harry Gandz, Julie Jackson, Alec Rubenstein, Dolly Bierman, Maurice Bierman, Valerie Vinestock, and Sydney Vinestock.

Front Row (left to right): Sheva Lurie, Joe Lurie, Joey Levey, Chris Edelman, Victor Alouf, Vickkie Alouf, Max Strachan, Dora Strachan.

In this issue, we publish one photograph. It is also from a vintage era. Who is presenting what to whom, who else is present and when did the presentation take plavce? In response to suggestions from our readers, you will find the answers on page 21.

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The Edinburgh Star

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CONTACT KATE GOODWIN

A DOUBLE PROFILE OF DAVID AND ALIT SEDLEY

by Ian Shein

An expansive, infectious smile, a firm handshake and a warm, friendly welcome introduces one to David Anthony Sedley, Rabbi of Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation for the past three and a half years. Born in Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, he was the eldest of three boys and three girls. His father, a teacher by profession, worked for Oxford University Press in Wellington before opening a general bookshop. His mother was a nurse before the demands of a large family and the inevitable increase in domestic duties led her stay to stay at home to look after the family.

Educated at Hutt Valley High School in Lower Hutt, a town adjacent to Wellington where the family lived, he went on to Victoria University where he studied for a BA in English and took courses in the history and theory of music. Graduating in 1988, he achieved a long-standing ambition to travel abroad. Arriving in London, he worked for Maxine's grocery shop in predominantly Jewish Golders Green and spent a very short time in Edinburgh before travelling through Europe. This brief visit left him with a lasting image of the beauty of the city and an unconscious desire to return to the city one day.

Ending up in Israel, he attended an *ulpan* at Kibbutz Yavneh for five months before enrolling at Darche Noam Yeshiva. Several years later, this same *yeshiva* became the spiritual home of two members of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, David Mason and Michael Rifkind. During his last two years there, David Sedley attended evening classes on communal work in the Diaspora. At that time, he saw his immediate future in terms of working with small communities. He did not imagine himself as a communal Rabbi but rather aspired to some form of adult Jewish education. However, at that time, Arnold Rifkind and John Cosgrove were in Israel with a remit to investigate the possibility of finding a Rabbi for the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation which had been without one since Rabbi Shapira's retirement the year before. He was interviewed and agreed to come to Edinburgh for *Shavuot*. After conducting services and a formal interview, he was offered and accepted the post. He then returned to Israel, where he gained *Semicha* before his return to Edinburgh to take up his duties. He stated that he was quite thrilled to have been offered the post, his first ever as a official duties. He regarded it as a great, if somewhat nerve-racking challenge.

David and Alit Sedley and family.

Alit Shrensky was born in New Jersey, the older of two girls. Her father had trained as a lawyer but was also qualified as an accountant while her mother worked in special education. On their very first visit to Israel, the family decided to make *aliyah*. Her mother continued her educational career and initiated what was to prove a very innovative scheme in Israel, the provision of mainstream kindergarten schooling for children with disabilities. Alit studied English Language and Literature at Bar Ilan University near Tel Aviv. She obtained a teaching qualification but her studies for a BA degree were interrupted by her marriage. She is currently taking courses at the Open University and the Centre for Continuing Education in Edinburgh. Her work experience has included employment in schools, retail management and work for the Jerusalem municipality.

Alit met her husband-to-be at a friend's birthday party and their immediate attraction to each other resulted in their engagement and wedding within a year of meeting. The young couple initially lived in Jerusalem while David was still at *yeshiva*. Their son Avi was born on 10 December 1995, the first *sabra* for the family, and their daughter Shani was born *Erev Pesach* on 9 April 1998, arriving home in time for her very first *Seder*.

Rabbi Sedley's enthusiasm to return to Edinburgh was tempered by the responsibility of his first Rabbinic post, especially since, for some time, he had

had doubts that this was the right career for him. On arrival in Edinburgh, he quickly became aware that he had come to a 'warm, friendly and supportive' community. However, he was very conscious of his youth – he was only 27 years old. To the inevitable comments that 'he is awful young' came the answer 'so he will get older'. He soon came to appreciative the predominantly older community and realised the necessity of combining age and youth. He regarded the older members as 'young at heart' and found his own age to be a distinct asset in communication. There is, however, no doubt that the ease with which he establishes relationships is mainly attributable to his own very relaxed and easy-going personality.

Due to the dedication of the small band of part-time teachers, Rabbi Sedley found a well-run *cheder* and capitalised on this by encouraging children to enjoy attending. He maintains that Jewish education should be both fun and interesting and that this contributes to making Judaism a positive learning experience. Keen to extend this to all age groups, the Rabbi organises classes in *Gemorah* and *Halacha*, brings speakers to *Melave Malkas*, teaches pre-and post-*Barmitzvah* boys, conducts innumerable school and adult groups round the Synagogue and is heavily involved in all facets of a small but very active community. Modern technology has resulted in computer presentation of regular *Shabbas Parsha* sheets and with Alit, who is responsible for the design, he has prepared a web-page on the Synagogue. On top of all this, he has recently obtained an MA in Education from the Open University. Whenever he has time for relaxation, he is fond of music, especially rock, and plays the guitar. Alit settles for pop music – she is an avid reader and for some time has been employed part-time in telemarketing for a courier company.

Sadly for Edinburgh, Rabbi Sedley has been offered a position as Rabbi of Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Synagogue in Leeds and he will take up his duties there in May. A much larger congregation and attendant clergy will inevitably result in a different emphasis in his work, allowing him to pursue further avenues which are of particular interest to him. He insists that he has gained considerably from his stay in Edinburgh and that this experience will benefit him greatly in Leeds. He will certainly be missed. The Edinburgh Star wishes the Sedley family good luck and much happiness and thanks them most warmly for their contribution to the well-being and success of our own small and invigorating community.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH

In this issue, we continue our occasional series with two very contrasting accounts.
The Editor would be very pleased to receive further contributions from readers

Rabbi David Sedley

Before beginning this article I must stress that these are my personal views. It is not my intention to agree or disagree with any of the other opinions which have been previously expressed in this magazine, but merely to provide food for thought. 'What it means to be Jewish' is a topic which I have great difficulty writing about. Not because of difficulties in defining 'who is a Jew', which has become a political issue rather than a theological one. We can safely take the standard Talmudic definition of a Jew as being someone who is born Jewish, or converts to Judaism, and leave the politicians and different branches of Rabbinic authorities to work out the precise details of that definition. However, being 'Jewish' is something more than 'technically' belonging to the Jewish religion. It seems to me that we must distinguish between Jew-ish and 'Jewish'. Half of New York is probably Jew-ish, based on the number of kosher-style restaurants, and the amount of bagels which are consumed daily. Half of Hollywood is Jew-ish if we go by the credits of any movie.

The reason that I find it difficult to write about being Jewish is because it is so much a part of who I am that I cannot imagine being anything else, and it is almost impossible to define something without recourse to contrast with an alternative. Another difficulty in defining what it means to be 'Jewish' is that our society, and particularly our language and concepts, are based on a Christian viewpoint. Whenever we talk about ideas such as 'faith', 'goodness' or even 'God', we often have to make a conscious effort to distinguish between the Jewish meaning of these terms, and the way it is used in the vernacular. In truth being 'Jewish' for me is not about philosophy or dogma, but about actions. Paul Johnson writes that "Judaism is not so much about doctrine – that is taken for granted – as behaviour; the code matters much more than the creed." To this I would add the famous Talmudic dictum that it is better to fulfil the commandments for the wrong reasons, for through this one will come to fulfil them for the right reasons. In other words, even if doctrine cannot be taken for granted, it will follows from one's actions and lifestyle.

In my experience philosophical discussions very rarely lead to direct action or making life changes. And to my mind, being 'Jewish' is about actions. The Talmud states that, since the destruction of the Temple, God only has the four cubits of

Halachah (Jewish Law). That means that creating a connection with God – finding spirituality – is achieved not through meditations or studying *Kabbalah*, but through fulfilling the commandments. Unlike other religions, Judaism is not even primarily concerned with the 'Big Commandments', such as belief, or Synagogue attendance, but rather with the small details. Ours is virtually the only religion that governs every aspect of life, and everything we do throughout the day. On everything from waking up in the morning, to eating, working, sleeping or speaking, there are books of laws to tell us how to act. Some of these laws are from the Torah, some are Rabbinic, and some are customary, but each of them reminds us constantly that we are 'Jewish', and gives us a direct connection to God and spirituality. Even the most mundane acts are thus translated into acts of worship.

Someone who has never experienced my definition of 'Jewish' will not be able to imagine finding spirituality in the minutiae of Jewish law. When I tell people about the myriad laws that comprise Judaism they ask incredulously how it could be possible to keep all of these laws? Others take the position of 'Does God really care about the details?'. To which the answers are 'No, we don't have to do the impossible – just try our best', and 'Yes, he does!'. To me being 'Jewish' without recognising the importance of Jewish law is like having a bagel without the *lox*. It may be Jew-ish, but it is not the total package.

Ruzena Wood

Most Jews are born Jewish. Converts achieve Jewishness. And doesn't everybody occasionally feel overwhelmed by the challenges of a Jewish identity? What about those 'wicked sons', not quite identifying with *Pesach*? But there is always a place for them at the *Seder* table. Judaism recognises the need to grow. Following a pilgrimage of their own, our teenage rebels may yet return to the fold. Diverse patterns illuminate our Jewish experience, not all of them of our own choosing.

I was not born Jewish. Yet, here I am, a convert to reform Judaism 'by profession of faith'. Asked casually how I came to be joining in that richly tapestried tune *etz chaim hi* along with everyone else, I try to think of a reply that is neat, logical and compatible with small talk: 'You know my father was a Professor of Hebrew'.

The truth lies elsewhere in time, requiring a different perspective. My father's devotion to Christianity and my own conversion to Judaism both represent attempts to create a better environment in the face of adversity. Always have been, ever since the Garden of Eden or, at least, since Abraham loaded tents into the landrover and left town. It was my father who, initially, made Judaism accessible for me.

The real story begins a couple of generations before I was born, in Glasgow in the 1920s where my paternal grandfather, Joseph, worked long hours in a grocery store. He hoped his fourteen year old son, James, might one day go to university, the dream of every poor family. Joseph had a heart attack and died and James left school. As a surveyor's apprentice, James supported his mother and two younger sisters and, as time went by, fended off his violent step-father with a poker.

James Wood graduated from Glasgow University with an MA in Philosophy and Political Economy. But, no longer believing that politics and economics offered the ultimate hope to mankind, he headed for Mansfield College, Oxford to read Theology. Ordained as a Congregational Minister in Macclesfield, Cheshire, James studied part-time at Manchester University, obtaining a degree in Semitic languages under professor Paul Kahle, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany.

One cold, wet day in 1939, my Dad encountered two men in *chassidic* garb. The men were ringing all the doorbells in the street , asking if there were any refugees from Nazi Germany who needed assistance. My Dad invited them in, the men hesitated, no doubt anxious about *kashrut*. They came in and the three men sat round the fire.

I was too young to remember the family from Germany who moved in with us. News reached us that the outspoken anti-Nazi Pastor, Friedrich Niemöller, had been arrested in Germany. My Dad contrived to send a letter of support to Mrs Niemöller which, quite remarkably, reached her. Months later, a reply was slipped through our letter box, delivered by hand. We never found out who delivered it.

The British Government informed us that my dad had been proscribed by the Nazis – the British had intercepted a 'hit list'. We were offered places on a ship going to Canada but my parents decided not to emigrate – a good thing, as it turned out, because the ship was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic and sank.

My Dad was struggling with a duodenal ulcer and subsisted almost entirely on milk. I can recall seeing him, hunched over the table, studying Hebrew texts. The square letters did not talk to me. I had a picture book of my own, all about God making the world and I used to wonder why it referred to 'fowls of the air' rather than 'birds'.

