




1996

Menorah Review (No. 36, Winter, 1996)

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MENORAH REVIEW



NUMBER 36 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • WINTER 1996

For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

Surviving the Twentieth Century

The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?

by Darrell J. Fasching

Albany: State University of New York Press

A Review Essay
by Peter J. Haas

Human beings, Fasching notes at one point, are not just storytellers, they are story dwellers. By this he means that stories structure our ideas of the world and our place in it. More importantly for the book before us, stories give structure to our vision of the future and how we will get there. In light of the atrocities of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Fasching argues, we need to change our foundational stories. The old stories with their old ethic will lead only to destruction.

The argument in *The Ethical Challenge* has to be read in light of Darrell Fasching's prior study, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics*. The argument there is that religious and moral communities are based ultimately on narratives; that is, on stories we tell ourselves in a particular community about who we are, from where we came and how we are to behave. But such narratives do more than offer a self-definition. They also tell us who stands outside the community and gives clues as well as guidance as to how to treat those others. The thesis launched in *Narrative Theology* and spelled out in more detail here is that the touchstone of a morality is treatment of the stranger. How we treat the stranger among us determines the kind of future, if any, we will have.

Darrell Fasching, in these books, argues that the events of Auschwitz and Hiroshima—that is, of the Shoah and of nuclear holocausts—force us in the West to face the symbolic universe that have led to such atrocities being committed against the other. In other words, we have to be aware of how we have defined the other so that mass killings could seem reasonable, even

necessary. His thesis is that we can prevent further atrocities of this kind, and possibly our own destruction along the way, only by constructing a new narrative that will elevate human rights and, specifically, human dignity to the ultimate level. We simply have too much power and are too aware of human fragility to continue unchanged.

To understand the analysis of the book, it is important to be aware of a basic distinction made by Jacques Ellul between what he called "sacred" and what he called "holy." Both terms, for Ellul, refer to an ultimate reality that transcends our everyday existence. The "sacred" defines a specific community and describes the ultimate locus of purity, goodness and righteousness for that group. In general, we think of the sacred as related to religious communities but it can apply, in Ellul's sense, to secular communities as well. A sacred narrative is any narrative that legitimizes the status quo of a group in ultimate terms and defines the final goal that all true members of that group wish, or should wish, to achieve. The problem is that the sacred legitimizes and sacralizes only its own community. By its very nature, it must define the other as outside the true community and as potentially heretical and even satanic. In opposition to this, Ellul proposes what he calls the holy; that is, that posture or narrative that constantly brings into question the present order and its existing structures. The holy defies the claim of absolute truth or absolute virtue. Therefore, while the sacred wants to establish the given structure as ultimate, the holy always wants to open new doors and reveal new possibilities.

One way of capturing this difference is through the terms *apocalypse* and *utopia*. As

Fasching uses these terms, utopias refer to those ideal societies conceived in the human realm and linked to structures already available in the status quo. They are "sacred" in the sense that they legitimate what can be achieved by using the resources at hand, often eliminating evil along the way, often meaning the other. Apocalyptic scenarios, on the other hand, offer a break with the established or routine order. An apocalyptic vision, in this sense, holds that things can be better only if they are different. The apocalyptic, rather than calling for the elimination of the other, must now call for the incorporation of the other into a new and larger synthesis. Along with Ellul, Fasching fears sacred narratives that offer utopias. These narratives, he says, lead to things like Final Solutions, Auschwitzes, Hiroshimas and military doctrines based on Mutually Assured Destruction. Rather, he prefers holy narratives that challenge the status quo and open new vistas for human existence. In a pointed sentence, Fasching notes that Final Solutions and having a future are mutually exclusive. This leaves us with the choice in the subtitle: *Apocalypse or Utopia*, or in its Biblical formulation: *life or death*.

With this background in mind, we can return to the new ethical narrative that Fasching hopes to see emerging as a response to the "final solutions" of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. The crux for him, as we noted, is treatment of the stranger. Sacred narratives look at outsiders as parasites or demons, as people that need eliminating to pave the way to utopia. The post-Shoah ethic must be a holy narrative with an apocalyptic vision, namely one that demands acceptance of the stranger. It is no accident, says Fasching, that the most common commandment in Hebrew Scriptures is to be kind to the stranger. It is an ethic that, from the time of Abraham, is already part of our common heritage as Christians and Jews.

A central narrative to which Fasching returns again and again is the story of the Tower of Babel. In the story, people try to build a tower to reach the heavens. God responds by breaking their language into mutually unintelligible dialects. As the story is placed in our canon, it seems to make the point that diversity is a punishment, the sign of an angry God. Fasching wants us to read

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the story in a different way, one suggested by his teacher, Gabriel Vahanian. In this reading, God's confounding of human language is a blessing, not a curse. In building the tower, humans had come to think their own efforts could achieve infinity or utopia. By confounding their language, God meant to force people to confront the fact of the other and realize their own finite limits. Human progress would now be possible only by acknowledging the existence of the other and accepting the other on his or her own terms; that is, by creating others, God opened the possibility for human self-transcendence and growth. Fasching ends the book by saying: "It is the stranger at our door who invites us to become new creatures in a new world where each speaks his or her own language and yet each is understood by all;" that is, in the terms defined above, an apocalyptic vision.

I must say at this point that I have given the above discussion a rather simple and one-dimensional recasting of what is actually a highly nuanced and intricate argument. Fasching has been influenced not only by the obvious thinkers: Durkheim, Ellul and Vahanian but also by Karl Mannheim, Richard Rubenstein, Harvey Cox, Arthur Cohen, Robert Jay Lifton, Robert Bellah, Eric Voegelin, Stanley Hauerwas, Paul Tillich, Irving Greenberg, Elic Wiesel, Masao Abe, Peter Berger, Bernard Lonergan, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Neuhaus and Mircea Eliade, to name a few. The argument is a complex interweaving of a variety of Jewish, Christian, Buddhist and secular writers. It constructs and sets into motion its own narrative discourse from bits and pieces of conversation that already exist. The book is nothing short of a synthesis of truly impressive proportions.

