Jewish Television
Yiddish Theater
The Three Stooges
Hasidic Laffs
Mad Comics
Chelm
Truth About Moses
Long Island
Labor Humor
Underground Comix
Fun in the Shtetl
Family Jokes
Coney Island
Baseball Clown
Dear Abbie
No MSG
Klezmer and Katz

GUEST EDITOR
PAUL BUHLE

FEATURING Sholem Aleichem, Terry Boyce, Eric Breitbart, Paul Buhle, Lawrence Bush, Isidore Haiblum, Arlene Goldbard, Larry Gonick, J. Hoberman, Jeannie Kamins, Maurice Kish, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Tuli Kupferberg, Harvey Kurtzman, David Marc, Wallace Markfield, Diane Noomin, Saul Raskin, Sharon Rudahl, Henry Sapoznik, Art Spiegelman

JE W I S H H U M O R
PRESENTED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL HUMOR MOVEMENT
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JEWISH HUMOR: AN INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Paul Buhle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROYSSER KUNDES</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOSHE NADIR: PRINCE OF SATIRE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Paul Buhle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE AVERAGE THEATER GOER</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Moshe Nadir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAM LIPTZIN: FORGOTTEN LABOR HUMORIST</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Paul Buhle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD AS GOLDFADEN</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by J. Hoberman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEGIN TO BE CLONED</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Lawrence Bush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHOLEM ALEICHEM: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Paul Buhle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAT'S JEWISH, YOU DON'T LOOK FUNNY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Henry Sapoznik</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EARLY JEWISH FILM STEREOTYPES</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Eric Brietbart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SAGA OF STUIE SPITZER</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Aline Kominsky-Crumb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TULI KUPFERBERG</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL SCHACHT: THE CLOWN PRINCE OF BASEBALL</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Eric Brietbart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I BEG YOU</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Moshe Nadir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUTO-DESTRUCTO</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Art Spiegelman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE THREE STOOGES</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by David Marc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARVEY KURTZMAN</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Paul Buhle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIDORE HAIBLUM</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Paul Buhle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE TSADDIK OF THE SEVEN WONDERS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Isidore Haiblum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY WISDOM</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Arlene Goldbard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENDY AND THE GOLOM</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WALLACE MARKFIELD</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Eric Brietbart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURNING 30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Terry Boyce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAR ABBIE</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Lawrence Bush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE TVnik TALKS JEWISH</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by David Marc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CREDITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVER: LUNA PARK by Maurice Kish</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 11 Reprinted from the Village Voice, December 14, 1982</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with permission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 12 “Sholem Aleichem Between Two Worlds: Kasrilevka and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York,” by Maurice Kish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 14 “The Kapelye” by Maurice Kish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 16 Canadian Jewish Outlook, July–August 1982</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 18 “Power-Pak Comics #2,” from Kitchen Sink Comics © Aline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kominsky-Crumb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 21 “Auto-Destructo” © Art Spiegelman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 25 “Dragged Net,” artist Willie Elder, from Mad Reader,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952 © Educational Comics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 26 Isidore Haiblum photo by Stanley Levine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 27 Leviathan, Spring 1982</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 28 “The Bride Cuts The Cake” by Diane Noomin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 29 Mendy Enterprises, 450 7th Ave., New York 10001; bi-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly, $5/year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 31 Tuli Kupferberg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 33 Jeannie Kamins “Bonds For Israel”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 34 Terry Boyce “Turning 30”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Terry Boyce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Lawrence Bush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Aline Kominsky-Crumb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Diane Noomin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Isidore Haiblum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Terry Boyce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STEVE FANKUCHEN** Publisher/Editor  
**JUDY STONE** Distribution
Welcome to SHMATE #6. In our first issue among many letters berating the choice of the magazine's name, there was one which asked, "Do you plan to be the Jewish answer to Mad Magazine?" Well, the answer to that can finally be found on page 24 of this issue. Molly Picon? The star of Yiddish stage and screen? In the article beginning on page 35 you can find out which T.V. cop show she frequently appeared on. Have you always wondered how to order your food without M.S.G. in a Chinese restaurant where the waiter does not speak English? Check the backcover.

No, this is not the SHMATE trivia issue. Rather, it is the product of a collaboration between a Long Island Jew and a Providence gentile, between myself and Paul Buhle. About a year ago Paul subscribed to SHMATE and sent along copies of several articles he had written. I responded with a request to write for the magazine. He was agreeable, in theory, but simply too busy to make a commitment. The path was then obvious. If it was too difficult to coordinate and produce a single article, why not try an entire issue instead? Or was it Paul who broached the idea? No matter!