When I was four years old, things began to go wrong. I was diagnosed 'spastic' and both my legs were set in plaster at Stoke Orthopaedic Hospital. When I got rid of the steel callipers, my legs were so thin that I fell with unfailing regularity. The road to school was unpaved and covered with heavy brown gravel – probably industrial waste left over from the now silent silk mills. Every time I fell, I just sat there and bawled. This was too much for my Dad who told me 'When you fall, tell God what happened immediately and get up!'.

We moved to Aberdeen in 1943 and stayed until 1947 when the Scottish Congregational College in Edinburgh offered my Dad the post of Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament. A series of books followed, my favourite being *Job and the Human Situation*. My own interests lay else where – friendly with other youngsters, including Jewish children, I was interested in music and the theatre.

Until 1950, when I decided to become a musician, my main interests were teaching myself Greek and exploring traditional Czech culture. I cherished one Czech characteristic: a defiant, gritty compassion which suffuses some of the finest Czech writing. Sadly it is rare and getting more so - Capek is not an example of this but Joseph Wechsberg, a Czech Jew from Moravia, is. The hypersensitive observation in his partly autobiographical *The Cooking of Vienna's Empire* is an enchanting essay in nostalgia. Gradually it occurred to me that there were too many Jewish connections for it to be a coincidence. I know now that this compassionate vein has its roots in Yiddish culture and traditional Judaism and was at home in the *shtetl*.

As a student at Edinburgh University, Jewish anthologies (largely aimed at the American market), liturgy and poetry injected a degree of kashrut into my compulsory reading of English Literature. I came to realise that post-war Christianity was trapped between an apologetic lack of confidence on the one hand and an increasingly hostile secular establishment on the other. I was more attracted by the vigorous interactive confrontations of Judaism. Abraham arguing, and arguing. Jonah sneaking off on a package holiday to Nineveh and getting more than he had bargained for. Christianity seemed to offer the Creator a diminished role in his own production, our world. It became more than I could tolerate.

I relied on Jewish friends. The Czech Jewish conductor, Walter Susskind, had me listening to so many rehearsals of the Scottish national orchestra that, after graduation, it was a natural progression from the Usher Hall to the National Library of Scotland where I became music archivist and creative consultant. And then, in 1981, the Hungarian-born, Jewish publisher, André Deutsch, published my anthology of Czech folk tales, *The Palace of Moon*. What I appreciated most about both these two men, Walter and André, was their ability to meet me half way. They were encouraging.

Health problems, and responsibility for my mother, now in her nineties, have made it impossible for me to mark my spiritual journey with a formal conversion to Reform Judaism, so far. Rabbi Hugo Gryn took a very positive view of my difficulties. He referred to Psalms 116-118, which include references to converts in the time of King David: 'the ones who fear the Lord'. 'As he put it 'You have to say you are Jewish and if anyone doesn't think you are, that is their problem'. That was compassion from the Carpathian mountains.

In January 1986, a member of the Community invited me to the Literary Society to hear a talk from the cookery writer Claudia Roden. The next *Shabbat*, I attended morning service. Like 'The Man who came to Dinner', I stayed.

Just a few months ago, a visitor returned to *Shul* after a few years working abroad. Recognising me, he exclaimed innocently, 'Are you still here?'. His expectation was clearly that I would have given up and gone away. I paused to give him a beaming smile and then replied 'How else could I study?'.

THE FOOD COLUMN

by Shirley Bennett

Peter and I are not long back from Canada where we stayed with my very good friend Celia who is a great gourmet cook. She is always cooking fantastic meals for her lucky family. While running an eye over the contents of her fridge, I noticed an interesting apple pie which I tasted. Impressed, I asked for the recipe and was surprised to be told that there was no pastry in it. It tasted just as if it was made of pastry and was such a simple recipe that it is my first suggestion to start the new Millennium:

NO PASTRY APPLE PIE

3 large Bramley apples
2 eggs
½ cup of sugar
⅓ cup of oil
½ cup of flour
1 teaspoonful baking powder
⅓ cup of milk

Mix all the ingredients except the apples. Then, peel and cut the apples into slices and press on top of the mixture. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake at 180°C (350°F, gas mark 4) for 45 minutes.

Sandra Caplan is a great cook, as some of you may know. There is always an impressive selection of goodies for visitors. Her mum Minnie gets quite hurt if guests don't eat so I thought that one of her favourite recipes would be fun. The basic mixture is quite similar to the previous one and makes about 3 dozen biscuits.

MINNIE'S KICHELS

2 large eggs
1¼lb. self-raising flour
1 cup of sugar
1 cup of oil
A few drops almond essence
1 teaspoonful of vanilla essence

Mix all the ingredients. Roll out and cut into rounds. Sprinkle with sugar. Bake at 180°C (350°F, gas mark 4) for 20 minutes.

Claudia Roden came to Edinburgh to give the opening talk to the Literary Society on 31st October and gave a very interesting talk about responses to her much acclaimed book *The Book of Jewish Food*. After her talk, I made a cake from another of her books, *The Mediterranean Cookery Book* and it was very good.

Her moist almond cake bathed in orange-flavoured syrup is really more of a dessert than a cake and is best eaten the day after it is made.

HONEY AND ALMOND CAKE

For the cake:

4 eggs separated
125g (4oz) sugar
Grated zest of 1 orange
50g (2oz) ground almonds
50g (2oz) blanched almonds finely chopped

For the syrup:

Juice of 3 oranges (about 300ml/10 fl oz)
75g (3oz) sugar
1 cinnamon stick
1 tablespoon orange liqueur

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C (350°F, gas mark 4). Mix the egg yolks with the sugar, orange zest and all the almonds. Beat the egg whites until stiff and fold them in. Pour the mixture into a greased and floured 20cm (8in) non-stick cake tin or one with removable sides or bottom and bake for 45 minutes. Let it cool. Then transfer to a serving plate.

Claudia Roden at the Lit.

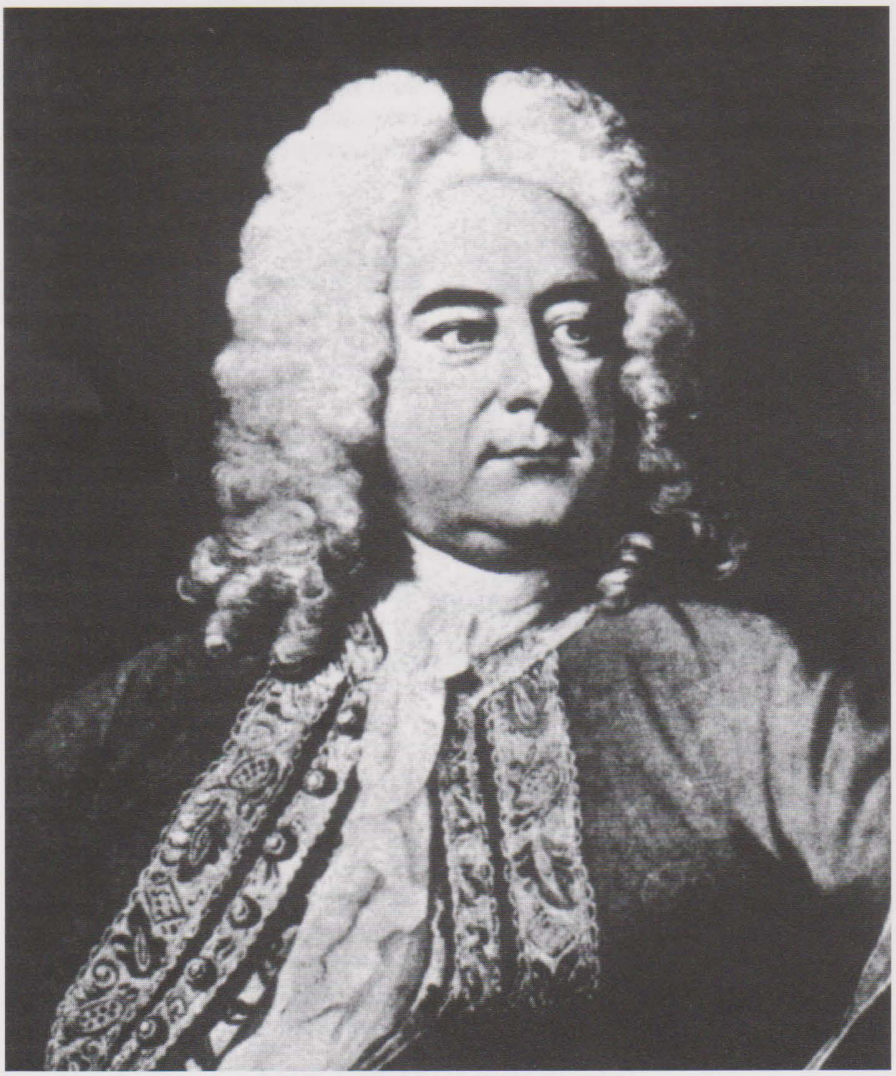
To make the syrup, simmer the orange juice with the sugar and cinnamon for a few minutes until the sugar has melted, and add the liqueur. Pour over the cake after piercing the top with little holes so that the syrup seeps in. It will take some time for the cake to become well impregnated. Leave the cinnamon stick on top for decoration. It is really delicious.

PHILO-SEMITISM IN MUSIC

by Lewis Stevens

Anti-Semitism in music is well-documented[123] and was the subject of a talk by Esti Sheinberg which was given to the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society in 1998. Although we are, for very understandable reasons concerned with anti-Semitism, whether in music or elsewhere, I feel that we do sometimes overlook the fact that there are many examples of non-Jews who have shown admiration and support for Jews in different spheres of life. This article is in no way intended as a polemic against the phenomenon of anti-Semitism in music, but simply to show that both philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism exist and deserve attention.

My definition of philo-Semitism in music is simply 'support and admiration for Jews in the sphere of music'. This is a wide and all-embracing definition encompassing the whole sphere of musical activity, but the two particular aspects that I wish to focus on are: first, composers who have used Jewish characters and portrayed them in a favourable light; and second, composers who have demonstrated philo-Semitism by their actions rather than or as well as their compositions. In the first category the characters most frequently portrayed are those from the Bible. Many composers, ranging from some of the earliest musicians to the 20th century figures like Honegger, Britten, and Stravinsky have used such characters.



G. W. F. Handel

HANDEL

I consider Handel first because, in his oratorios, he portrayed more biblical characters than any other well-known composer. If Handel did not invent the oratorio, then he was certainly the earliest major exponent of it, in much the same way as Haydn was the earliest major exponent of the symphony. Handel wrote 14 English oratorios on Old Testament subjects and only two (*Messiah* and *Theodora*) on New Testament subjects. And why the great preponderance of Old Testament topics? I am not suggesting that this can only be attributed to philo-Semitism, since there were clearly other reasons as well, but I am suggesting that philo-Semitism was a factor. Another important reason is that it was common to use music as a political metaphor[4] and Handel, who was politically astute, had an eye for the market. This was one of the reasons why he changed from writing Italian operas to oratorios. Italian opera was becoming less popular and was particularly expensive to perform – even in those days – since it entailed hiring expensive Italian singers. In addition, oratorios did not have to face the same restrictions as operas – the Blasphemy Act of 1605 made the staging of biblical dramas illegal but unstaged religious dramas were permitted.

Although we know a lot about Handel's public persona, we know surprisingly little about his private opinions. Here I want to consider three factors which have a bearing on whether or not the label philo-Semitism can be applied to him: his views on religion; his life in

England; and the content of the oratorios themselves.