Its goal is no less impressive. The inclusion of both Auschwitz and Hiroshima in the title is quite purposeful. Both represent the same ethical narrative, one that casts the outsider or stranger as something less than human, something that can be eliminated en masse if needed. This is not to equate the bombing of Hiroshima with the systematic genocide of the Nazis. It is to say that insofar as we in the West are listening to the same basic narrative about the sacred, we face the same danger of imposing final solutions (by gas or bomb) and so precluding a future. In addition, Fasching wants to make it clear that our acceptance of the stranger means not only transcending nationalisms in the West but also bringing East and West together into mutual acceptance of the other. In short, we need not only a new Western ethic based on the Bible (i.e., a new reading of the Tower of Babel) but also an ethic that can speak to the East as well. Presumably, Abraham's hospitality to strangers could bring Muslims under the umbrella of the new narrative as well, although Fasching does not address this specifically.

To be sure, this analysis of the (post-)modern situation makes a good deal of intuitive sense. These is little room for doubt that the Nazis demonized the Jews, that Americans demonized the "Japs," that Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia are busy demonizing each other. Also, it is clear, I am willing to concede, that unless the various peoples of the earth learn to accept the other we will produce more final solutions and fewer futures. On the other hand, it appears to me that the strategy proposed here is not as straightforward as it seems at first.

To begin, I think there is a legitimate question about whether narrative is really the foundation of morality. Semioticians argue, quite persuasively for some, that stories, narratives, myths and the like are themselves already built on a prior substratum of convictions. That is, we begin at base level with certain fundamental notions about good and bad, say, and then narrativize or put these into discourse to bring them into the individual conscious and, eventually, public realms. So, on this view, changing the narrative level is starting too high on the semiotic chain. If we hope to change an ethic, we must address ourselves first to the much deeper basic convictions and inchoate beliefs that provide structure to the logically subsequent act of narrative construction. The narrative that discursivizes these will then, on this theory, change on its own accord. I understand this is far from a settled matter, however, if the claim that one can change an ethic exists then my working on the narrative level alone is not, I suggest, immediately self-evident.

There is a second problem. It is the notion that to be a good person one must accept the outsider, which is, itself, a particular narrative of certain liberal Western communities. Insofar as we succeed in making that narrative part of the narrative of others, are we not by that very act (imperialistically) tinkering with or "improving" their narrative and, therefore, diminishing their otherness?

Let me put matters slightly different. I can accept Fasching's notion that part of being Jewish means to accept the stranger because my people were once strangers. I have certainly, over the years, learned to accept those others who are willing to accept me in my Jewishness even if they are doing so only to be better Christians. However, can I, or should I, accept as part of being a good Jew the stranger whose narrative demonizes African-Americans? I say this as one who lives not far from a preacher who does not agree with the Ku Klux Klan but once served as their chaplain because he felt they also had a right to ministry.

The irony is that the holy also has its binary opposite, just as does the sacred. In this case, one fundamental "other" for the holy is the sacred; that is, those narratives

and their communities who refuse to acknowledge the holy. We can, of course, build a wonderful new holy narrative that includes Christian and Jew, Occidental and Oriental, believer and avowed secularist. But what do we do with those who refuse to participate in the bringing of the apocalypse and, instead, insist on constructing their own sacred utopias? Is our narrative to become a "super-narrative" by which other narratives are judged? Or, to frame matters differently, are we allowed to suppress their narratives and stop their Auschwitzes because of the demands of our narrative? The answer before us, as always, seems to be yes.

Peter J. Haas is a professor of religious studies at Vanderbilt University and a contributing editor.

On Jewish Art: "Wherefore Art Thou?"

*The Visual Dimension:
Aspects of Jewish Art*
edited by Clare Moore
Boulder, CO: Westview Press

A Review Essay
by Earle J. Coleman

Defining art is always problematic—philosophers still fiercely debate competing theories from Plato to Tolstoy and Freud—but defining Jewish art is especially challenging. Indeed, Joseph Gutmann entitles an essay: "Is There A Jewish Art?" But, some pose a different question: "Given the taboo of the Second Commandment, should there be?" Others ask: "Can there be?" The very expression "Jewish art" strikes them as a kind of oxymoron. Perhaps first considered in the 19th century, the problem of defining Jewish art has come into prominence only in the 20th century. One wonders how to classify religious works by non-Jewish artists (Rembrandt's Biblical paintings). Again, if one classifies according to content, the Biblical works of Michelangelo must be regarded as Jewish. Moreover, some works by Jewish artists feature non-Jewish subject matter (e.g., Marc Chagall's depiction of specifically Christian themes or Max Rosenthal's painting of Jesus). In addition, some ask if a definition of Jewish art should include so-called secular art done by Jews or if it should only embrace religious art; that is, works with Jewish themes, symbols or functions. Complications abound. Chinese Taoists find Rembrandt's so-called secular landscape paintings, with their power to evoke a hint of the Tao, to be more spiritual than his Biblical scenes. Some have observed that precision calls for saying "the art of the Jews in Israel" or "the art of the Jews in Judea" and for identifying the par-

ticular period as if there were no long-standing common denominators in Jewish art. Some wonder how to understand the contemporary painter in Israel who creates the sort of abstract compositions that flourish in many other countries. They question how such nonrepresentational art can be religious and specifically Jewish.