One of SHMATE's main purposes is to present an opportunity for alternatives, in procedure as well as contents. Thus I consider it doubly fortunate to have Paul, a well-respected scholar, writer, and organizer as Guest Editor. After all, who among us has never once smugly remarked that a non-Jew could never really understand Jewish humor? (Why is it that we who try to be so understanding of others always insist that others cannot understand us?) Come to think of it, this has been triply fortunate. How often does an editor, known for his lax deadlines, get the opportunity of working with someone who actually produces copy where and when promised? Bless you, Paul!

At first I complacently sat back chortling how I would have an issue of SHMATE put together by another person, leaving me free to work on all the non-editorial chores. Well, wrong! What has ensued has been a sort of role-reversal dialog, with Paul playing the New York Jew and myself playing the goy from the boonies. Paul handed me 35 pages of material about famous people—only I'd never heard of half of them, let alone knew what they were about. So, Paul educated me about Jewish history and I educated him about assuming too much of one's readers. We took out a little here, added a little there, and changed a few other things. Nonetheless, the substantive essentials of this issue are to Paul's credit.

It has been interesting for Paul and me to discuss this role reversal, as well as another fact: had I put the issue together, it would have been different in much more than specifics. I would not have thought to use Paul's historical approach. Instead I would have concentrated on the past 30 years with a nod to "ancient history" through the Marx brothers. Instead of being analytic and descriptive, it would have been exemplary. More jokes, short cartoons, one liners, funny stories. It would probably have been funnier, livelier, more topical, and less original—essentially just another Jewish joke book. It would not have fulfilled the essential SHMATE requirement of adding something new. To put it simply it would have been fun, but redundant.

Fortunately I left Paul to gather material and stuck to dealing with logistical problems. For instance: did you know that due to the gravitational pull of the Rockies, eight inches of copy in New York are stretched to ten inches by the time they arrive here?

SHMATE will return to its more variegated format next issue. Letters concerning issue #5 will be included there along with response to the current issue. Please keep those letters coming. I can't over-emphasize their importance to other readers, authors, and myself. At present, distribution is SHMATE's weakest link. There is simply no money to pay someone to work on it and no time for me to do it. Therefore, the magazine is dependent on its readers for publicity. Unless you show and sell SHMATE to your friends, relatives, libraries, bookstores, and organizations, the magazine will be incapable of paying production and distribution staff so that time will be freed for editorial improvement. At present, even with no paid staff, the magazine is not breaking even. One alternative is to seek a publisher to handle the primary financial responsibilities. Any suggestions or proposals readers have about that would be much appreciated.

A few details. Subscription and bookstore copies of SHMATE will be sent out by July 1. If your copy is delayed please complain to the Post Office. Last issue many copies took four weeks to be delivered. There is nothing that can be done from this end. If you would like your copies sent first class, (to use that quaint Postal Service euphemism), add $4 to your subscription (or 70¢/issue). Your subscription ends with the last number of the code on your mailing label. If it is 6 or 7, please renew soon.

STEVE FANKUCHEN
JEWISH HUMOR
AN INTERPRETATION
by PAUL BUHLE

"You have made us a little lower than the angels? That depends on what you call a little, doesn't it?"

Tevye the Dairyman, to the Lord

"I do not know whether there are many other instances of people making fun to such a degree of its own character."

Sigmund Freud

Jewish Humor — only two words but almost redundant already. Humor has, say the editors of the admirable Big Book of Jewish Humor, nearly "come to replace the standard sacred texts as a touchstone for the entire Jewish community." No doubt this is because, in an age of confusion and secularism, no other definition of "Jewish" fits. But also for another and subtler reason. Humor, like religion, is always a response to eternal questions about the condition and fate of humanity. If Yiddishkayt and its humor drew the outside world into a Jewish interpretation, and if Jewish humor has through mass communications become, in turn universal, the puzzlement of shtetl mor, like religion, is always a response to eternal questions. Humor, which offers both anodyne against pain and antidote against futility, will be part of any cure.

The function of religion, the anthropologists tell us, is to reconcile us to death, pain, and the persistence of evil. The function of ritual in every pre-modern order has been to mythically return the participants to a moment outside time where contradictions vanish. The great anarcho-Zionist Yiddish literary critic, B. Rivkin, rightly says that Jewish life and Jewish joy revolved around the holidays for many centuries. The obligation to be happy on the Sabbath is the most basic of all religious sentiments. Sholom Aleichem has an anonymous drayman returning from synagogue to his home, and "When I open the door and sing out, 'Good Shabbos,' you can hear me at the other end of town." Every holiday reminds pious Jews of their special role in human and divine history, by returning them to the Messiah Time. The form of rite, concludes Rivkin, is "spectacle," another plane of existence where communal values and collectivity overflow the barriers of class society's external and internal repressions.

Not to romanticize: the religious hold upon a community perpetually threatened from the outside forbade the kind of carnivals so much a part of European gentile life in Rabelais' time, where all values turned upside down and official religion became a laughingstock for some days every year. European Jews drew upon the playful folk songs of their gentle neighbors, against rabbinic decree, because they lacked some needed element of secularism in their own culture. The keen and bitter dialectic sense of humor had to be cultivated upon ground broken by the ploughs of modernism.