Handel's views on Religion

Handel was born in 1685 and was brought up in Halle, just north of Leipzig, as a Lutheran Protestant. Severe epidemics between 1681 and 1683 decimated the population of Halle, which fell from 11,000 to 5,000, and in the period following, immigration into the town was encouraged. After 1685, when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes which had proclaimed freedom of worship, many Huguenots (Protestants) were driven out of France and many fled to England and Germany. Huguenots were granted the use of the 16th century *Domekirsche* in Halle in 1686 and the restrictions on residence of Jews in Halle were lifted in 1692. Thus Handel witnessed a climate of increased tolerance for other religions in Halle. When he lived in England, he composed music for the Anglican church, but it rarely shows signs of deep religious feeling. It was not really intended for inner worship, but more to display the pomp and circumstance of Anglicanism.[5]

Handel was more adept at expressing the sufferings of humanity and moods of nature than the consolations of religion. We know that he composed music masses for the Catholic church in Italy. He did not compose any music for the synagogue but then he would not have been asked to do so as the reform movement only started at the beginning of the 19th century. My conjecture, and it is only conjecture, is that he would have been happy to do so, especially with suitable remuneration! Overall we have a picture of a man who embodied religious toleration as well as compassion and understanding for the less fortunate (he made many bequests to charity later in life). One might imagine that had he lived in the twentieth century he would have been a humanist.

Handel's Life in England

Handel composed his oratorios in England, where he lived from the age of 25 (in 1710) until his death at the age of 74 (in 1759). There were a number of factors that made him decide to settle in England. At that time, England was regarded as a liberal and tolerant country. Initially he was somewhat an outsider, not speaking English fluently, but later he became part of the establishment. Even as late as 1733, when he visited Oxford to perform *Athalia*, some of the dons appear to have been prejudiced against 'a foreigner and his foreign fiddlers', although they apparently warmed to him after hearing the oratorio. Handel became a naturalised British subject on his 42nd birthday and a contemporary historian, Hawkins, wrote of him at the time: 'he would often say that one of the great felicities of his life was that he was settled in a country where no man suffers any molestation or inconvenience on account of his religious principles'. Although the Jewish community in London had increased in size and prominence, they might not have entirely shared Handel's reported views, but compared with pre-Revolutionary France, Britain was certainly considered to be a model of tolerance.

The new middle class Jewish community made up a significant proportion of the audiences for his oratorios and there were a number of leading Jews among his subscribers. Jews are said to have flocked to *Judas Maccabeus*. Rockstro points out that, in the chorus 'We worship God and God alone', neither Jew nor Christian could listen unmoved. In a letter to a friend, Handel attributed the poor reception to one of his later oratorios, *Theodora*, saying 'Jews will not come to it as to *Judas Maccabeus* because it is a Christian story and ladies will not come because it is a virtuous one'. So he was obviously aware of the Jewish following in the audiences.

In 1753 the British Government introduced the Jewish Naturalisation Act, allowing foreign-born Jews to become naturalised. One of the reasons for this was to facilitate commerce and increase revenue. For example, after the Jacobite uprising of 1745, the City panicked and Sampson Gideon, a Jewish financier, raised £1,700,000 to help restore government calm.[6] Around this time there was considerable opposition to the Act and much anti-Semitism from its opponents, so much so that the Act was withdrawn a year later because of the outcry from Christian merchants – it was not until 1890 that Jewish emancipation was complete. Because anti-Semitic feelings were running high at this time, Old Testament oratorios with Israelite heroes were much less popular than previously.[7] Despite this, for the 1752 and 1753 seasons, Handel revived many of his Old Testament oratorios including *Judas Maccabeus, Samson, Deborah, Saul, Joshua, Alexander Balus* and *Jeptha*.

Handel's oratorios

If we compare Handel's and Bach's compositions on religious subjects, the contrast is stark. Bach composed out of a deep religious belief which inspired his works while Handel was first and foremost a man of the theatre, and it was the drama which provided his inspiration.[8] It should be remembered that all his oratorios, even *Messiah*, were written to be performed in the theatre and not in church.

If we look at the Jewish characters portrayed in his oratorios, many of their blemishes are removed and they are often portrayed in a more favourable light than in the Bible. I will now illustrate how the Jewish characters in the oratorios are favourably portrayed. My first oratorio is *Samson*. This portrays Samson in a most heroic light. Unlike the Book of Judges, where Samson is portrayed as leading an irreligious and immoral life and having illicit sexual relationships with a Philistine woman, or Saint Saëns's *Samson and Dalila*, where Samson's great weakness in being seduced by Dalila notwithstanding all his father's dire warnings, Handel does not include Samson's seduction and disgrace. Instead he concentrates on his inner journey from his remorse to the fulfilment of his destiny in saving Israel from the

Philistines. Thus, Samson emerges as a heroic figure, full of remorse for his previous misdeeds. The libretto, by Newburgh Hamilton is based on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. It is difficult not to feel from the words and the music that Handel was greatly inspired by the Samson's character.

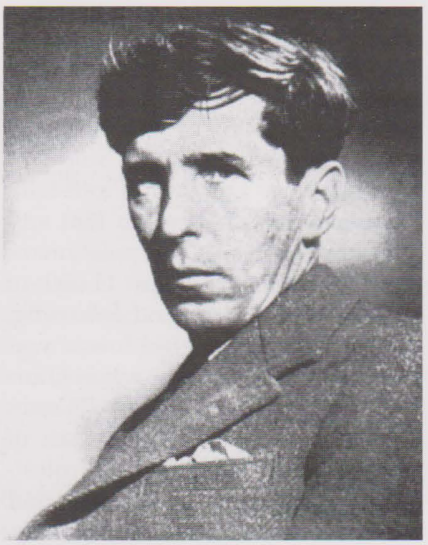
My second example is from the oratorio *Solomon*, and shows how Handel portrays Solomon as larger than life and free of any of the blemishes that appear in the First Book of Kings, and to a lesser extent the Second Book of Chronicles. In fact, some consider that the picture of Solomon which emerges from the oratorio was intended as an idealised portrait of George II with all his imperial greatness and commercial omnipotence. Thus, it is an example of political metaphor. This oratorio has been described as rather like a tableau. It has three acts, consisting of unconnected events. In the first act Solomon and his bride, Pharaoh's daughter, are like young lovers experiencing the first flush of passion – no reference is made to the other 699 wives! The third act is rather like a trade visit with the Queen of Sheba bringing gifts of gold and gems and with Solomon showing off the wonders of his palace, but it is in the second act that Solomon appears in all his wisdom. In the absence of DNA fingerprinting, two harlots are both claiming parentage of a child and Solomon has been asked to judge between them. Here he displays his wisdom by advocating that the child should be chopped in half with his sword and that they have half each. The one harlot gives herself away by saying that this would be fair and just, whereas the true mother, concerned for her child says that it would be better for her to lose her child than for the child to lose its life. The true mother is given her child and justice is done. At this point the chorus, extolling Solomon's wisdom sings:

"From the east and to the west.
Who so wise as Solomon?
Who like Israel's king is bless'd,
Who so worthy of the throne."

I have mentioned the common use of political metaphor in Handel's oratorios and *Judas Maccabaeus* is another example. Handel's librettist tells us that *Judas Maccabaeus* was planned as a compliment to the Duke of Cumberland, to be performed on his victorious return from Scotland in 1746, although the first performance was actually not until 1st April 1747. The Duke of Cumberland was likened to the Jewish hero, Judas Maccabaeus. The comparison of Judas Maccabaeus with the Duke of Cumberland may not be regarded as philo-Semitic in Scotland, it is important to remember that when Bonnie Prince Charles landed in 1745, many people in London thought that there was a real danger that the Hanovarians would be overthrown. Thus, victory at Culloden was seen as an effective way of removing the Jacobite threat and was viewed with relief and patriotic fever in London. Handel uses political metaphors both for individuals, e.g. Solomon (George II), Judas Maccabaeus (Duke of Cumberland), Saul and his descendants (the Stuart family), and for nations e.g. the Israelites (Christian England) and the Philistines (Catholic Europe). Note that I give the metaphoric equivalent in parentheses. In all of these examples the individuals or nations considered to be on the side of right are compared with Israelites either individually or collectively. This is, I believe a further argument for philo-Semitism.

MICHAEL TIPPETT

I want to now move from 18th century to 20th century oratorio. On 7th of November 1938 Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Polish Jew living with his aunt and uncle in Paris, received a letter from his sister explaining that his parents, along with many other Polish Jews living in Germany had been expelled from Germany but had not been allowed to enter Poland. Their plight was dire and, driven to desperation, Herschel Grynszpan, bought a gun and went to the German Embassy



Michael Tippett

where he assassinated a German diplomat, von Rath. The Nazis retaliated by having a general pogrom against all Jews under their rule leading to the events of *Kristallnacht* on 9th November. This tragic event provided the inspiration for Michael Tippett's oratorio *The Child of our Time* composed during the first weeks after the outbreak of war in 1939.

Tippett had always held left wing political views. In the early 1920s, appalled by the enormous loss of life in World War 1, he became a pacifist. In 1932 he became a Trotskyist sympathiser and joined the Communist Party for a short period. His philosophy was a mixture of instinctive pacifism and political idealism. After leaving the Communist Party, he remained a socialist and joined the Socialist Antiwar Front. Throughout his life he showed great concern for humanitarian issues and social injustice. He registered as a conscientious objector and in 1942 was given non-combatant duties which he refused and as a result went to prison for 3 months.

Tippett demonstrated philo-Semitism both in his actions and in his composition. He was appointed Director of Music at Morley College London in 1940. He was active in appointing staff who were Jewish refugees from Central Europe, including Walter Goehr, Mátyás Seiber, and three teenage string

players who were to form three quarters of the Amadeus Quartet. These appointments of foreigners attracted criticism from some quarters. Tippett's oratorio *A Child of our Time* was modelled overall on Handel's oratorio, *Messiah*, and on Bach's *Passions*. Both comprise three acts in which the first is general (prophecy in the case of Messiah), the second is the epic itself, and the third is consequential comment. However, instead of using Lutheran Chorales as Bach might have done, he used Negro spirituals. He believed that, in the twentieth century, Negro spirituals would speak to a greater proportion of the world's population than Christian chorales or Jewish liturgical music. Although he completed the work quite quickly, wartime conditions precluded an early performance. It was fitting that the first performance in 1944 was given with Walter Goehr, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany conducting. The work became one of Tippett's most popular works, catching the mood of the time. It has been performed in Germany and some performances have been associated with educational projects aimed a countering the resurgence of neo-Nazism.

In the second act of *A Child of our Time* there is a chorus of the self-righteous:

"We cannot have them in our Empire.
They shall not work, nor beg a dole.
Let them starve in No-Man's-Land!"

This is both a reference to homeless Jews stranded on the Polish border, and to the British government's refusal to receive more than a token few. Tippett was particularly concerned that the government and left-wing organisations in Britain were unwilling to help these Jewish refugees left stranded or dying on the Polish-German border.

MAURICE RAVEL

My next example of philo-Semitism in music is from France and from the early part of this century. In the

Maurice Ravel

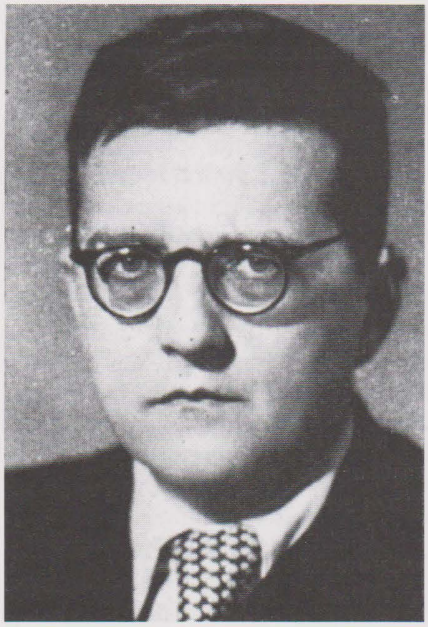
period preceding Alfred Dreyfus's exoneration on the false charge of handing secrets to the Germans and his reinstatement in the army in 1906, there was a vigorous debate throughout France on the question of nationality and patriotism which led to the formation of two opposing extra-parliamentary organisations: the *Dreyfusards* formed the League of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, and the *anti-Dreyfusards*, the League of Patriots. The former were concerned with the maintenance of individual rights proclaimed by the Revolution, whereas the latter were concerned that France was being eroded by the values of the Revolution.