Given the unprecedented varieties of art in the 20th century, it can be argued that either there is no ever-present essence or that any such essence would be trivial (i.e., obvious and unilluminating). Therefore, one should not try to define art in general, much less Jewish, Christian or Buddhist art. Instead, one should try to simply describe and appreciate the manifold expressions of art. In short, some maintain that Jewish art can only be understood in terms of its historical varieties and its contemporary expressions. Of course, the philosophical spirit, with its quest for universals, generalizations or principles, will not rest content with studying the particulars. Rather than pursue such a common denominator, some non-philosophers favor a rather broad, inclusive notion. Thus, Bernhard Blumenkrantz, a prolific, contemporary contributor to Jewish studies, defines Jewish art as "... not only those things produced by Jews (even if the content has no Jewish character or even if, at the extreme, it had a Christian character—as from the 19th century has sometimes been the case)... but also those things that were produced for Jews even though by non-Jewish artists (as is particularly frequent in architecture)."

Still, there is a recurring question: Where does one turn to find art that is intrinsically Jewish? Clare Moore's beautifully illustrated book features warm, glowing color plates of the Hebrew Psalter as well as black and white photographs of manuscripts, etchings, drawings, utensils, sculpture, architecture and paintings. Her tightly edited anthology illuminates the thematic issue by drawing from contributors in linguistics, art history, museum studies, Jewish studies and archaeology, the collected essays being the proceedings from the first international conference on Jewish art that was held in St. Edmund Hall at Oxford University in 1977. Isaiah Shachar, a pioneering scholar in Jewish art and crafts and the figure to whom this commemorative volume is dedicated, would be well pleased with the participants' contributions. In 1977, writing for *The Times* of London, Shachar pointed out that the prospect of defining Jewish art, not to mention the very possibility of its existence, is challenged by the iconoclastic Second Commandment; also, in *Bellum Judaicum* 2, 10:4, the representation of God, humans or animals is strictly forbidden. Some think it a fallacy to ask about Jewish art or how it can be defined since the question presupposes that a more basic question has already been answered in the affirmative: Does Jewish art exist?

That religions need art to communicate as well as to dramatize their doctrines and express profound spiritual feelings supports an affirmative answer to the above question. After all, there has never been a religion without its respective artistic expressions. There could not be since art articulates the otherwise ineffable aspects of religion. In a hymn, one may sense what cannot be captured in prose language. In fact, the religious life invariably issues in art whether it be the luminous poetry of Jewish scriptures, the sublime landscape paintings of Ch'an Bud-

dism or the lyrical calligraphy of Islam. Therefore, in *Religion and Art*, Paul Weiss emphasizes that all religions have some art: "If a religion forbids the use of song, men will cultivate the graces of speech; if it frowns on the theater or the use of musical instruments, it will allow room for architecture or poetry." Of course, Jewish scriptures do contain positive statements about art (e.g., in Exodus 31:3-5, the Lord endowed a man with the craftsmanship required to devise artistic designs). Even the austerities of the Amish and Shakers do not prevent them from creating, respectively, the strong, simple beauty of their quilts and their elegantly lean furniture. Ludwig Wittgenstein's dictum "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" is falsified by the world's religions with their poetry, songs, paintings, dances, architecture, sculpture and myths. Indeed, interest in the aesthetic is just as universal as interest in the spiritual; and, the two are invariably intertwined historically. It is indisputable that art has long existed among Jews. However, the question remains: Does distinctively Jewish art exist?

When it comes to characterizing Jewish art, one might naturally turn to artists with Jewish backgrounds but this can be rather unhelpful. Often such artists reject Jewish art or deny its existence. Jozef Israels, for example, declared: "I am not a Jewish artist nor do I want to be. I am a Dutch artist." Perhaps he wanted artistic freedom from working under the auspices of a religious community. The English artist, Solomon J. Solomon, when asked to define Jewish art, stated that he "could more easily write an apology for its non-existence." And the American artist, Ben Shan, agrees that "there is no such thing." An artist may not wish to be identified with his or her Jewish heritage because he or she regards categorization as particular (i.e., limiting) and art as universal. Thus, the American sculptor, Moses Jacob Ezekiel, exclaimed, "I do not want to be stamped with the title of 'Jewish sculptor'." He also asserted the moot point that the world does not care whether a good artist is a Jew or a Gentile.

Jewish artists, who do wish to be recognized as such, face a curious contemporary problem. What might be called the "identity paradox" applies to them as well as to members of any number of other traditions. A contemporary Jewish painter of abstract art furnishes an example. Having been raised a Jew, she came to love Jewish food, literature, poetry, painting, music, philosophy and religion. It would be very odd if nothing of what she cherished influenced her paintings. But, she also wanted the autonomy to depart from traditional artists, schools and canons. After a time, her paintings became abstract. Hence the paradox: Even if one has appropriated a rich tradition, the yearning for freedom can drive someone to create art that cannot be identified in terms of its

LEAH

Near sighted okay but I wasn't blind.
I knew my husband wanted
my sister like deserts rain
I wanted him worse, and took.

I knew he was kind the moment
I saw him, and loved his gentle voice
so strong and deep it rumbled
through my womb welcoming him.

Never was pretty, never would be.
My sister I loved and loved me
and would flee our father if
I was there to mother her.

He understood us finally.
I was the earth their love
could grow on anywhere.
And I rejoiced in such reluctant lovers.

I gave him daughter and sons he never
loved as much as he loved hers
and spoiled them rotten
Joseph needed dungeons to grow in.

Yes, it was worth it, all of it.
I had the man I loved in my bed,
in my life, in my heart and
my sons carried on his dreams.

So he didn't lust for me as I for him
my smell and feel and weight on him
wasn't the sheer delight, but pleasure,
that I made sure.

Childless, Rachel stole our fathers
dolly gods and sat through his search
on them knowing he knew and
dared not prove it with curses.

Nothing was ever straight
in our family but lies. Preparation
for our husbands' world and
God misdirections cunning truths.