The classic Yiddish literature took shape as the shtetl weathered fierce blows. The Haskalah, as Aaron Lansky has brilliantly elucidated, represented the intellectual side of a nascent Jewish bourgeoisie set upon wiping out the old superstitious ways. The Maskilim believed the Jews had to be civilized, taught German or Russian in place of Yiddish, stripped of their habits and rituals which held back individualist initiative. They met formidable opposition in organized Hadisim, which exemplified precisely the anti-modern bent. Their Yiddish stories, folksongs, and proverbs constituted a mighty folklore, an earthiness which mocked the materiality of the Maskilim. And, they had a fanatical belief in the impossibility of assimilation, the ultimate irreducible qualities of Jewry. Industrialization, urbanization, optimistic anticipations of tolerance, and pessimism at recurrent pogroms pushed the village folk one way and another, out of the old ruts, but to nowhere in particular.

It is in the paradoxical nature of Jewish cultural development that the great writers, from Mendele Mokher Sforim and Sholom Aleichem onward, used the language considered vulgar ("a half-bestial tongue," wrote Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz) by the Maskilim, but used it to uplift shtetl Jews from the meanness of their condition. The stories by "Mendele the Bookseller" cut so deeply with their satire that, written by a gentle, they might be taken for anti-Semitic. He drew upon a folk-wisdom already skeptical about the miracles of the Bible and the customs of the Hasids, but likewise suspicious of the wonderous life predicted for Jewish emancipation into the outside world. This folk-wisdom later on nourished the socialist, anarchist, Bundist, and Labor Zionist movements, but never completely succumbed to the militant secularism of the politicos. Humor held something back from the claims of the world, and in that view of another reality maintained a link with the older non-rationalism. Not by accident did some of the greatest Yiddish literary comedians come from amidst the "exploited of the exploited," the Hasidic districts of Galicia.

The renowned psychologist Theodore Reik, who returned at the end of his distinguished career to the question of Jewish humor, recalled that the radio phrase, "We pause for station identification," touched a chord in him. The "inner construction of the Jews" that eluded even Freud's famous work on humor, might be summed up in a single joke. A doctor called to aid Baroness Feilchenfeld through delivery suggests a card game in an adjoining room. She shrieks, "Ah, mon Dieu, comme je suffre!" and her husband leaps up, but the doctor convinces him to play on; later the woman cries, "My God, what continued next page
The ghetto joke enters through a painful reality. "Suffering makes you laugh, too." And conversely, the Jewish joke can be funny without making us blissfully carefree. The famous meshugge comics make humor out of insanity, like the Jew in asylum who demands kosher food but is seen on the sabbath with a cigar. "For what am I meshugge?" It is skeptical, as Freud himself used to say, for experience shows "The ways of the Lord are dark, but rarely pleasant." It takes Messianism with a big grain of salt, as the peasant woman laments, "God save us from the Messiah!" But above all it accepts mundane reality only to make a joke, like the pious Jews who believe their rabbi can see tragedy but is seen on the sabbath with a cigar. "Now it's time."

That's the point. The gentile world has tradition­ally given the Jewish male a sort of semi-Black reputation of doing something strange with his organ (mythically related to circumcision) so that a gentile woman will never want a gentile man again. The Jewish woman has notoriously been the butt of jokes about materialism, neurosis, exaggerated sexual appetite on the one hand and functional frigidity on the other. However, jokes about impotence, small organ size, and generalized male stupidity also go a long way back, even if they have only been recalled and revamped by Jewish comedien­nes in recent years. Alienated sh tupping remains the anti-holy of holies, just as good sex is the holy of anti­holies.

The climax, as raconteur Itche Goldberg says, is finally the anti-climax. If the late nineteenth century Russian peasants colloquially explain the new telegraph as "a dog with its tail in Moscow and its head in Warsaw, so that when you pull the tail its head barks," and one Jew offers the same explanation (substituting Vilna and Odessa), the other Jew says, "Fine, but what is the principle of electricity?" The first Jew: "Just the same only without the dog." Some commen­tators call this joke intellectual. Others say it works off the pilpul, the question-and-answer character of religious instruc­tion. A more sensible analysis may be that it affirms the nature of common sense — and then pulls the rug out from under it. A Jew in Vienna just after the Anschluss goes to a friendly travel agent to pick an escape, and is told one spot after another on the globe is forbidden to Jews (or requires too much money for entry). "Mein Herr, would you perhaps have another globe?" Reality affirmed, denied, and laconically affirmed again. Perhaps. Or perhaps there is another globe on which escape from fate remains possible; but that other globe lays just beyond our searching eyes and out­stretched hands. Wasn't Rod Serling Jewish?