After the closure of the Dreyfus affair, the question of nationality appeared to have been resolved, but the League of Patriots now began examining the question: "What cultural values are French?" The composer and musical educationalist Vincent D'Indy, who was a member of the League of Patriots, denounced Jewish art as undermining 'the logical chain of the past' claiming that the 'Jewish School' had retarded 'authentic' progress in art throughout most of the nineteenth century. In 1916 the *Ligue pour la Défense de la Musique Française* was formed as an outgrowth of the League of Patriots. Its aim during the First World War was to ban the performance of any works by German or Austrian composers not yet in the public domain. Germany and Austria were seen as the enemy without, but, after the war, attention was directed at the 'enemy within' – mainly Jews. Among composers, Debussy, who had formerly praised Offenbach, now criticised him and also implied that Dukas was not 'fully French (on the grounds that he was Jewish). The most prominent composer among the outspoken opponents of this xenophobia was Ravel. He refused to join the League of Patriots. He continued editing Mendelssohn's piano music, wrote an orchestral version of his *Mélodies Hébraïques* (*Kaddisch* and *L'Enigme Eternelle*) which was performed in 1920, and insisted that Schoenberg be invited to Paris to present his works to the Société Indépendente in 1927. Unlike many members of the Ligue pour la Défense de la Musique Française who stayed at home during the war, Ravel, who was rejected for active combat on medical grounds, nevertheless served as a driver for the armed forces and considered himself a truer patriot than members of the league.

Ravel is sometimes mistakenly considered to be Jewish. This seems to have arisen because he had a number of Jewish friends, because he set the *Kaddish* to music, and because his name is similar to 'Rabbele' (meaning little rabbi). According to his original biographer Roland-Manuel (who was of Jewish descent), there is no suggestion that there was Jewish blood on either side of Ravel's family.[8]

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Shostakovich's use of Jewish themes in his music is well-known and so also is his friendship with Jewish musicians and composers such as Moishe Vainberg. Benjamin Fleischmann, who was born in 1914, was a promising young Jewish composer who studied composition with Shostakovich for four years at the Leningrad Conservatory from 1937-1941. In 1941 he enlisted in the People's Brigade to fight the Nazis in what turned out to be a 900 day



Dmitri Shostakovich

siege of Leningrad in which half its population died mainly of starvation. Like most of these poorly trained and armed volunteers, Fleischmann died in the siege. He left few compositions, and one of these was incomplete – *Rothschild's violin*, based on a short story by Chekhov. Shostakovich found the manuscript and decided to complete it as a tribute to a promising composer who died tragically young. He completed it in 1943, but during the Stalin era there was no chance that it could be performed. The first staged performance was not until 1968 when it was conducted by Shostakovich's son, Maxim. It was given its UK premiere at the B'nai Brith Festival in London 1997.

KARL AMADEUS HARTMANN

My last example is the German composer Karl Amadeus Hartmann (1905-1963) who lived his whole life in Germany. His compositions are mainly orchestral and include eight symphonies. He and his family were staunchly anti-fascist. They remained in Germany throughout the war, helping others to escape, but Karl Amadeus went into a musical exile by not allowing any of his music to be played throughout that period. Living in Munich he saw the extremes of political unrest in the 1930s. In a number of his works, he cites Jewish themes, e.g. in his second symphony there is a Russian-Jewish lament, and in his first string quartet (1933) he incorporates *Eliaj hu hanavi*. A sonata entitled *27th April 1945* was inspired by the description of prisoners leaving Dachau, and has the quotation over the score 'unending was the stream ... unending was the misery'. In 1960 he was approached by Paul Dessau and Hans Werner Henze to contribute a movement to a composite work called *Judische Chronik* (Jewish Chronicle), a public reaction at the awakening anti-Semitism in Germany just fifteen years after the Holocaust. For this he composed a movement entitled *Ghetto* evoking the terror of the ghettos of the 1940s. Prior to this in 1945 he had an ideal opportunity to demonstrate his philo-Semitism. With the approval of the Americans, he was appointed to oversee the revitalisation of musical culture in Bavaria. He was one of the few musicians at that time in Germany who were untainted either by Fascist or Communist sympathies. In 1945, he began a concert series in Munich entitled *Musica Viva* and included music that had been specifically banned by the Nazis – *'Entartete Musik'* (degenerate music). This was not exclusively by Jewish composers, because there were others like Hindemith and Stravinsky who had been banned. However, it did have a very strong representation of Jewish composers, and he was thus able to ensure that many of the works by Jewish composers that were banned by the Nazis were given a hearing.

In this article I have described some examples of philo-Semitism in music; there are undoubtedly many more, but I hope that this illustrates that not only anti-Semitism but also philo-Semitism in music do exist and that both deserve our attention.

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This article is based on a talk given to the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society on 5th December 1999. Dr Stevens is Senior Lecturer in Biochemistry at the University of Stirling.

SOME TWENTIETH CENTURY JEWISH ARTISTS
PART ONE

by Samuel Robin Spark

In this two-part of article, I shall discuss some Jewish artists of this century whose work I am familiar with and describe some of the religious and social background which informs their work. There are of course thousands of Jewish artists who have worked over the last hundred years or so but I shall mainly be referring to five, namely Chagall, Kramer, Adler, Gertler and Yosl Bergner, the last being the only living artist among them. In Part One, I discuss the work of Chagall, who is of course very well known, and Kramer and Adler, who are less so.

These five artists all come from, or have their roots in Eastern European Jewry and have left a legacy in painting comparable to that of writers like Isaac Bashevis Singer and Bernard Malamud in literature. I have chosen these five artists because of their strong evocation of Jewish identity and because they have drawn on the religious and social aspects of the rich Yiddish culture of early twentieth century eastern Europe to produce their work. Of course there are many fine artists who have not identified themselves as Jews in their work – for example, Avigdor Arikha, whose retrospective exhibition was recently held in the National Gallery of Modern Art here in Edinburgh and reviewed in Issue 33 of **The Edinburgh Star**.

Marc Chagall ***Rabbi with Torah*** *(circa 1914).*

The social and political upheavals of the early twentieth century – the Russian Revolution and the First World War – had their parallels in the world of art where traditional styles gave way before the explosion of new artistic movements, to Cubism, Vorticism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Art Nouveau. In this period of continual change and experiment, Jewish artists were liberated from the constraints of the past and were able to express powerful thoughts and feelings in styles appropriate to their personalities and subject-matter. Moreover, whereas nineteenth century Jewish artists took their cue in painting from their non-Jewish contemporaries, the Jewish artists of this century played a prominent part in the various artistic movements of the time and were indeed often in the forefront of these movements. It is as if there was a huge outpouring of Jewish artistic talent from a previously untapped source.

The first artist whose work I shall describe is Marc Chagall (1887-1985). His earlier work gives expression to the traditional way of life of the villages and small towns of eastern Europe where Yiddish culture in all its manifestations, musical, literary, dramatic and religious, flourished. in the first quarter of the century. There was a great interest on the part of Jewish artists in their cultural heritage and they wished to embody it in their art and no-one did this more intimately or more delightfully than Chagall.

In '**Russian Wedding**', we see, on the left of the picture, the wedding procession moving through the village headed by the fiddler, a soldier in uniform, and the Rabbi or minister carrying the ketuba. The bride, in her white dress, is the focus of our perception. The white of her dress is counter-balanced on the right of the picture by the white of the *tsitsit* worn by the village milkman who is carrying his milk-pails slung from a yoke across his shoulders. The blue of the milk-pails is echoed by rectangles of blue in the little buildings of the *shtetl* in the background.

'**The Birth**' depicts child-birth in a relatively realistic way. The mother has just been delivered of a child which is being held up by the midwife. They are shielded from the gaze of onlookers by the red canopy over the bed, while to the right a group of neighbours who have been

awaiting the birth are being adjured to be quiet. A cow has managed to push its way in with them. This group is bathed in golden light. It is night; looking in from the blackness outside the window are two figures, an adult and a child. A male figure has concealed himself at the foot of the bed – the husband? The colours of this picture, red, gold and black, and the chiaroscuro effects are reminiscent of Rembrandt.

'The Fiddler' is in a much more surreal style than the two pictures just referred to. The fiddler is huge and floats above the village. His face is green – the colour of trance or hallucination in Chagall's work. Two of the village buildings are churches and an angel with a halo crosses the sky at the top of the picture. Footprints in the snow signify tne ongoing life of the village. Three tiny figures in the bottom left are gazing up entranced at the fiddler. The fiddler's size undoubtedly reflects his importance in village life in Chagall's childhood, where he, and his fellow musicians, entertained the community at all the important social events – and indeed were so employed by their Gentile neighbours as well. But he is also a symbolic figure, standing for the mystery and power of art in all its manifestations.

'Rabbi with Torah' is another of these highly important figures remembered from childhood. He fills the picture, dressed in black, with his white *tallit* covering his shoulders, wearing his phylacteries and carrying the *Torah* scroll in its red mantle. Like the fiddler, he is seen against a snowy landscape at the very top of which are tiny houses and a tiny sledge, drawn by oxen.

Religion was, of course, the underpinning of the culture, and the yearly cycle of religious festivals punctuated the passing months with their attendant rituals, feastings, fastings and rejoicings. **'Feast of Tabernacles'** depicts one such festival, *Succoth*, during which, for seven days food is served outside the house in a temporary structure. The style is child-like; *the succah* takes centre stage; to its left is a Rabbi with *lulav* and *etrog*; to the right a woman is emerging from the house carrying a dish of food to the *succah*, her cheery grin and brightly coloured clothes suggesting the joyful mood of this particular festival.

'The House of Life' is, of course, a picture of a cemetery with an imposing gateway before it. The most interesting feature of this picture is the treatment of the sky which is painted as a number of facets in white and shades of blue. The effect is of tremendous movement, contrasting with the stillness of the gravestones below. It seems to me to be suggesting that the hopes and aspirations of the dead will live on in their children as long as Judaism endures. No doubt, though, other interpretations are possible.

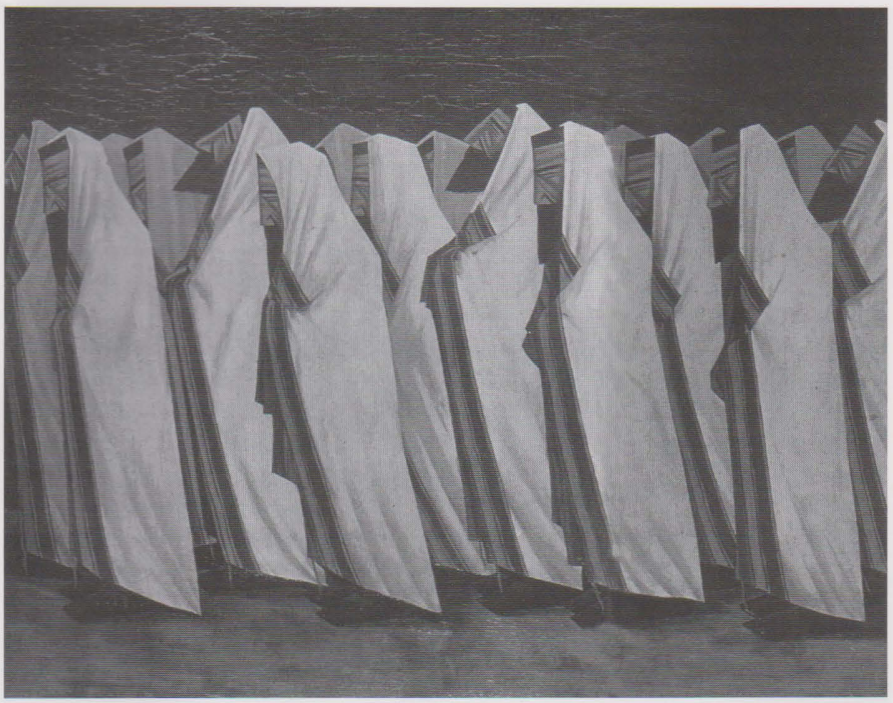
In contrast to the happy nostalgia of these earlier pictures, a series of paintings begins to appear from the thirties onwards incorporating a crucified figure. These paintings are Chagall's response to the pogroms, persecutions and consequent desperate exodus of Jews from eastern Europe. The first of these paintings was **'White Crucifixion'** where the crucified figure dominates the centre of the picture lit by a broad shaft of white light. But this is no Christian Saviour or Redeemer. Rather he is a young Rabbi, his loincloth a prayer shawl, sharing in the general suffering of his people. Above the Cross, instead of a band of mourning angels, there is a group of ordinary Jews in attitudes of lamentation. The Christ-figure is surrounded by small scenes of fear, flight and destruction. Only the *menorah* at the bottom of the picture is solidly unmoved.