Abyss between word and deed,
promise and payment, prophecy and
fact, passion, cunning, and visions
combined to breed our people.

—Richard Sherwin

cultural origin. Few, if any, can distinguish abstract paintings as "Chinese," "Jewish," "French," "British" or "American." And, if a beholder cannot make the above distinctions, he or she may conclude that the artist's entire tradition has been "left behind." However, on consideration, it seems dubious that an artist can suppress all of his or her rich, long-standing heritage even when painting abstract works. It may be that what is "Jewish" in works of art is not so much the stylistic, surface features as the spirit the artist infuses into his or her creation to communicate something of the Jewish tradition. In any case, A. Rosengarten, an eminent 19th-century Jewish architect, identifies enhanced communication between countries as still another threat to preserving indigenous art. With international dialogue comes cross-fertilization among artists and the question of whether anational, cultural, religious or ethnic artistic tradition can endure.

Jews and non-Jews alike have been rather critical of Jewish visual art, with Martin Buber declaring: "The Jew of antiquity was more of an aural (*Ohrnensch*) than a visual being (*Augenmensch*) and felt more in terms of time than space." The Protestant theologian and Orientalist, Immanuel Benzinger, presented a harsher estimate of Jewish visual art when he asserted that: "Hebrews had absolutely no gift for the pictorial arts." Such pejorative characterizations bear on the problem of defining Jewish art because very often classic definitions of art are normative. Leo Tolstoy, for instance, argued that if a work is not great art, then it is not art at all. From this one might infer that if Jewish art is inferior, then it is not art at all; thus, there is nothing to define. Of course, Jews have defended Jewish visual art; and, not surprisingly, their defenses have met with criticism. Zionists, who wished to refute any charges of Jewish inferiority in the visual arts, identified various contemporary "Jewish artists." However, Karl Schwarz reasoned that because Jews frequently contributed to the arts of other cultures, "... we are dealing with the art of the Jews, not Jewish art." Nevertheless, there is visual art, which is created by Jews for the express purpose of fostering Jewish ideals, that makes an important aesthetic contribution even if it is influenced by Greek, Christian or Islamic sources. One may look to the syntheses of these elements for the originality of the Jewish artist. After all, much that is fresh in Japanese art is inspired by Chinese sources.

When other definitions fail, some philosophers define art ostensibly, by naming or pointing to specific examples: "Art may be defined as painting, sculpture, literature, music and architecture." Accordingly, some Jews identify Jewish art with the synagogue. However, the derivative character of Jewish architecture is evident. The synagogue is not *suis generis* but evolves from Greco-

Roman art. Sometimes non-Jewish artists even created *rimonim* and *parohets* for synagogues. Of course, it is hardly surprising that for centuries synagogues were not distinctly Jewish in design since their architects were Christians, Jews being excluded from the profession. Unfortunately, synagogues have fallen victim to the worst sort of destruction. During World War II, the neoclassical Great Synagogue in London, built by the Christian architect James Spiller, was damaged by enemy action and eventually demolished. Gottfried Semper's synagogue of 1840 in Dresden, a paradigm of synagogue architecture for nearly a century, was another casualty of the war. Generally, architecture is regarded as the most pragmatic of the arts. But the synagogue, like the art museum, places a high regard on the non-utilitarian. In the former, a genizah is the storeroom for worn-out sacred objects. Here, non-useful works, which possess aesthetic value, are preserved for religious reasons, as in an art museum, non-useful art works are preserved for aesthetic reasons.

Some turn from architecture to the art of medieval Hebrew manuscripts to locate inherently Jewish art but such iconography is directly connected to that of medieval Christian and Islamic manuscripts. Once again, the appreciator of Jewish visual art may be moved by fresh syntheses, whatever the source of the elements that are being incorporated into the whole. It remains true that Jewish literary art—poetry, tales, anecdotes, plays, novels or other narratives—constitutes a profound aesthetic contribution to humankind. Therefore, while some look to the Psalter or synagogue for distinctively Jewish contributions to world art, others turn to Jewish literature. On an experimental level, perhaps Jewish art consists in those works that transmit the essence of Jewish tradition. Here the focus is not on externals but on the capacity of art to eloquently convey the ideas, intuitions, emotions and experiences that sustain Judaism. In short, one should look to the relationship between the work and the beholder. Typically, major art theories do focus on the relationship between the art work and the audience (e.g., the work is said to elicit emotion, enlighten or move people to action). For a Jew, there is no doubt about what relation is paramount. When Martin Buber spoke of having an I-Thou relation with a work of art, even something as mundane as an arabesque wall paper design, he presented art as a Thou through which the eternal Thou addresses every receptive Thou. Jewish art exists whenever an art work contributes to the unique dialogue between the finite Thou and the eternal Thou, which nurtures Jewish values, memories and insights.

Earle J. Coleman is a professor of philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University and a contributing editor.

The Message of Kohelet

*Dialogues With Kohelet:
The Book of Ecclesiastes*
by T.A. Perry
University Park: The
Pennsylvania State University
Press

A Review Essay
by Matthew B. Schwartz

Mozart composed a duet for violin requiring the two musicians to stand on opposite sides of a table with one sheet of music between them. Each musician reads the sheet as it faces him, completely upside-down from the other. Surprisingly, the result is beautiful Mozartean harmony. A story is told too of a great Talmudic sage who one day walked into the yeshiva in Slobodka and found three young scholars avidly debating the meaning of a passage in one of his books. When the young men realized who the sage was, they asked which of their interpretations he had had in mind when he wrote. "All three of them," he answered.