Shmuel Niger, the greatest of Yiddish literary critics, devoted the third and final volume of his selected works entirely to Sholem Aleichem. The generation coming of age in the 1910s, Niger recalled, first looked at Sholem Aleichem as contemptuously familiar stuff, unequal to the self-conscious artistry of an I. L. Peretz or of their own poetic comrades in "di Yunge", rebellious young aesthetes. The father of Yiddish literature had already prepared this denigration himself, instructing the inscription of Pagliacci's lament upon his tombstone, that he had to write for women and children, and when they laughed, they could not see his tears. But he had seen better and more completely and with far more artis­try, than he himself knew.

Sholem Aleichem created a world of laughter out of tears. His Tevye, pious and loving, is one of the great characters in modern literature — realistic yet archetypal. The foolishness of Tevye to our modern eyes does not
condemn him to smallness; we seem small next to his simplicity and harmony. As Itche Goldberg says, Fiddler On the Roof reduced Tevye to a caricature and thereby made him a relic for the back shelf of collective Jewish memory. But in Sholom Aleichem's pages, a caricature Tevye could never be. Likewise his Karsilevka, a Hasidic village out of synch with the swift modernization of the world; if another outcome than modern capitalism, world wars, Stalinism and fascism, destruction of surviving pre-modern communities and threatened destruction of the earth itself were possible, if humanity could have moved from the old collective to the new, Karsilevka would have been a prime candidate. Menachem Mendel, the big-city lufimensch, is already closer to the cruelties of 20th century life. But even here a picturesque quality prevails. The ultimate impossibility of bourgeois life, of happy assimilation (or, Sholem Aleichem might have added, the impossibility of becoming a nation with all the military, racial, and other vices of other nations) becomes clear.

So well did Sholem Aleichem draw out this message that it has become the main theme of Jewish humor ever since. Or better: so well did Sholem Aleichem identify the main theme that it has become his inescapable virtue to have explored it in anticipation. The best of (early) Philip Roth, the best of (recent) Joseph Heller, the obsession of the Groysser Kundes, of Moshe Nadir, of revolutionary anarchists and folkish communists and, for that matter, revolutionary labor Zionists comes to the same thing. It is not merely that Jewry exists within a geographical galut, but that the galut goes to the soul, where no piety or change of physical location can root it out.

The theme must be bold, because it aspires to universality. "If God is the God of the universe and His people a world people, dispersed to all ends, then the Redeemer must come not to one land alone but to all lands, the Messiah must come for the entire world. Here ends the dream of mere Earth of blessings and curses on Earth. Here we verge on heaven itself." So writes Peretz, the ganterz yid, the quintessential Jew. Jewish humor has seen the universal condition in itself, the wound as old as the first oppression. It takes into itself the poison of combined human ills because it has no choice, and because it must develop through its own systemic powers an antidote. Humor, at its highest level of performance, holds out the hope of renewed health by reaching for another kind of reality, borrowing on something told in a dream. Primal and modern become reconciled under the sign of God's Own Shlemiel.

Continued next page
HUMOR: continued

Jewish humor, like Jewish life in the last century or so, fits roughly into three periods. The dates cannot be particularly precise. Sholem Aleichem died not in nineteenth century Kasrilevka or Yehupetz, but in the Bronx, 1914. Yiddish has outsurvived generations of assimilation by now. Not even the approaching demise of the 1920s-30s immigrants will entirely blot out the memory of the shtetl, of Jewish metropolitan scenes in Eastern Europe. The impression, however far removed, still anchors the present to 800 years of Jewish life.

We need to know that the Yiddish theater Abraham Goldfaden wrote for, and critic Moshe Nadir observed, had all the craziness of unguarded hilarity, shmaltz, and spectacle, dominating by turns. We need to see how Yiddish humor became philosophical and literary in the hands of Nadir, casually didactic in the pages of a Yiddish weekly, *Groysser Kundes*, propagandistic for a labor agitator like Sam Liptzin. “I was born with a flaw,” Nadir wrote in his sad-sweet mocking way, “I can’t stand the spilling of blood. I am melancholy . . . I am a Jew.” If this Jew is not the universal one, he remains a very real one to this day.