Another such painting is **'Exodus'**. In the upper half of the picture is the crucified figure representing the suffering of the Jewish people while beneath him a multitude of the dispossessed are on the move. A Rabbi is in the centre, holding the Five Books of Moses and exhorting the people to remember their religion wherever they go; the figure of Moses carrying the Ten Commandments is large in the bottom right; behind him is the bride (symboling the Sabbath) floating beneath a wedding canopy; at the back of the crowd, a woman carries a candlestick. Women carrying children are prominent in the crowd – no doubt because women are the life-line of Judaism and represent the sanctification of the Jewish home. Apart from the crucified figure, highlighted in white and gold, the colours are sombre, mainly black, blue and purple.

By adopting the iconography of Christian religious painting, so familiar to all the Western World, Chagall perhaps hoped to bring home the full horror of what was happening to the Jews of Europe. World events since the painting of these deeply affecting pictures have given them a universality and continuing topicality which Chagall perhaps did not intend or foresee.

The final synthesis of this series of paintings is **'The Falling Angel'**, begun as early as 1923 but not completed in its present form until 1947. Falling or fleeing figures dominate the picture – the angel, the man, the Rabbi, the tiny figure with his possessions in a bundle slung over his shoulder. The Christ-figure with his *tsitsit* loincloth is there too but very much smaller than before. The calf, in glowing yellow, is an innocent creature caught up in the general destruction. But the little blue violin plays on by itself and points of golden light – the star, the pendulum, the candle – suggest a possible hope for the futurs

This note of optimism stands out fully in **'The Tree of Life'**. The tree of life is central to the picture, its foliage flame-like in vibrant autumn colours. Below the tree is the artist with his palette in his left hand and a three-branched candlestick held up in his right to illuminate the picture he is painting. Emanating from the picture is a bride who takes up her position at the top of the tree alongside her bridegroom. Above them is the wedding canopy. The ceremony is being serenaded by a



Jacob Kramer ***The Day of Atonement*** *(1919).*

tree-like figure playing the violin. Life will continue in spite of the horrors of the past.

Finally, let us look at something unusual in Chagall's work – a picture almost totally realistic in style and painted in a very restricted palette. **'The Western Wall'** is exactly that, a picture in which the Wall itself fills most of the picture, each massive stone painted to show its weight and solidity. The figures who pray at its base are completely dwarfed by it.

There could be no greater contrast to the style of Chagall than that of our next painter, Jacob Kramer (1892-1962). Kramer was born in the Ukraine but emigrated to England and settled in Leeds where he taught at the Leeds School of Art. Where Chagall's figures levitate, fly around, run away, where some are agitated and terrified while others are peaceful, joyous and ecstatic, Kramer's are statuesque, sculptural, exuding spiritual harmony and intensity by their very stillness. 'Two Rabbis' stand side by side, dressed identically in black, hands positioned identically, eyes closed. Their faces are stylised. Hands and faces are lit; the rest of the figure is dark. They stand as though in a cabbalistic trance. **'The Rabbis'** is painted in a very angular style. Again the figures are virtually identical, but this time all are covered in the white of the *tallit*. They have been flattened into a repetitive pattern.

'The Day of Atonement' depicts a close-knit group of pious Jews praying on the Day of Atonement. They are arranged in a tight, rhythmical pattern. All wear the same prayer-shawl, all have virtually the same face, all are in the same pose, except that four in the line have their faces tilted upwards, so that their triangular black beards point up and away from the rest of the downward-pointing line. This gives an unexpected effect of animation in the line of clone-like figures suggestive of their swaying as they chant their ritual prayers. A lesser artist using such tightly controlled composition and such a restricted use of colour might have produced a picture empty of feeling but Kramer's paintings give immensely powerful expression to religious fervour.

Kramer's contemporary, Jankel Adler (1895-1949), was born in Poland and fled to England from Germany in 1933, settling eventually in London. Adler trained for the rabbinate but gave it up in order to become an artist. Unlike Chagall or Kramer he was interested in painting purely for its own sake; where he used Jewish figures or themes, he was exploiting his background with the sole purpose of making some painterly exploration. **'Jew and Horse'**, for example, is very much in his own style, simplifying the garb of the man and the form of the horse. The shadow of the horse is reduced to a geometric shape.

'Judith' is a picture of a standing woman leaning on a table. She is wearing a pink dress and shoes and has long black hair tied in a pink bow. We associate the period of the twenties and thirties with aesthetically beautiful, sylph-like figures but this painting is rather in the style of a painter like Leger or Picasso at a certain period in their development. The figure is heavy, solid, rotund – face, hands, hips and feet are all rounded. **'Purim Play'** shows characters that are simplified and stylised in a similarly heavy style to 'Judith'. They are meant to look unsophisticated.

In speaking of Adler, the painter Joseph Herman said that cats in Yiddish folklore represented the family. Perhaps in **'Cats'**, a dramatic scene of of one cat attacking another which is attempting to flee, Adler is showing the family in conflict. The suggestion of ruined classical stonework in the background is maybe to remind us that it was ever thus.

'The Catbreeder' is a very beautiful composition. Both man and cat are poised, elegant figures. The palette is restricted to browns, blueish-lilac and white. The rippled edges of the man's coat, the dark colour of the garment sharply outlined against a white wall, are etched in the curvilinear shape of the newel-post in the background. The fuzzy edge of the cheek hair of his beard is echoed in the soft, fluffy cheek hair of the cat; the stripes of his trousers by the grain of the floorboards; the lilac of his shirt by the lilac of the background to the left of the picture and by the colour of the cat's eyes.

'Soldiers' shows two Polish

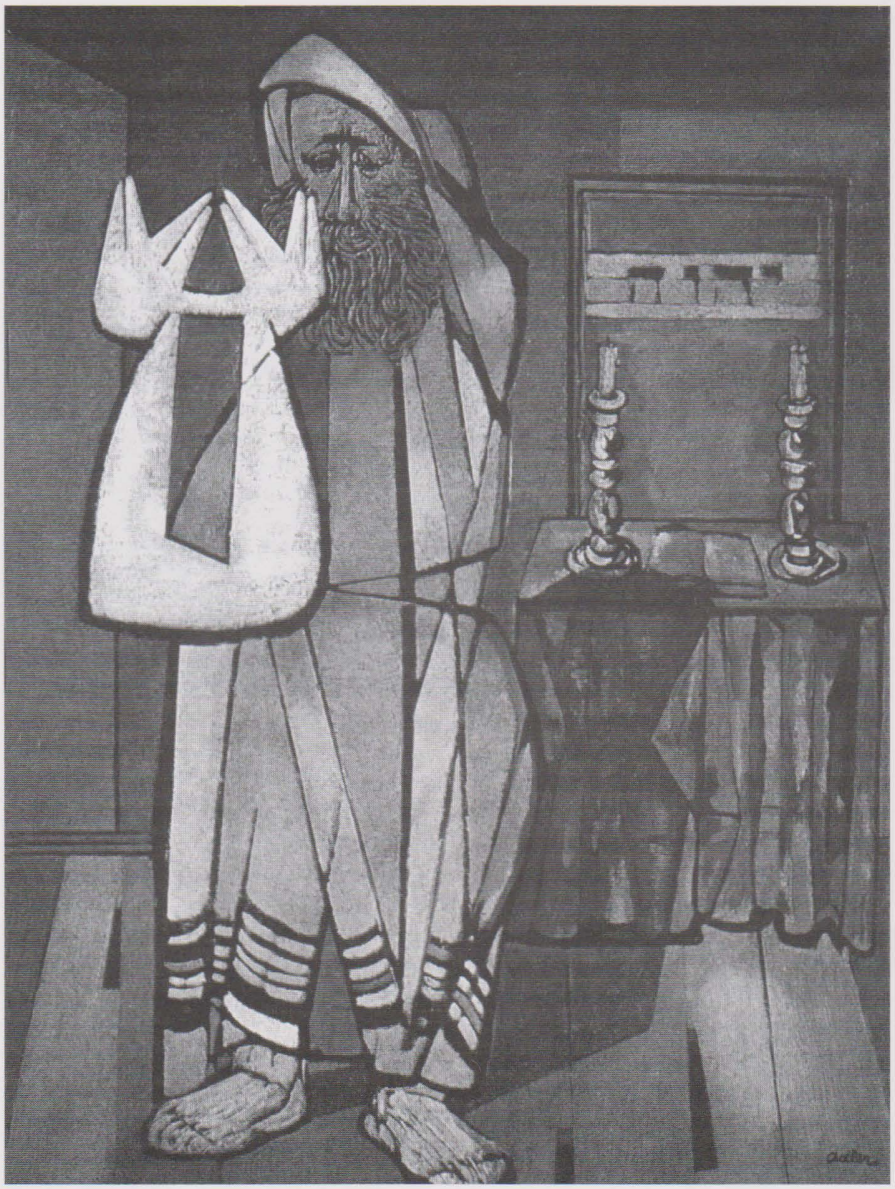
soldiers at prayer, one wearing phylacteries, the other leaning on a desk. The interest is not in the religious significance of the scene but rather in the composition of the painting which makes play with vertical, horizontal and curved lines.

'Angelika' shows a stylised figure of a girl with a mask-like face accompanied by two cats in a domestic setting. In contrast to **'Judith'**, this girl has very elegant, long-fingered hands and shapely legs. The somewhat stylised cats are very much at home – perhaps representing the parents of the girl. It is *Shabbat*. It may be that she is expecting a visit from a possible future husband. A combination of muted colours and interesting lighting effects make this a very sophisticated picture.

'Two Rabbis', painted in 1942, is an exception among Adler's paintings in that it does convey a sense of the agony of the time. The word 'miserocordia' (pity) can be partially seen, written on a piece of paper held by one of the Rabbis who looks straight out at us. Their round, staring eyes and compressed lips suggest eloquently the anguish of knowing that the pity they beg for their people will not be forthcoming. **'Priest'**, however, though also painted in 1942, shows the artist again preoccupied with artistic concerns. The priest is shown blessing the congregation with the special hand formation of the priestly blessing. The figure is fractured into geometric and cubic shapes. It is the impact of the image itself that the artist is concentrating on, not the emotional or religious content.

'My Parents' shows the standing figure, the father, with one hand raised in the priestly blessing while the other points to a Hebrew text. The seated figure, the mother, is pointing upward to the father, concurring in his statement. The colours are suggestive of Chagall but the style is Cubist.

Incidentally, Adler, who lived for a time in Glasgow and was a major influence on two Scottish artists, Colquhoun and MacBryde.



Jankel Adler ***Priest*** *(1942).*

Part Two of this article will appear in the next issue of ***The Edinburgh Star****.*

STAR TREK

The presentation was being made on behalf of the community to its minister, Rabbi Dr Salis Daiches, by the President, Reuben Cohen. Also present were:
Back Row: S. N. Dorfman, E. Isenberg, H. Baker, H. Green, B. Oppenheim, S. Cram, J. Levinson, H. Levitt.
Front Row: E. H. Furst, JP, Dr. Daiches, R. Cohen, JP, Mrs. Daiches and L. J. Cohen.