The Book of *Ecclesiastes* or *Kohelet* likewise wishes to defy scholars' attempts to confine it within any particular philosophical schema or formula. Yet it continues to attract and tantalize thinkers for it too apparently consists of various levels, designs and patterns and is susceptible to many interpretations. I will discuss Professor T.A. Perry's interpretation of *Kohelet*; then, I will offer a view of my own on another issue—why *Kohelet* wrote his book.

In *Dialogues With Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes*, T.A. Perry has produced a new translation of *Kohelet*, accompanied by a commentary and preceded by a 50-page introduction. He emphasizes literary interpretation over theology and philology, while basing the whole on the premise that *Kohelet* is a transcript of a debate between two or more people, accounting for the many seemingly contradictory ideas in the text. The dialogue form helps bring differences of human experience into confrontation and allows the individual to argue with more traditional authoritative views. The translation thus opens with the "Presenter" saying, "The sayings of Kohelet, son of David, King in Jerusalem." Then *Kohelet* himself talks, "Vanity of vanities." The presenter now explains, "Kohelet has spoken a vanity of vanities! Is everything vanity?" *Kohelet* goes on, "What profit hath man..." Perry's study is intricate, detailed and intelligent, if not entirely convincing, as perhaps no book on *Kohelet* will be.

Dialogic reading of *Kohelet* is not a new idea. Perry notes that the early church fathers refer to it. It can be added that at least

several medieval rabbinic writers mention it (including *Sefer Ha-ikkarim* 4:28 and *Akedat Yitzhak*). The use of dialogue as a literary form goes back at least to the Sumerians, and Plato used it in his essays. The Hebrew Scripture too is permeated with dialogues beginning with the I-Thou stories in Genesis, and Job is entirely dialogic. In the absence of punctuation marks, changes of speaker are indicated often by key words like *gam, ani, ki or re' eh*.

Seen in the dialogic construct, says Perry, the pessimism of Kohelet becomes merely one voice in the discussion and not a dominant theme. Difficult, contentious statements may be used merely to provoke responses. *Kohelet* expresses many positive ideas as well—what people enjoy from their labors is good, and human enterprise should be encouraged. Wisdom is wonderful, although not by itself an answer to everything. Kohelet is optimistic about the plan of human times, as indicated in Chapter III. God made all things good in their time despite the appearance of insecurity. Vanity (*hebel*) too is seen in its positive aspect, and life is not futile, inasmuch as things can get better or worse. Even life's ephemerality becomes a means of drawing closer to God (p. 47-48).

Although not narrowly dogmatic then, *Kohelet's* case must be presented in the Hebrew Scripture "because our last recourse is not faith but our own experience. This is the bottom line, what one turns to when everything else fails, when competing faiths fall short or no longer make sense or shock by their unscrupulousness or vanity" (p. 46). To Perry, the question is not so much how *Kohelet* could have been included in the canon but what is the nature of a canon that can include such a book. The Hebrew Scripture could have a place for *Kohelet* because it recognized that human experience must include dissonance and dialectic.

One can debate Perry's seeming diminution of the importance of faith in the above quotation. Perhaps the various dissonances and even transgressions the Bible records of its heroes (e.g., David or Job) did not degrade them but elevated them only because they had a basic sense of faith and were determined to continue living with their faith.

Perry correctly does not dwell extensively on Kohelet's negative side, and he makes a major effort, in the style of Mordecai Zer-Kavod, to relate *Kohelet* to the rest of Scripture, both in its language and in its ideas. This is a significant change from many earlier writers who minimized *Kohelet's* role as part of Hebrew literary tradition and emphasized possible links to the literature of Ugarit, Persia, Egypt and Greece.

Perry uses some rabbinic works, particularly Midrash and commentaries found in the *Mikraot Gedolot* edition like Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Sforno. However, his mention of Kimhi, Abrabanel and Malbim (p. XV) is

confusing. None of them wrote on *Kohelet*. He also refers once to Morris Jastrow, a psychologist who wrote on *Kohelet*, by his father's name, Marcus Jastrow (the rabbi who wrote the famous Aramaic-English dictionary). Some other rabbinic writings are not mentioned, notably Ramban's *Derasha al Divrei Kohelet*; R. Saadiah Gaon's *Emunot Ve-Deot*, Chapter 10 as well as his text commentary; and the commentaries of Alshich and R. Yaacov of Lissa.

Kohelet seems to conclude, more or less, that worldly life is not haphazard and that God formed the physical world with care as well as love and gave man the ability to use it for good.

Perry thus offers some interesting views as to how and why Kohelet may have used the dialogic form in his book and also why he is so interested in experience. There is, however, another question with which Perry does not deal directly. Why did Kohelet write this book at all? I would like to offer my own pet theory. It is true that Kohelet sensed many contradictions in the world around him and felt frustrated in the seeming inability of man to make any impact on the world. He sought, like many before and after him, to find some purpose in that world. To find an ultimate meaning was not easy. Yet, all this was not really new and wisdom writers of many times and places had sought, with incomplete success, to make sense of what they saw and experienced. Kohelet, however, went an important step further. As a committed son of Israel, he was willing to accept the restrictions of the practical world because he believed in something more. As the Midrash opines, nothing is new under the sun but the world of Torah extends beyond the sun (i.e., beyond earthly limitations) and, in that realm, there are creativity and freshness and immortal values. This is not the world to come after death but rather the spiritual and intellectual elevation that one can experience even in this mortal life.

The non-material part of man makes sense to Kohelet. He can understand that one can thrive and grow by devoting himself to the Torah. What he does not understand is why man cannot devote himself wholly to the spiritual. Why does he need all the strains, disappointments and miseries of the tangible world under the sun? Does this not merely distract man from his higher purposes? Thus, Kohelet embarks on a search to understand why God created a material world as well as a spiritual. This is not Gilgamesh seeking to avoid pain by finding immortality; Kohelet is hoping to understand why man must toil and strive for the body when the soul seems so much more

important.