Still, when the barriers slammed down against large-scale Jewish immigration at the end of the 1920s, the Golden Age of Yiddish had come toward an end. Decades earlier, a unique and unforeseeable adaptation had already started. At the heart of the moiling popular culture in immigrant New York, Jews notoriously began to synthesize the multiplicity of influences around them into a new Americanism. Coney Island could be their dreamland, because it liberated Jews among peoples of all backgrounds and beliefs. Adaptation, the perpetual recreation of vernacular, had been one of the eternal pillars of *Yiddishkayt*. But for the first time, a porous and fast-changing modern culture unwittingly invited Jewish intervention on the widest scale. Jews were, Yiddish critic-journalist Hillel Rogoff remarked, neither excluded from nor equals in the United States; they had to struggle for a democratic cultural pluralism while carving out their own roles. Jewish musicians found a creative tension somewhere between shtetl traditions, jazz and a mainstream pop. Jewish clowns, like Al Shacht, suffered to create unique forms of comedy. The Three Stooges tortured each other while they sabotaged elite culture for the sake of their audience. The intervention, began so unself-consciously within the chaos of popular culture, flourished with a mixture of wild enthusiasm and lingering sadness.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, across Depression, anti-Fascist crusade, Holocaust, Cold War, and rampant commercialization, Jewish humor spread through the society. Nothing illustrates the universalization so well as Harvey Kurtzman’s *Mad Comics*, which rendered “I was raised on chicken fat” into a mock-heroic claim of superheroes while teaching the children of America anti-commercial values most never guessed to be essentially Jewish. Television offered the comedic Jews a whole new arena where the struggle for popular acceptance in one generation gradually became the sense of self-identity in another.

With that last insight, we leave history behind and come to the present of Jewish Humor. The comic artist is aggressive in a new way, eager to use the viable elements of tradition while perfectly capable of practicing comedy without any forced or artificial Jewishness. The revival of *Yiddishkayt* in Yiddish and English offers a symbol for the process, because no one will seriously propose Yiddish as a first language again—it is linguistically voluntary, but its inner logic necessary for the *goldene kайт*, the golden chain from the past, to become complete.

We would have liked articles about Fanny Brice, Molly Berg, and a hundred other subjects. But perhaps the point can be made in this narrow space. The closer to those Americanizing masses comedy has come, the more spontaneous, lively, and fulfilling for audience and artist. Today, we are a decade or more into an era of vast potential creativity. The crisis and threatened destruction of the world offers a necessary role for comics and comedy, while humor provides an ideal means for the conveyance of universal messages through particular tradition.

***

A small confession. “The heavens glitter, and make ideas roll around in my head, such beautiful, unbelievable ideas,” wrote Moshe Nadir in an Apology for his erotic poetry volume, *Vilde Reusen* (Wild Roses), “... And if you find them lacking in morals or good taste, I’m not to blame . . . This is a goyish product. Be warned!” In my case the warning is literal. This is a goyishe product to some degree mysterious even to the editor. For he is—in spite of his friends and spiritual mishpokah, his mechanical ineptitude, neuroses and high blood pressure—a gentile.
Marx, the Wonder-Worker, leads the children of Israel through perils to Paradise.

A weekly humor magazine, militantly class-conscious in its defense of unions and workers' rights, bitterly satirical against war, ardently Jewish, without sanctifying any Jewish leader as above criticism and fun. Too good to be true? That was the Groysser Kundes (1909-1927), one of the most popular publications in the New York ghetto.

Its guiding spirit, Jakob Marinoff, was a melancholy poet who had imbibed the weltschmerz en route to America and soon put aside his poetry for a journalistic adventure. Stories about his notorious cheapness toward writers, his use of fresh immigrants who expected little money, can still be heard from oldtimers. But he ran the operation with great care—no satirical editor until Harvey Kurtzman approached his ability to get the best out of his writers and artists.

A typical issue featured a few large cartoons, a serious editorial, six or seven pages mixing cartoons about ghetto personalities, the world situation, and the foibles of romance with numerous light poems and little prose sketches. It covered the cultural scene as perhaps no other humor paper has, analyzing theatrical and literary developments in the ghetto, while publishing the most famous Yiddish writers like Nadir along with legions of the obscure.
Reform Rabbis Fit American Jews For Assimilation

Emma Goldman, pictured as kvetch.

The Kundes attacks the corruption of Yiddish culture at its roots.
THE PRINCE OF SATIRE

MOSHE NADIR

by PAUL BUHLE

I'm from an old and fading world
Wiped out by Mechanism
I dream of Mystery and Romance
My hope is Communism

“The American Sholem Aleichem,” prince of satire in the Yiddish popular press’ golden years, Moshe Nadir is today a forgotten figure. He has been neglected, paradoxically, because of his intimacy with the ghetto scene, the word-play based on a common parlance now vanished. But he has also been ignored because, “Great Cynic” and nihilist turned Communist (until his break with the Party in 1939), he remains treyf to the Jewish establishment. Only recently has he been partially rehabilitated to one of those oddities worth a passing mention.

Actually, Nadir is a literary giant whose importance has grown. He was not the first radical Yiddish humorist of note. Morris Winchevsky, the zeyde of socialist journalism in Yiddish, wrote for years under the title of “Di Meshugene Filosof,” the crazy philosopher, and offered ruminations like:

What?! Does the invention of the telegraph only mean that information will pass from Petersburg to London about the grandchildren of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the telephone, gift to modern times, wonder child of the civilization, has it come into the world only to transmit the cries of the Jews, new sounds of agony from one part to another?