A CONTROVERSY RECONSIDERED

SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS ON BINJAMIN WILKOMIRSKI AND HIS BOOK 'FRAGMENTS: MEMORIES OF A CHILDHOOD, 1939-1948'

by Tammy Fransman

Binjamin Wilkomirski's book *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948* was remarkable for the attention and praise it received after publication. Equally remarkable were the accusations levelled shortly thereafter that the book is not an authentic account of a child's survival of the holocaust. The response to the book seems to have become polarised between two different camps: those (a minority) who still support Wilkomirski and see his book as being based on fact and those (a majority) who see him as having been deliberately misleading and fraudulent.

In this article I wish to deepen the discussion by examining four points: First, did Wilkomirski actually live through the holocaust as a child and are his memories a 'true' record of his experiences? Of particular interest in this connection are the difficulties involved in retrieving early childhood memories. Second, did Wilkomirski consciously lie about his origins and the childhood memories contained in his book? In this respect it is important to note that Wilkomirski is a gifted writer who convinced many people of the authenticity of his experiences. Third, is Wilkomirski 'mad' (to quote Anne Karpf, a survivor's daughter, speaking in a BBC program directed by Christopher Ogliati) and is his book the product of a deluded mind? Here I will examine how Wilkomirski may have used the holocaust as a metaphor for his own victimised childhood. Fourth, why has such a furore been raised regarding the book's authenticity? In this context it is necessary to briefly reflect on the motivations of those involved as well as the fact that for some history has been appropriated by personal emotions as Wilkomirski has been accused of doing.

To begin, let us briefly summarise the book and the controversies surrounding it. In just 155 powerful pages, Wilkomirski recounts 'fragments' of his experiences of being a very small child of about 3 or 4, separated from his parents and later from his brothers and growing up alone in a series of death camps. Interwoven with these early memories are later ones of his release from these camps and his journey to, and sojourn in, a foreign country (Switzerland), initially in a children's home and later with foster parents.

The book was widely praised and won many literary awards. It was seen as a potential 'classic' of holocaust literature. For example, the novelist Paul Bailey wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*: 'I had to read it slowly, taking silent walks between chapters, so raw and powerful are the feelings it contains and inspires...The bravery of this undertaking cannot be exaggerated, nor the sense of human dignity it leaves with the reader'. (quoted in Lappin, 1999, p.12).

However, in 1998 a Swiss journalist Daniel Ganzfried, who had written a less successful book on the holocaust, claimed that *Fragments* was a work of fiction. He provided evidence that indicated that Wilkomirski could never have been in a concentration camp. According to him, Wilkomirski was born Bruno Grosjean on the 12 February 1941, the illegitimate son of Yvonne Berthe Grosjean. He was placed in care and, after a period in a number of orphanages, fostered by the Dössekker family in 1945 and adopted by them in 1957.

Wilkomirski's publishers remained unconvinced and did not drop his book from their lists at this stage. Wilkomirski himself did not respond to these accusations other than to say that his readers 'always had the option to understand his book as either fact or fiction' (*ibid.*, p.14) but he then withdrew from all public engagements.

On 14 October 1999, Wilkomirski's German publishers announced that they were withdrawing hardback copies of the book because 'they were no longer convinced that the author's account was accurate' (Gibbons and Stephan 1999, p.2). This was based on a provisional report by the Swiss historian, Stefan Machler, in which evidence pointed to *Fragments* being a work of fiction.

In her article entitled 'The man with two Heads', Eleanor Lappin lists the evidence against Wilkomirski as follows: his birth certificate indicating he was born Bruno Grosjean; records of his adoption; continual changes in his hypothesis about happened; his acceptance of money left to him by Yvonne Grosjean on her death as her natural son; the absence of people who had known him in Cracow and, most damning of all, a refusal to have a DNA test which might prove or disprove his relationship to either his father (Yvonne Grosjean's lover) and/or his maternal uncle.

Returning to the questions set out above, it may be postulated (although it may be stretching the evidence a bit far) that Wilkomirski was actually one of a very small group of children who survived the holocaust and this book is his attempt to say something about his experiences. As those people working with traumatised children know, it is very hard to pin down and verify objectively many of the fragments and distorted half memories that a child may have

Binjamin Wilkomirski in his clarinet workshop, 1998.

about traumatic experiences. Often these memories are expressed in nightmares or dreams; imagined or real terrors; odd behaviours; moments of flashback; loss of thoughts or thinking ability or even the enormous unmanageable pain that may be evoked by them in others who are close to the child but remain unexpressed and misunderstood by the child himself. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for children who have suffered severe early trauma to recall early memories although not as clearly and coherently perhaps as Wilkomirski has done. And when the child grows up and becomes an adult it becomes even more difficult to verify such fleeting images of undisclosed grief about what may have occurred. Even if Wilkomirski's book is not an accurate record, the searing criticism and investigations to which the book has been subjected may put many other adults off recounting their valid traumatic childhood experiences and bearing witness in the fear that they may not be believed.

Alternatively, it may be hypothesised that Wilkomirski was not a child survivor of the holocaust and that he consciously chose to write a story, fraudulently passing it off as a valid memory in order to achieve literary fame and financial success. Worse still, Ganzfried seems to believe that Wilkomirski 'stole' such memories. Such an indictment would be severe and justify a sense of outrage on the part of others. It would, however, indicate that Wilkomirski is a skilled writer who has an exceptional talent for understanding and portraying the complex inner world of a traumatised child and that he is capable of constructing a masterpiece. Possibly he would have achieved a certain degree of literary recognition and fame if he had simply presented such a book 'as a fictional memoir. The fact that so many people have read and accepted Wilkomirski's account of his childhood as accurate would bear witness to his ability to capture something genuine about a child survivor's experience.

The third possibility is in many ways the most interesting. It may be hypothesised that Wilkomirski (really Bruno) was not a child survivor of the death camps but (and there is some evidence to support this) a survivor of a traumatic childhood. There is some evidence to suggest that both his mother, to whom he was born illegitimately, and his maternal uncle were the product of physically and emotionally abused childhoods. (See Lappin, *op. cit*, p.63). And then there is the rather unclear history of his first four, formative, years in institutions and of being fostered. (In the BBC program, a supposed foster brother reports how Bruno had to be removed from their home because of his foster mother's rages). Finally, there was adoption by the wealthy Dössekkers who were seen as unemotional, distant and cut off. (Again in the BBC program, a teacher recalls the lack of contact between the young Bruno and his elderly, adoptive mother). How does a damaged child growing up in such an environment make sense of the flashbacks, nightmares, confusions and terrors he seems to have experienced as well as being at odds with wealthy Swiss bourgeois society? Bruno might have found a solution in the history of the holocaust.

In *Fragments*, Wilkomirski reports on the importance of his Jewish physics teacher who was his 'guide and mentor, the kind of father I would have wished for myself. He understood what I was really saying' (Wilkomirski, 1996, p.152) as well as his history teacher, a victim himself of the Nazi era, who was determined to explore the truth of this period with his students. It is possible to see how the young Bruno found in the story of the holocaust the perfect metaphor for his previously inexplicable life as a victim, much as young children find in fairy tales similar metaphors for describing their struggles. From there it is easy to see how Bruno may have immersed himself in the literature of the holocaust, reinterpreting facts in terms of personal images so that it would be difficult for him to differentiate the truth of his personal past and his fantasies about it from the historical truth of those who had actually survived the camps. In *Fragments*, he himself says of his discovery of the Nazi system: 'I wanted to know everything. I wanted to absorb every detail and understand every connection. I hoped I would find answers for pictures that came from my broken childhood memory some nights to stop me going to sleep or to give me terrifying nightmares. I wanted to know what other people had gone through back then. I wanted to compare it with my own earliest memories that I carried around inside me. I wanted to subject them to intelligent reason and arrange them in a pattern that made sense'. (*ibid.*, p.147).

Lappin feels that Wilkomirski/Bruno's anguish is genuine and such anguish 'seems impossible to fabricate' (Lappin, *op. cit*, p.61). Many people, such as Israeli holocaust expert Israel Gutman who wrote that 'Wilkomirski has written a story which he has experienced deeply, that's for sure'. (*ibid.*, p. 61) would appear to agree.

Finally it is necessary to ask why there has been such a furore regarding the authenticity of the book? In this connection it is

important to acknowledge that those most vociferous in their support or condemnation of the book may have their own motivations for doing so. These may range from the personal such as envy of Wilkomirski's success or through identification with their own experiences as survivors or victims to the political such as the use of the book by right wing groups eager to discredit evidence of the holocaust.

Some people have a vested interest in claiming ownership of the holocaust and its memories even though not directly involved. In an interesting article on 'The Joys and Perils of Victimhood', Ian Baruma talks about the Jewish holocaust as being the 'Olympics of suffering' (Baruma, 1999, p.4). In his words 'The Jewish Holocaust has been an inspiration for others. For almost every community, be it a nation or a religious or ethnic or sexual minority, has a bone to pick with history. All have suffered wrongs, and to an increasing and in my view alarming extent, all want these wrongs to be recognised, publicly, ritually, and sometimes financially'. What he finds alarming is not that one has to look at the past, because without knowledge of the past it is impossible to understand who we are and where we are going but 'the extent to which so many minorities have come to define themselves ... as historical victims. What this reveals ... is precisely a lack of historical perspective'.

In a world characterised by the increasing break down of religious, ideological, national and cultural boundaries, people are less and less concerned to find out how things actually were with a view to explaining them and prefer a sentimental 'soup of pain' in which the memories of Jewish survivors are compared with the victims of the Nanking Massacre, Tianamen Square etc. Truth then becomes subjective as only the victims can judge through their own feelings what is true or false. In this process, truth becomes lost. However, facts are not made up but real. There are differences between fact and fiction. Primo Levi's fear was not that future generations would fail to share his pain but that they would not recognise the truth.

The conclusion of this paper is that the whole discussion surrounding the authenticity of Wilkomirski's book is clearly far more complex than a simple true/false dualism would suggest.

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Tammy Fransman reviewed Binjamin Wilkomirski's book 'Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939-1948' in Issue 32 of the ***The Edinburgh Star*** *(February 1999).*

BOOK REVIEWS

Amira Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza – Days and Nights in a Land Under Siege*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1999, hardcover £20.00, paperback (out soon) £7.99.

reviewed by Yuval Millo

Amira Hass served as the *Ha'aretz* daily newspaper corespondent in the Gaza Strip between 1991 and 1995. During that time, she was the only Israeli reporter covering the area who had actually taken up residency there. In that sense, the book provides us with a rare, even unique, account of life in Gaza under Israeli occupation. Specifically. it is a report on the occupied people written by a member of the occupying national group who shared their day to day experiences. Israeli journalism in the early 1990s was full of reports on and opinions about life in the occupied territories. Most of these pieces provided only a very partial description of life in places like Gaza because they tended to cover only the political aspects of the occupation. The small minority of written accounts that did refer to the personal dimensions of life under occupation were deficient by virtue of the simple fact almost no Israeli journalist dared spend a night there, let alone an extended period of time. By writing from the perspective of a resident, Hass is able to describe in detail the actual experience of life in Gaza under occupation. Using countless examples, Hass tries to convey the message that an occupation is a total experience. As the book's sub-title implies, the occupation was an experience which lasted 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the people who experienced it. As such, it was a phenomenon that was much greater than the sum of the various manifestations of the political ambitions of the Palestinians and the Israeli military occupation.

Being a reporter rather than a historian or a political scientist, Hass has not written a chronological account of the four years period covered in the book. Neither has she written a mere political description of the events. Instead she adopts a more personal approach, giving us a few snap shots from the life of a society under occupation. She does so by telling the stories of 'ordinary people' – describing the big historical events from the point of view of her local connections and their friends and families. The book comprises 13 chapters and is divided into four parts. Each part describes various aspects of Palestinian society of the time – the fight for political freedom, aspects of family life under the occupation, bereavement and the curfew policy – using personal stories which highlight the themes. This provides a vivid picture of life in Gaza which is usually hidden when political environments are documented.