And so Kohelet tries every sort of experience, as he describes in his second chapter. He undoubtedly knew from his studies what these experiences had meant to other people. However, he cannot rely only on their reports; he needs to see for himself and he tests as much of what the world offers as a king is able.

Kohelet seems to conclude, more or less, that worldly life is not haphazard and that God formed the physical world with care as well as love and gave man the ability to use it for good. The problem is that man often does not fulfill his potential. Both human behavior and wisdom are flawed so that the world seems to have many pains and sorrows with which to burden him.

Another problem in *Kohelet* is its seeming universality. Non-Jews as well as Jews seem to find this book deeply poignant, maybe more so than any other book of the Hebrew Bible. Is this a particularly Jewish book? Does it have a specially Jewish message or point of view? Perhaps it was this question that troubled the Rabbis of the Talmud when they thought of suppressing *Kohelet* because it seemed inclined to heresy (*minut*) or, in another account, because it seemed to contain contradictions. (Lev. R. 28, 2B Sabb. 30b)

"And why did they not suppress it? Because its beginning was words of Torah and its end was words of Torah." Not merely, however, that *Kohelet* contained a few pious phrases at its beginning and end. Rather, it seems that the rabbis believed that Kohelet's searching was serious and constructive, both in mental and material matters, and it helped him to achieve a better understanding of God's work. (Perry would agree with this, p. 46.) A full comprehension of the purpose of Creation is not available or necessary to man. However, it is clear that God watches over man in his earthly life and that earthly life has meaning and love and fulfillment for those who use it well.

The importance of Kohelet's finding can be better recognized when one remembers that the Greeks were never able to reconcile the needs of body and soul. The two could never co-exist in harmony and it was necessary to separate one from the other (e.g., *Phaedo*, 63f). Greek thought and art could feature the most grossly physical and the most ethereally sublime but it could never make them interact to good purpose. Nor could her greatest philosophers ever feel comfortable as long as body and soul were attached. "The body is the prison of the soul," wrote Plato. Kohelet's living with both wisdom and experience answered that dilemma. Both spiritual and earthly worlds are important to God's plan for man.

Matthew B. Schwartz is a professor of history at Wayne State University and a contributing editor.

Holocaust Texts: A "Newer Testament"

*Mother of the Wire Fence:
Inside and Outside the Holocaust*
by Karl A. Plank
Louisville: Westminster
John Knox Press

A Review Essay
by Cliff Edwards

Karl A. Plank, a published poet, theologian and professor of religion, provides a series of meditations on a photograph, a painting and a series of poems, essays and novels emerging from the Holocaust. Beginning with Mendel Grossman's photograph of a Jewish mother speaking to her youngest child through a wire fence at the Lodz Ghetto in 1942, a fence that separates him for deportation and death, Plank provides a sensitive commentary exposing the obscene brutality of that time and place to the reader.

Plank's own poetic skills and reticence allow the powerful texts and images of the *Shoah* to speak in their own naked pain and power. Among the texts are fragments from Nelly Sachs's *O The Chimneys*; Dan Pagis's poem, "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car"; Simche Bunem Shayavt's "Lekh-Lekho"; passages from Elie Wiesel's *Night*; and descriptions from Claude Lanzmann's film, "Shoah."

The diverse voices and deeds of the *Shoah* are given the larger part of the book but, quietly and unobtrusively, Plank reveals his own discoveries that help us interpret what we see and hear. We find ourselves at the birthing of a new Bible, a "Newer Testament," founded on sufferings more troubling than those of the Biblical Exodus and Exile, words more poignant than those of a Jeremiah or Jesus. Plank suggests that the *Shoah* has given us genuine prophetic voices and authentic texts that are candidates for Holy Scripture.

Further, the final pages of Plank's work call those readers who are Christians to a serious consideration of the relevance for Christianity of the *Shoah* and its many eyes and voices. He cites Emil Fackenheim's question:

"What are the sufferings of the Cross compared to those of a mother whose child is slaughtered to the sound of laughter or the strains of a Viennese waltz?"

Plank suggests that the Christian "word of faith" give way to "silence," that the Christian response reflect "silence, humility and waiting together for God." This "waiting together" should focus less on redemption than on "community," the church standing with the victims, "as if before Easter." In

Plank's words:

"If the Christian community is to escape its role as marshal of the wire fence, it must bear the story of the Jewish family that suffered in its midst and not apart from its hands. Its act of narrative must give voice to the victim while, at the same time, making confession."

Cliff Edwards is a professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and a contributing editor.

Jewish Women and Jewish Writers

by Sarah Barbara Watstein

History and criticism as well as interpretation and reinterpretation are the shared concerns of the authors, editors and contributors of the titles reviewed in this article. Many of these texts are classic and timeless; some are written by men, others by women and still others by "anonymous." Spend time with any of these titles, you will learn that there is a large body of literature by Jewish women writers and that scholarship on Jewish women writers is thriving. Also, you will come to know that, throughout history, becoming a Jewish women writer was a cultural anomaly. Finally, you will be exposed to a variety of Jewish women's voices in English, Hebrew, Spanish and Yiddish, to name a few, as well as a variety of women's cultures. Each of these titles succeeds in posing special challenges.

Chattel or Person: The Status of Women in the Mishnah. By Judith Romney Wegner. New York: Oxford University Press. The present study is more than an exercise in ancient history. Here, Wegner describes, analyzes and interprets the Mishnaic law concerning women's status. Her interest is when and why the Mishnah treats women as persons as well as when and why it treats them as chattels. A jurisprudential approach is emphasized. Two considerations led the author to pose the question in terms of person and chattel. First, the legal dichotomy puts matters into sharp relief in that *personhood* means the complexity of legal entitlements and obligations that largely define an individual's status in society. The converse of *person* in this sense is *chattel*. Second, the form of the question was "virtually dictated by the nature of Mishnaic taxonomy, resting as it does on analogy and contrast." Wegner notes that to the Mishnah framers, woman presents an anomaly, "a legal hybrid" that defies logical classification.