And the trains, the new ships? Are they made only so that every land shall contain a section of suffering Jews?

What? Victor Hugo dead and Bismark alive? Has the world gone to the devil?

But if humor (like poetry) offered Winchevsky a fresh method for agitation, it became in the hands of Nadir a developed art accessible to the masses of ordinary Yiddish-speaking folk.

Born Itzhak Reiss in 1885, Nadir immigrated from his native Galicia to New York in 1898. He came to love the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city, the freedom and strangeness of the streets. But the memory of his shtetl, Narayev, remained fixed upon his mind like an image of the Eternal Village where the age-old collectivity, the proximity to Nature (the seasons, life, and death) and the sense of fragmented individual self-identity had not yielded to outside influence. “Sentimental as a schoolboy, no more lyrical than a moon-calf,” a disbeliever in High Art, pessimistic about life but an incurable romantic, Nadir straddled the two worlds as Sholem Aleichem could not. Like his friends di Yunge, the Yiddish aesthetes around him during the 1910s, he brought Yiddish to its ultimate expression and made a distinct claim for Jewish-American destiny.

Protege of an anarcho-Zionist, considered a founder of the twentieth century Freie Arbeter Shitimme, the anarchist weekly, shining star of the daily Tog, he renounced the backhanded respectability of Yiddishkayn’s Bad Boy to become satirist for the Communist Morgen Freiheit. Stalinization ultimately diminished his art by undercutting the sharpness of his Heinesque reversals and providing moral compulsion for both nasty polemics and didactic commentaries. But even at that, he could produce a wonderful children’s volume, Kind an Keyt. He leaves behind at least 10 other volumes, none in print and at least 99% untranslated. One day I hope to publish a volume of translations.
I am the average theater goer. I am, in the language of the poet, Walt Whitman, "the divine average." I believe in the "divine average" and in its right to govern the world.

I am the average theater goer whom all wish to please. I am he, the exalted Sanhedrin, who is the last word in everything. The dramatist bows before me. The actor prostrates himself in my presence. The impresario has a constant ear cocked in my direction. I am big, strong, mighty, vulgar, vox populi, eternal.

I am the average theater goer. I am the eternal riddle of the theater. All approach me as a world problem, an enigma, a salamander. But I, myself, am perfectly unconcerned. It is all the same with me if the play pleases or does not please. My artistic taste is like a celluloid collar. It can be used on both sides.

I am the average theater goer and I do not go to the theater to think, but to forget. I seek there to forget my wife, the children, the crowded tenement, the littered wash, the bad ventilation. I frequently go out for a walk, just so, out on the avenue and something stirs within me and there is no saloon handy, so I walk into some theater and presently I find myself seated upstairs perfectly contented. As long as I am already there I see a play too. What difference does it make to me?

I am the average theater goer and I really do not know what the critics want of me, why they muddle me up so. All I know is that they won't let me get any pleasure out of life. When a play doesn't please me because it is slow, along they come and say it does please me, and when a play really does please me because there is dancing and singing in it and it's lively, they come along and say that it doesn't even begin to please me, that it is trash and that it revolted me. In plain words, according to them, plays which please me do not please me because they really please me very much indeed.

To tell the truth I love a play in which no one stands about idle. I love to see when one throws himself downstairs, when one gets angry and smashes dishes, when there is plenty of noise as at a fair, when one tears at his collar and beats his breast, when one turns up the whites of his eyes and becomes green as grass. I hate to see an actor go about idle or sit on one spot, just so, without snow or hail, without thunder and lightning. I want to see men dressed in armor or in the costumes of wealthy shepherds, who wear little silken chemises and crooked staffs and a silvered hoop on the forehead. On the women I love to see as much exposed as possible because you see I have already been married many years to my own wife and I cannot become unfaithful to her because my earnings are very small.

I am the average theater goer. I do not go to the theater to criticize. I just go to rest my feet a little. The play itself is not important. What is important is that I, who own nothing that is my own, have here a seat which is reserved especially for me and upon which no one else dare sit except I alone. I may stand upon it with both my feet, or sit, or leave it vacant altogether, or attach underneath it my derby. No one dare say anything to me. It is mine. Just let any one else try and sit down upon it. Should I enter and find some one occupying it, I would not take another seat were the whole theater empty, oh no. I would just say to him, "Hey, you there, just you get up please. I sit here."

I am the average theater goer and I go to the theater myself to play. I go there to meet my countrymen and between us we play our own comedy. They ask me sweetly, "Why don't you come and see us sometimes?" while I hate them as one hates pig. I go to the play because my neighbor goes and my neighbor goes because I go. We both go there because there is no tailors' club or a homely bathouse where one may go for a bit of chat with some acquaintance, where one may slap a fellow on the back and say a homely word, crack a homely joke. I go to the heart-rending drama because my boss has deducted a cent-and-a-half a dozen sleeves and my heart is very heavy and—and I am ashamed to cry. Therefore, when I see Othello, the Moor, choke his beloved Desdemona, or how Hamlet holds in his hands the skull of his friend Yorick and speaks of life and death, I suddenly recall that they have deducted a cent-and-a-half a dozen sleeves and I cry real tears.