Such a 'human description' has some drawbacks as well. First, by describing the same period of time

from several 'micro' points of view, Hass inevitably refers to the same historical events time and again. She also repeatedly mentions the names of Gaza streets and of towns and regions in the Strip, in which the events took place. After reading a few chapters, the reader may develop a sense of 'virtual familiarity' with the places and persons mentioned, but the repetition can nevertheless become tiresome. Second, because places and names are frequently repeated, readers who are not thoroughly acquainted with the political history of the Strip and of Israel may develop a feeling of being 'outsiders'. Readers may regard the book as sequence of anecdotes which simply happened while important and dramatic events occurred in the background. English speaking readers may not be aware of the differences between the various Palestinian organisations which operated in the Strip during the *Intifada*. While the glossary does help in clarifying things a bit, I must admit that some of the entries were not even familiar to me, although I am an Israeli and spent nearly a year in the Strip during the *Intifada*.

If we look beyond the stylistic approach and examine the book as a historical analysis of the period, some further insights can be gained. When reading a political and cultural account such as this, two issues may flash through the readers' mind. The first refers to the two different dimensions of historical accounts. Popular books describing and analysing historical periods have to play a double role. Although they should contain a clear, accurate and full account of the events in question, the historical description should be undertaken in an aesthetically pleasing way. In other words, a history book is expected to be a good read. Sadly, the number of books which satisfy both goals satisfactorily is very small. Hass's book is one the few which achieves both objectives really successfully - she has managed to write in a clear and fast pace what is often a riveting narrative of Palestinian society at one of its major turning points. She also provides a wealth of historical fact and detail which manages to inform even those who are already knowledgeable about the social and political aspects of the Palestinian *Intifada*.

The second issue that is usually raised with regard to historical accounts refers to the stand which the author takes towards the events described. The last years of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip were accompanied by charged emotions and a heated ideological debate in both Palestinian and Israeli society. Thus, it was very easy to simply describe the Gaza Strip in the early 1990s as the place where the fight against the Israeli occupation for an independent Palestinian state reached its peak. Almost inevitably, such a description portrays the Palestinians as the righteous freedom fighters and the Israelis as the 'bad guys'. In this book, however, Hass does not take that easy path. Although many pages are devoted to describing the brutality of soldiers and the humiliation of local residents, Hass also refers to another dimension of Palestinian society. Between 1993 and 1996, the Palestinian state evolved from being a vague, revolutionary concept into a struggling political reality. The book shows us that although the dominant conflict was the Israeli-Palestinian one, Palestinian society had its own inner conflicts as well; conflicts which were, in some ways, just as fierce and significant as the struggle against the Zionist state. Hass gives many detailed examples of the changes Palestinian society underwent in that period. In particular, she illustrates how changing circumstances faced the charismatic, ideological leaders of the revolution with the choice of either to giving way to more pragmatic bureaucrats or to transforming themselves.

Both as an historical document analysing the *Intifada* years and as a description of the human condition under occupation, Hass's book is well worth reading. The book explores a reality that was either altogether unknown outside Palestinian society or not well understood. These two perspectives – knowing and understanding- are intertwined in the historical narrative and direct us respectively to cognitive and emotive values. Hass's book is an informative and an interesting text. At the same time, however, it provides us with the opportunity to look at and engage with an occupied society from a rare point of view - that of the occupied people.

Yuval Millo is an Israeli Ph.D student in Department of Sociology at University of Edinburgh. He served in Gaza while doing national service.

Andy Mackie, *Postcards from Auschwitz* (available from the author at The Gateway Theatre, Elm Row, Leith Walk, Edinburgh EH7 4AH in return for a donation to **The Ediburgh Star**)

reviewed by Joyce Caplan

We have all been to Auschwitz. Through the experience and witness of others, we have been able to imaginatively connect with the suffering of those who died, even though the final horror contains a terrible mystery we cannot penetrate; the heart of evil. Primo Levi said that 'while all the victims of the holocaust were not Jews, all Jews were intended victims'. In Andy Mackie's poems, we feel the horror of that intention.

Postcards from Auschwitz was the result of a visit made in 1997, when the Anti-Nazi League took a varied group of Jews and Gentiles, ranging from school-children to a retired pattern-cutter, to experience the death camps. They were accompanied by an 87-year old Auschwitz survivor who had lost both his wife and his child at the Birkenau camp, their ashes mixed in a vast field with the dust of thousands of others.

The visit was recorded by the group on video camcorders, captured ion photographs and recorded in words. Mackie wrote Postcards from Auschwitz to explain and express the experience as a present-day reality, using the ruins of history to understand the past.

The German critic Adorno made the now famous pronouncement in 1949 that 'after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry'. He was so stunned by the destruction of the Holocaust and the cultural betrayal he saw it embodying for the German people that he thought that only silence was possible. But silence compounds evil, and the need to bear witness, as Primo Levi explained, is to acknowledge the 'millions of mouthless dead', to give them a voice. It is difficult to identify with mass destruction, it is too immense, but the personal voice that poetry gives can create in us the 'empathy of suffering' and transcend knowledge to reach under-

Continued on Page 30

In Memoriam

SIMON (SIMMY) LEVINSON
born in Edinburgh 18 August 1903, died in Netanya 19 September 1999, aged 96

Dr Moshe Kelman writes from Jerusalem. Simmy Levinson was the fifth child of Isaac and Rachel Levinson, refugees from Lithuania who emigrated to Scotland in 1889 and established themselves as jewellers and merchants in Edinburgh.

Simmy was educated at Preston Street School and George Heriot's School, Edinburgh, leaving at 17 to work for his father. As a young man, he travelled the length and breadth of Scotland, selling cutlery, watches and fancy goods.

In 1932, he married Fanny Nathan, the youngest daughter of a family who had lived in Edinburgh since the 1880s. Their wedding was the first to take place in the new Synagogue in Salisbury Road where they were to be active members over the next 60 years.

In 1939, Simmy enlisted for military service, and in 1942 he joined the Royal Air Force, where he became a radio-telegraphy and direction-finding operator, guiding friendly aircraft and detecting enemy planes. He was stationed first in Coventry and later in Thurso and in the Orkneys.

After the war, Simmy developed his father's business to become a prominent carpet-wholesaler in Scotland. The premises he built in West Richmond Street were subsequently to be transformed – through his own and others philanthropy – into a health centre. Named Levinson House, it now serves as the University of Edinburgh's Department of General Practice.

For many years, Simmy acted as Secretary of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and refurbished the *Beth Hamedrash* in memory of his father. He was an ardent Zionist from his early years and was Treasurer of the Joint Palestine Appeal – now the United Jewish Israel Appeal – where his commitment and persistence were highly effective.

Apart from his public philanthropy, he helped many needy individuals in discreet ways – his charitable activities went well beyond the Jewish community and he was a staunch supporter of many local institutions.

Always immaculately dressed, he cut an imposing figure. Like many Edinburgh residents, he was a great walker and, in spite of being an inveterate smoker, never knew a day's illness until he was over the age of 90.

He and Fanny were very happy that all three of their children chose to settle in Israel and play their part in the building of the State, each in their different ways. Sonia and her husband Aaron made *aliyah* in 1959 shortly after they were married. Rose and her husband Moshe followed in 1970, and Victor joined them some years later.

Simmy was always intensely proud of the contribution he and his extended family made to Israel. He is survived by his wife Fanny; children Rose, Sonia and Victor; seven grand-children and 15 great-grandchildren.

[Dr Kelman's obituary notice was first published in the ***Jewish Chronicle*** *on 10 December 1999. We are grateful to Dr Kelman for his permission to republish it here.]*

LIONEL DAICHES
born Edinburgh 8 March 1911, died Edinburgh 11 November 1999, aged 88

Lord McCluskey writes: I had the good fortune to know and work with Lionel Daiches, QC, at the time when he probably reached the peak of his forensic powers. That was the period from 1956, when he took silk, to 1962, when he became a sheriff-substitute in Glasgow. I was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates in 1955 and was dazzled by the rhetorical gifts of this remarkable advocate. He had quite the most beautiful voice and a command of language, of imagery, of metaphor and of wit that made almost everybody else at the Scottish bar pale and pedestrian by comparison.

Not everyone because Ross MacLean had a voice so attractive that juries believed his every word, however improbable, and R. P. Morison, QC, was certainly the most complete advocate of his generation. But they were both 15 years ahead of Lionel. He stood out among the post-war intake of advocates as by far the most gifted orator. Indeed, after 44 years at the Bar and over 20 in the House of Lords, I have never heard anyone speak with half his eloquence. Apart from the voice, almost theatrical in pitch and resonance, the words flowed melifluously powerfully and with astonishing coherence. I say 'astonishing' because when he began a passage of oratory, or sometimes even a sentence, no-one – not even Lionel – knew how it was going to end. But, when the end was reached, there it was in all its glory; as if he had sat up all night polishing his perorations. And yet, despite being endowed with this remarkable gift, he did not reach the heights which some of his more pedestrian contemporaries achieved. Why was that? One reason was that, in those days, the bulk of the daily work of the Scottish Bar

A cartoon of Lionel Daiches by his friend Emilio Coia.

consisted of cases in which the issues were primarily issues of fact – divorce cases, personal injury compensation claims, criminal trials and the like. The intellectual content of most of the work was low-grade and unchallenging. So, for Lionel, it was all too easy. He could do it standing on his head; he didn't have to prepare. He had done his preparation in his youth and could outstrip his opponents without sitting for hours and hours studying dull papers and even duller books.

But, alas, successful advocacy before judges ultimately depends in the long term upon preparation. 99 per cent preparation, 1 per cent inspiration. In the daily grind of the practice of the law, the tortoise beats the hare. As jury trials began to fade from daily practice in the Court of Session, Lionel had to take his eloquence more and more into the criminal courts.

Then, as now, practice in the criminal courts as defence counsel was a dead end in terms of preferment to the bench of the Court of Session. That is another story but it was – and still is – a fact of life.

So, in 1962, Lionel went off to be a sheriff. That began what was probably the most miserable period of his life. For the sheriff has to sit listening. And, for Lionel to sit there like a muzzled nightingale listening while the frogs croaked was very hard to bear.

He didn't endure it long. On his return to the Bar, the talents were still there. He could go to Moscow and, after ten days, return and write an entertaining book about it. He could summon up forensic passion and indignation for case after case. But there is a kind of burnout in criminal jury advocacy, and I suspect his enthusiasm for snatching brands from the burning diminished – as it does. And, of course, those who practice in the criminal courts, if they do make a mistake, are much more likely than their civil colleagues to find it all over the tabloids the next day. And Lionel got more than his share of adverse headlines – just because he was so well known. I don't think that the latent anti-Semitism still palpable in the Parliament House then helped him either. That at least has now gone.

There is one thing he told me that I have never forgotten. When he took silk, he received several letters from friends begging him to get out of criminal work and into civil practice, where the money and the preferment lay. He refused, explaining to me: 'Look, if a country's law is able to provide a clue, an index, to its civilisation, would you look for it in the civil law – in property, trusts and commerce – or would you look to see how the country's criminal legal system worked? The answer is obvious: a country's commitment to the achievement of justice has to be discovered in its criminal courts.

And lawyers who use their talents in the criminal courts are making the best contribution that lawyers can make to the civilising of the society in which they live'.

He was right, though too few of us acknowledge that truth.

Lionel will be missed. But he will be happily remembered. People sometimes say wistfully that there aren't any great characters around any more. maybe. But, with Lionel Daiches gone, we have certainly lost an outstanding one – a uniquely talented advocate. It was a privilege to be his colleague.

[Lord McCluskey's appreciation 'Lionel Daiches: a Dazzling Orator', first appeared in ***The Scotsman*** *on 30 November 1999. We are grateful to Lord McCluskey for his permission to republish it here.]*

ELMA DUBOW (NÉE RIFKIND)
born in Edinburgh in 1935, died in Cardiff on 30 December 1999, aged 64

My sister Elma was born in Edinburgh in 1935 and moved to Cardiff after her marriage to Vivian Dubow in 1963. She became actively involved in community life and at the same time she and Vivian raised their family. She was an active member of the Ladies Guild and *Chevra Kadisha*, but was unfortunately forced to curtail some of her activities when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis about 30 years ago. Despite becoming more and more disabled she maintained her sense of humour and her desire for life. Her husband encouraged her to maintain her ties with her family and they attended as many *simchas* as they could. Elma was a strong person and although her speech was impaired in later years she was still, nevertheless, able to express an opinion worth listening to on any issue.