Chapters explore the minor daughter, the wife, the Levirate widow, the autonomous woman as well as woman and the public domain. Here, Wegner grapples with her

most challenging questions. How far do the sages succeed in integrating women into their blueprint for the ideal Israelite way? And, how well does their treatment of women fit the general method of the Mishnah? The final chapter includes a discussion of some recent Jewish feminist scholarship that has particular relevance to the present study. The work of Judith Baskin, Rachel Biale, Bernadette Broten, Blu Greenberg, Annette Kuhn, Sherry Ortner, Cynthia Ozick, Judith Plaskow, Michelle Zimbalist Rosalind and Ellen Umansky are some whose contributions are chronicled in this chapter.

This is an academic and readable study. If you are interested in the rich intellectual tradition of ancient Judaism, the status of women and the comparative history of religions, chances are this book will be extraordinarily valuable.

From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women. By Leila Leah Bronner. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press. Do you find yourself drawn to debates about gender and the Biblical tradition? Do you find the reconsideration and reinterpretation of texts to be exciting? If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, you will find this study particularly provocative. Focusing on female characters of the Bible as perceived through the aggadic traditions (folkloristic, narrative, legendary as opposed to halakha or codified legal discussion) of Talmud and Midrash, the author adds her voice to the emerging tradition of depatriarchalizing Biblical interpretation. She discusses Midrash as a method of inquiry. The classical texts of rabbinic literature—Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud and Midrash—constitute the primary resources for this study. Jewish literature that predates the Rabbis is examined for comparative purposes. Bronner focuses specifically on Eve, Sarah bat Asher, Ruth, Hannah, Deborah and others. Separate chapters examine daughters (including Lot's daughters, Dinah, Tamar, the daughters of Zelophehad, Jephthah's daughter) and prostitutes (Rahab and Tamar). Bronner points up the complexity and contradiction in the rabbinic construction of a woman. The author succeeds in presenting what the aggadic traditions of Talmud and Midrash say about women. A bibliography and index of rabbinic references provide added value to this book.

Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition. By Nehama Aschkenasy. Detroit: Wayne State University. From S.Y. Agnon to Amos Oz...from Shulamit Lapid to A.B. Yehoshua...from Kate Millet to Virginia Woolf...today, as in earlier periods, both male and female writers face the challenge of the tension between myths and new realities. In this landmark study of women in Judaic literary tradition, Aschkenasy at-

tempts to trace Eve's long and manifold journeys through the ages. A brief historical introduction, tracing the evolution of the female "otherness" in Hebraic literature, starts the book. The next two chapters ("Evil, Sex and the Demonic" and "The Empty Vessel: Woman as Mother") explore the woman as a deadly seductress and a formidable giver of life. In "Woman and Oppression," the ordeal of the real-life woman in the male-dominant culture is chronicled. The final chapter delineates the variety of female strategies used by woman to overcome her role and the male's mind as the portentous force of mythic dimensions and her actual worldly status as a silent, insignificant "second sex."

The variety of female experiences followed in this study are impressive. The literary documents cited are testament to the quality of the author's scholarship. Let's hope this text is followed by other explorations of the woman in the Hebraic tradition.

Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible. By Alice Ogden Bellis. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press. Many of us are aware that feminist and womanist scholarship is part of a larger movement in academic circles today that approach texts with questions about power assumptions. Rich in its diversity of perspectives and methods, Biblical scholarship also is a field with its share of controversy and conflict regarding perspectives, methods and conclusions. This volume intends to introduce students and the general reader to feminist and womanist approaches to the Hebrew Bible and to survey the available literature. In her introduction, Bellis summarizes the purpose and scope of her book. The focus is on the Biblical stories, and it addresses the use of male and female imagery in the prophetic and wisdom literature.

Stories focus on Eve, the women of *Genesis*, the women of *Exodus* and *Numbers*, the women of *Joshua* and *Judges*, the women of *Samuel* 1 and 2, the women of *Kings* 1 and 2, the women of the prophets, the women of the wisdom literature, and subversive women (Ruth, Esther, Susanna and Judith). Bellis defines feminism and womanism initially, to help the reader comprehend her reflections on the variety of feminist interpretations of these stories. We can learn from the positive role models, the women who had power and used it well, and the women who had little power and accomplished important goals in spite of their powerlessness. Also, we can learn from the women who, in various ways, were victimized; from the tendency to make women look worse than they are; and finally, from the Biblical propensity to categorize women as very good or very bad.

Bellis should be credited for her open-minded and inclusive introduction and survey that will serve readers well. Her book reminds us of why we read ancient texts: not simply

to find out what happened, what the ancients thought and what the texts meant but because of what these texts mean today. Discussion questions conclude each chapter, making this book even more well worth reading.

Jewish-American Women Writers: A Bibliography and Critical Sourcebook. Edited by Ann R. Shapiro with Sara R. Horowitz, Ellen Schiff and Miriyam Glazer. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group. This volume explores the extraordinary achievement of Jewish-American women novelists, poets and playwrights who have written in the English language. It is intended to be a standard reference work and, as such, is composed mainly of entries alphabetically arranged by writer. Information on biography, bibliography and a critical survey on each writer are provided as is an analysis of the writer's work by a scholar in Jewish-American literature, women's literature or a related field. A special chapter on some of the important writers of autobiographies that document the experience of Jewish women in America also is included.