I am the average theater goer and when I am in Thomashefsky's theater and I see on the stage a beautiful room with expensive furniture and chandeliers I feel flattered. I pretend that the well-to-do Thomashefsky has invited me to his house and is showing off his wealth to me, his treasures, and when I recall that I am just a poor fellow, I get so warm around my heart. Here is he, the rich Thomashefsky, who is worth at least a million rendlach. Here is his old mother.
Here is his daughter. Here they're drinking tea; now they speak of a broken fiddle; he weeps; he sings; now he goes to take a bath. And all of this costs me but half a dollar. Isn't it worth it? If another millionaire, Jacob Schiff, for instance, would want a half dollar to show me his house wouldn't I go? And should they show upon the stage a poor house, in which the folks go about covered in rags and tags, I have pleasure also for then I am reminded that after all there are poorer than I and I thank God for that.

I am the average theater goer and the play with all its nonsense bores me mighty little. As soon as the lights are lowered and there is no other place to look, I look at the stage. The music plays so I listen. They dance, so I think to myself they have healthy feet, not tortured with work like mine. They talk of a nightingale, I fall asleep. It thunders, I wake up. And after it is all over I go home and plan again about opening a pants factory.

I am the average theater goer and I love to see beards, those that can readily be detected as pasted on. I love to see how they drink champagne on the stage and to speculate whether it is real champagne. When I watch them eat real noodles and one rides in on a real horse, it is worth more to me than the whole drama. It seems to me there is no greater art in the whole world and that this is a picture of real life.

I am the average theater goer and when I see how the villain is finally punished in the fourth act and the hero is rewarded I am touched to the heart because you see I am a very honest man, but my neighbor there is a common fellow, a scamp, an outcast, a good-for-nothing.

I am the average theater goer over whom the critics make such a fuss, before whom all bow with such respect. Each one of them has a decided opinion with regard to my opinion, but I have no opinions with regard to myself not even with regard to their opinions about me. I go to the theater because I am lonely, down-hearted or light-hearted, or because they are playing something from Sholom Asch or Za Zalatarafski, because maybe I earn a lot of money and have no other place to spend it, or because I am going about idle and have no place to go. I like comedies, farces, burlesques, tragedies, Barnum & Bailey's, Luna Park, pointed shoes, seal rings, plump girls, hamburger steak, King Lear, cemetery, tango, Haman baths, Galli Curci, paprika, etc., etc.

I am the average theater goer and I believe with the poet Walt Whitman in the "divine average," that it rules the world, the seven arts, the skies, love, religion. Do not all the old bachelors, who write criticisms for the papers, believe likewise?

**FORGOTTEN YIDDISH LABOR HUMORIST**

**SAM LIPTZIN**

by **PAUL BUHLE**

In the 1920s-40s, the Jewish unions and the Yiddish-language Left had a high proportion of *folksmensch* humorists, activists who could toss off a clever phrase, draw a crude cartoon that went to the point, add spice to writing for the *Morgen Freiheit*, a communist publication which has become, since the 'sixties, Euro-Communist or independent socialist. There, in the decaying remnants of the once-proud co-ops on Allerton Avenue, I asked Sam what it had meant to be a radical humorist. He chuckled, "A radical humorist has more tragedy than humor." He had a hard life, brutally beaten by thugs for his activism in the tailors' union, never able to earn a living with his writing, unknown outside the Left corner of the Yiddish world. But, he brushed off the bad memories.

As an active socialist in the days before the Russian Revolution, he had the job of taking the stepladder to New York street meetings and preparing the crowd for the main speaker. "By nature" he had a joke or two, and once somebody in the crowd called out the question of how the Revolution would be made. He answered that he had just been in a bakery on Ludlow Street, where people would come in and taste the cake and ask the clerk how it was made. "I'll tell you the same thing the clerk told me: I'm only here to sell, if you want to know how to make it, ask the baker," i.e., the official speakers to follow. The *Forward* picked up the joke, reprinted it as the bright saying of a *grine yingel* (fresh immigrant boy), and soon he was sending jokes off to the *Groys-

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**RED PEPPERS**

Workers who want to work long hours, shorten their hours of life.

Reaction is like autumn. It kills everything in bloom.

Even on the pavement, one can crawl into the mire.

If a man had to bear a child, he would kill ten people before he would give birth to one.

Time is money, hence the bosses hand us hours instead of wages.

A good voice will not be lost even in the last row, but that does not mean bad voices should be pushed forward to the front row.

To utter wise thoughts, one need not have a big mouth.