Throughout all their shared adversity, Elma and Vivian maintained a loving Jewish household and instilled into their children, Walter, Jonathan and Rachael, the Jewish traditions and family values they inherited from their own parents.

Dr. Aaron Rifkind
Toronto.

ROSE RIFKIND
born in Gourock in 1907, died in Toronto on 2 January 2000, aged 92

My mother Rose was born in Gourock over 92 years ago. Moving to Edinburgh after marrying my father Jack in 1933 was not easy for her because of her close family ties. However she became actively involved in the Jewish community and in her life was president of *Ziona* and the Ladies Guild. She also worked for the *Chevra Kadisha*. She was always good with her hands and was able to do fine work such as needlepoint, crochet and dressmaking – she even made her own hats and tartan *kippot* which she sold to raise money for charity. No challenge was too great, but I think she will be remembered by many for her painting, which she took up in her later years with great enthusiasm. If anyone was fortunate enough to have a *simcha* or wedding in the 70's or early 80's they may have been the recipient of one of Rose Rifkind's paintings. I remember how proud my father was of her accomplishments.

Jack and Rose Rifkind both came from families steeped in Jewish tradition. Their parents instilled into them the meaning of being a Jew and the sacrifices that observant Jews make in a secular world. My mother and father took up this challenge and made their commitment to the ways of our forefathers. Their observance of daily ritual, of *Shabbat* and *Yom Tovim* was paramount – material achievement was secondary. I am sure that they would have derived much *nachas* from knowing that their eight grandchildren have adopted the same love and commitment to Jewish values and Jewish life.

I know the greatest pain my mother suffered was her inability to deal with her daughter Elma's illness. My mother moved to Canada 10 years ago and, although her health had been poor for the last 18 months, she continued to fight for life so that she could maintain a link with Elma. Only when she knew that Elma was no longer in pain and no longer needed her on this earth, did she re-unite with Elma and her husband Jack, my father, in *olam habah*.

Dr. Aaron Rifkind
Toronto.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

I have just had a profoundly thought-provoking experience. I recently visited an elderly uncle in the Jewish Old Age Home at Newark Lodge in Glasgow. Surrounded by old and new friends, we sat in a small lounge to talk about his relatively new status as a resident. On the way to the dining room we looked briefly into the *Shul* and the shop, nodding to many familiar faces and stopping to exchange news with some people that I knew from my childhood in Glasgow.

The atmosphere was comfortable, and familiar and I thought to myself – it I had to move out of my house in later life, no longer able to live independently. the thing that would be most important to me would be, to be surrounded by *yiddishkeit* people I know and customs that are dear to me as a Jew.

Perhaps, by the time I need support (hopefully in the dim and distant future), something will be in place in Edinburgh – for where else would I wish to live? – my friends are here, my *Shul* is here and my life is here. But what of these elderly members of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation who have already arrived at the stage of needing the reassurance that they can live near the *Shul* with all its facilities, plus the added bonus of being amongst other Jewish people, not to mention having the support of emergency services if necessary? I consider that provision for them should be a matter of considerable urgency.

I was intensely disappointed at the outcome of the vote on the Scottish Homes' proposal at the AGM this year and felt the discussion had only just begun. For many people, this was only the first or second time they had had to ask questions, hear points of view and digest the implications of the argument. I have been a member of this *Shul* for 15 years but I had not heard of the Congregation's 'Trustees' until about six months before. Many questions jumped to mind regarding their involvement – who are they? how are they elected? what is their constitutional remit? and, as trustees of a charitable body, should their priority not be to promote the interests of its members?

Discussion of this issue only began at 10.00 p.m. and voting took place at 11.30 p.m. Some people had already left the building, even more were too exhausted to think straight by that time and good number of us were still confused by the issues especially after one Trustee's speech which begged even more questions. This was clearly too important a subject to be voted on at that time of night with all the unanswered questions that hung in the air.

The issues raised by the needs of the elderly, the state of the buildings and grounds, and role of the Trustees merit much more discussion by the community before an informed vote by members of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation can be taken. I hope that, at 88, I will be living in my house, healthy and able to look after myself. But, if not, I would like to have the choice of living in a Jewish sheltered housing project in Edinburgh and to play my part in making this happen

Yours sincerely
Lesley Danzig
7 East Castle Road
Edinburgh
EH10 SAP

Dear Editor

You are to be congratulated on the conciliatory, fair and wise comments contained in your recent editorials in relation to the vexed question of the proposed sale of land behind the Synagogue for the purpose of building amenity housing. The same however regrettably cannot be said of your correspondents in the last issue of **The Edinburgh Star**.

I was not present at the AGM on 9 June 1999 when the matter was discussed and voted on. Nevertheless as a member of the community of some 40 years standing, I feel compelled to state my views.

In terms of the constitution, there can be no question that the leadership and decision making powers rest with the community's elected representatives, i.e. the Council and the Executive. However, the Trustees have the sole power to deal with property and invested funds. As a corollary to this power, the Trustees have an implied duty of care to preserve the assets of the congregation and their actions therefore should not be in a manner detrimental to the interests of the Congregation. This is a very different matter from suggesting that the Trustees have a duty to maximise the financial assets of the Congregation. What it does mean is that they cannot knowingly act in a way that prejudices the Congregation's assets.

I believe it is a matter of public record that, having obtained an independent valuation from a surveyor, the price being offered by Glasgow Jewish Housing Association for purchase of the property was (however the calculations are done) at least £100,000 less than the independent market evaluation. This presented the Trustees with a substantial problem. Having taken legal advice, they were advised that agreeing to the proposals in the light of the valuation which they had obtained might amount in law to gratuitous alienation for which the Trustees would be personally liable. This in turn would have made the Trustees vulnerable to legal action by any disgruntled member. Had there been unanimous support in favour of the proposals, this could have provided a solution to the problem. However, in the real world, the Trustees were aware that there was opposition from some quarters,

primarily because of the huge potential financial loss. Alternatively, the community as a whole could have provided the Trustees with an indemnity against any such personal liability which would have placed each and every member of the community at personal financial risk.

To suggest that the Trustees are even able 'to reconsider their remit in the cool ,.light of day' is, at best, missing the point or, at worst, mischievous. The Trustees have done no more , nor less, than to act in an entirely appropriate way by seeking legal and commercial advice in relation to their powers and duties as Trustees. To have done anything less would have been inappropriate. It is unfortunate that those advancing the proposal did not seek similar advice because, had they done so, the matter might well have been resolved in an earlier and less acrimonious fashion.

Let me state unequivocally that I am entirely in favour of the principle of the provision of amenity housing for our elderly. While I am no apologist for the Trustees, I am certain that each and every Trustee is of a similar view. To somehow suggest that their responsible actions bring them into conflict with the core values of the community is akin to suggesting that those of our transatlantic cousins who are in favour of sound fiscal management are against motherhood and apple pie.

Finally, I impugn no one's integrity in the positions that they took on the matter. Like you Sir, I urge all parties to endeavour to seek a solution that will reconcile the entirely appropriate motives of those in favour of the proposals with the equally appropriate practical considerations of those who opposed them.

Yours sincerely.
Mark Sischy
12 Blackford Hill Grove
Edinburgh
EH9 3HX.

Dear Editor

Have any other readers noticed the striking resemblance between the Chairman of your Editorial Board John Cosgrove (pictured above, right) and the recently re-elected Member of Parliament for Kensington and Chelsea, Michael Portillo (pictured above, left)? Are they perchance related? If they are, is John Cosgrove really a Spanish refugee or is Michael Portillo one of the chosen people [Is he, in fact, a *marrano*?, Ed.]. I think we should be told.

Yours sincerely
name and address supplied.

Book Reviews—Continued from Page 25

standing.

These short poems, as their title suggests, take us on an actual journey through Auschwitz, through its ruins and memories. We travel around the camp, past the 'sorting huts' (named 'Canada' after the far, exotic and unattainable), past the punishment block bearing witness to the banal fact of such a ludicrous provision 'like a truth that chokes the laugh out of you'. The careful lay-out of the camp that the views still reveal are 'operational management optimised'; the efficiency of intended death.

In the centre pages are four poignant photographs, one showing the thoughtful simplicity of the steps to the gas chambers, another a squalid pond surrounded by silver birches, its lyrical reflection hiding the human ashes dumped in its waters.

Like the best of footsteps, Mackie uses repetition to enforce the remorselessness of his experience

> took the leaders for being trouble makers
> then they
> took the young men for slave labour
> then they
> took belongings, property and valuable

or the constant 'just keep breathing' in the poem 'What to do in the Gas Chamber'.

Mackie takes us through his present, as guide and narrator, to show us what he sees and feels. he even shows us his travel diary, like the itinerary of a travel agent, giving us a narrative of his 'trip'. He offers explanations of the process of deportation and death, the 'suitcases, shoes, hair, artificial limbs' of the victims still piled in the reception areas.

The final poem contains both past and present with its image of 'loading' a transport - the bus home. The visitors take away not only memories and memorabilia but their lives as well.

> We see, we listen, we witness
> Loading our cameras
> Loading pockets with postcards.

Some of those who journeyed to Auschwitz left everything there. We can only, like Mackie, acknowledge their lives; 'place a stone to say you were there'.

Andy Mackie's play 'David's Gift', which was inspired by his visit to Auschwitz, was performed at the Theatre Workshop in May 1999. It was reviewed by Janet Mundy in Issue 33 of ***The Edinburgh Star*** *((July 1999).*

COMING EVENTS

February 2000			
13th	Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
		Literary Society	8.00 p.m.
		Professor Yasir Suleiman, Edinburgh University	
		'A Palestinian View of the Peace Process'	
21st	Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
24th	Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews	7.30 p.m.
		His Eminence Cardinal Thomas Winning	
March 2000			
5th	Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 p.m.
10th	Sunday	Literary Society	8.00 p.m.
		Micheline Wandor	
		'The Garden of Eden Revisited'	
		(original poetry and prose)	
13th	Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
19th	Sunday	Literary Society	8.00 p.m.
		You, Me and the Rest of Us	
		'Deperately Seeking Esther'	
		(home-grown Purim fun)	
23rd	Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews	7.30 p.m.
		Dr. Kenneth Collins, Glasgow	
		'Jewish Immigrants in Scotland	
		– Health Issues, 1890-1910'	
April 2000			
5th	Sunday	Literary Society	8.00 p.m.
		Rabbi Moshe Yehudai, Newcastle	
		'The Jewish triangle: Theology, Worship, Ethics'	
17th	Sunday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 p.m.
20th	Thursday	First Day *Pesach*	
21st	Friday	Second Day *Pesach*	
30th	Sunday	Literary Society	8.00 p.m.
		Judith Weil, Jewish Museum	
		'The Magic of Mysticism: Putting Spirituality to Good Effect'	

Junior Maccabi meets on alternate Sundays from 1.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. For further information, contact David Brannan, Samuel Danzig or Joel Raffel (229 5541).

Senior Maccabi meets on Sunday evenings in members' homes. For further information, contact Rowan Hendry (331 3795).

The Jewish Philosophical Society meets every month on a Sunday in members' homes.

The Luncheon Club meets every Tuesday and Thursday at 12.30 p.m.

The Parent and Toddler group meets on Sunday mornings at 10.00 a.m.

All meetings are subject to alteration.

All the above events, unless otherwise stated, take place in the Community Centre, at 4 Salisbury Road.

Although some dates have not yet been finalised, the Friendship Club continues to meet on alternate Sundays at 3.00 p.m. Please contact Willie Caplan (667 7984) for details and dates.