The representative selection of writers include Mary Antin, Ann Birstein, E.M. Broner, Rosellen Brown, Hortense Calisher, Kim Chernin, Andrea Dworkin, Edna Ferber, Rebecca Goldstein and more. Yes, you will find entries on Lillian Hellman, Erica Jong, Maxine Kumin, Emma Lazarus, Robin

Morgan, Tillie Olsen, Alicia Ostriker, Cynthia Ozick, Grace Paley, Marge Piercy and Muriel Rukeyser (my favorite). Also, you will find entries on Susan Sontag, Gertrude Stein, Elizabeth Swados, Wendy Wasserstein, Helen Yglesias and more.

Thumbs up! This book promises to be one of the most outstanding reference sources published in 1994.

Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing. Edited by Judith R. Baskin. Detroit: Wayne State University. If insightful, literary essays on little explored topics grab your attention, then *Women of the Word* will meet your needs. If, however, you are interested in a companion study and complement to *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (an anthology that explores the lives and activities of Jewish women in various times and places) (Detroit, 1991), search no further. The focus of these essays is secular Jewish literature. An underlying intent of the collection is to demonstrate the ways in which literature tells us about women's lives in particular circumstances. The volume is ordered roughly chronologically, as arrangement that juxtaposes analyses of contemporaneous literature by and about women written in Hebrew, Yiddish, English and Spanish, "indicative," as the editor writes, "of a Jewish female struggle across geographical and linguistic boundaries to find a voice with which to express that imaginative transmutation of experience and aspiration we call literature."

The chapters fall into natural categories by language groups. Chapters cover such areas as medieval Hebrew literature; Yiddish literature; the Shtetl; Yiddish women writers in America; women poets in two modern Yiddish anthologies; Jewish American women's stories of the 20s; the rhetoric of zeal in Emma Lazarus, Marie Syrkin and Cynthia Ozick; women survivors of Nazi genocide; Jewish women writers in Latin America; Israeli women writers. The editor's words offer the best summary:

"Neither inclusive nor exclusive, *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing* attempts to illuminate moments, both painful and exhilarating, from the struggle of Jewish women to find literary legitimacy, often in Jewish cultures wary of female aspirations and feminist concerns."

These studies are written in a present "when Jewish women writers internationally are creating a wealth of diverse literary works." I could not help but be reminded of the short time span in which Jewish women's writing has flourished.

Sarah Barbara Watstein is an assistant director for academic services and head of the Cabell Library at Virginia Commonwealth University. Also, she is a contributing editor.

PLACES

There are places in my mind I cannot go,
Where barbed-wire thoughts rip
and tear at my serenity.

There are places in my heart I cannot go,
Where forbidden feelings lie
trapped behind locked doors.

And yet, as a moth is drawn towards the
flame, so too am I drawn towards
the burning place within my soul,
Where words cannot be uttered, nor
questions answered, nor arguments won.

And I emerge from this Dantean
nightmare, battered and bruised, silently
screaming for help...and hope. Screams
which echo endlessly within the dark
and empty places I cannot go.

I wonder how it is possible to survive
day after day, thinking the unthinkable,
bearing the unbearable.

And I know the answer lies deep
in the hearts of those I love with a pure,
unconditional, required love.

—Amy Breth

BOOK BRIEFINGS

Editor's Note: Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of Menorah Review.

The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials. By Telford Taylor. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. This is the long-awaited history of the war crimes trials by a key participant, a member of the American prosecution staff and eventual chief counsel. In vivid recollections meticulously documented, Taylor portrays events as he "saw, heard and otherwise sensed them at the time and not as a detached historian, working from the documents, might picture them." It is his intimate knowledge of what happened outside the courtroom—as well as his profound grasp of international law—that permits Taylor to break new ground in describing the actual trials that began in November 1945. His book is an engrossing and reflective eyewitness account of one of the most significant events in our century, the definitive word on the inner workings of that momentous episode in history that has come to be known simply as Nuremberg.

The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols. By Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platin Teutsch. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc. Jewish symbols reflect the interaction of word and image within Jewish culture. The authors have brought their extensive knowledge and talents together to create the first reference guide of its kind, designed for use by educators, artists, Rabbis, folklorists, feminists, Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, and lay readers. The more than 250 entries that make up this encyclopedia include ceremonial objects and images, personalities, places, concepts, motifs, and events that have come to represent central Jewish ideas and continue to play a meaningful role in defining Jewish experience today.

The Merit of Our Mothers: A Bilingual Anthology of Jewish Women's Prayers. Compiled by Tracy Guren Klirs. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press. The "tkhines," prayers and devotions for Jewish women, originated in the world of pre-modern Ashkenazic Jewry and represent one of the richest forms of Jewish religious literature. Although the earliest date back to 1590, the majority were published in the 18th and 19th centuries. The authors, some of whom were women, tried to create a way of communicating with God in their "mother-tongue" of Yiddish without having to go to synagogue. They are written in the first person singular and express the most personal of spiritual concerns. This text presents 23 "tkhines" in the original Yiddish and in beautifully translated English.

And You Shall Tell Your Son...The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible. By Yair Zakovitch. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University. The Exodus, the central event in the historiography of the Bible and in the collective memory of the Biblical period, represents an historical watershed; it shapes the recounting of events both before and after it. In this book, the influence of the Exodus tradition on the ideological-literary shaping of the Biblical historiography is investigated, with particular attention paid to such questions as: Why were the Israelites enslaved in Egypt? Why did the Exodus tradition take on such enormous dimensions in the Bible? How is this phenomenon related to the separatism promoted as ideal in the Hebrew Scriptures?



NUMBER 36 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • WINTER 1996

Menorah Review is published by the Center for Judaic Studies of Virginia Commonwealth University and distributed worldwide. Comments and manuscripts are welcome. Address all correspondence to Center for Judaic Studies, P.O. Box 842025, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284-2025.

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Herbert Hirsch

Production Manager: Kay W. Brill

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