*from In Spite of Tears* (1946)

by Sam Liptzin
REVIEW

GOOD AS GOLDFADEN

by J. HOBERMAN

Ben Bonus’ production of Abraham Goldfaden’s operetta, Shulamith, is touching in ways that have nothing to do with passing of Yiddish theater. Perhaps deliberately, perhaps pragmatically, Bonus has staged this antique as a blatantly tacky pageant — more Orchard Street than Broadway—which is exactly what it was when Goldfaden, the itinerant father of Yiddish theater, opened it 100 years ago in darkest Russia, where it was so popular that it shattered tribal taboos against Shabbos night theater. (Shortly afterwards, albeit for different reasons, the czar banned the obstreperous Yiddish theater altogether.)

The principals wear gaudy burnooses, leopard-skin togas, glitter-encrusted helmets, and sandals that lace to their knees. (“Why does he have t’fillin on his legs?” my companion wanted to know.) The set resembles a minor cubist landscape dotted with cacti from a Road Runner cartoon. The plot tempers Old Testament retribution with romantic love. Although set in biblical times, it’s based on a far later folk legend. Shulamith, daughter of Israel, gets farblondget in the desert and hurls herself into a miraculous well. She is rescued by the warrior Avisholem and the two plight their troth. Avisholem heads on to Jerusalem where he is captivated by another Jewish maiden whom he subsequently marries. In the divine scheme of things, however, his desert vows take precedence and the two children he fathers meet awful deaths. Remembering Shulamith (who has since gone mad) he hastens to Bethlehem and the pair live happily ever after.

Gilbert and Sullivan it’s not, but despite the savage load of guilt here, the play is basically light-hearted. Indeed, the second act — where Avisholem goes searching for Shulamith as she confounds the doddering general, merchant, and rabbi who are vying for her hand — is a Mel Brooks-like exercise in vaudeville delirium complete with exotic dancing girls, anticlerical satire, and a nudnik shepherd who seems to have wandered in from Lodz. I haven’t seen a comparable mixture of low comedy, art brut staging, and overal ethnic mishigas on a New York stage since the Theater of Gibberish perpetrated Hot Chachkas in Richard Foreman’s life.

The production’s only serious flaw is its fatuous patronizing English narration. For, unlike much of what passes for Yiddish theater, there is nothing nostalgic about Shulamith. It’s a rude, expressive, hallucinated, energetic, and nutty as it was a hundred years ago. A shaynem dank to Bonus and company for bringing Goldfaden back.

Begin To Be Cloned

Jerusalem . . . Describing it as his “last act of statesmanship” before retirement, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin today announced his intention to be cloned.

Over 1,000 living cells will be removed from Mr. Begin’s inner cheek lining, according to a spokesman for Technion Institute. They will be cultured in petrie dishes in a location not publicly divulged.

“We hope that Mr. Begin’s courageous act will inspire Jews in Eretz Israel and beyond to be cloned,” said Shimon Gluck, an Israeli Cabinet spokesman. “It is the only way for us to counteract the booming Arab birthrate and assure the Jewish character of the State of Israel.”

Mr. Gluck refused to comment on speculation that cloning may become a military requirement for Israelis serving in the Israel Defense Force.

A VISIT FROM THE FOLKS

by Sharon Rudahl
— Hinde, I am telling you, we should pawn the caftan in order to become wealthy!
— Why do you bring this up!
— I visited the rich man’s house, where they served an omelette. What can I say—Gold!
— Nonsense! What could they put into it, confetti?
— What can I say? All the tastes of paradise!
— You ate?
— Crazy! Who am I, a relative?
— So how do you know?
— Doesn’t one see? A pleasure to look from the distance!
Melts on the tongue like butter!
— Wealthy people! They don’t miss a thing.
— They miss headaches! I’d like to see, Hinda . . . mm . . . mm . . . make me an omelette . . .

“Hinde, I am telling you, we should pawn the caftan in order to become wealthy!” Any Sholem Aleichem humor-story will do. This one is a favorite of Yiddish poet Martin Birnbaum, translated by him for lectures in English. The beginning tells us of the absurdity of the situation: circulation of goods by the poor cannot do anything but circulate the goods. And that’s what happens at the most basic level, the family, between the wife’s meager store and the husband’s elevated appetite.

“I visited the rich man’s house, where they served an omelette.” Did they give him any, his wife asks. “What am I, a relative?” Not even a real taste but a phantom pleasure, beyond realistic expectations.

Hinde has no butter, no milk, only half an egg, no flour but buckwheat, no onion, only garlic. “As long as it’s an omelette!” the watering mouth cries.

At a critical moment, the wife takes the reader aside to tell the truth, “The evil spirit has gotten into him. Just because he saw the rich man eat . . . and if the man would cut off his nose, would this one cut off his nose, too?” Then with resignation to her husband, “Go wash your hands, the omelette is ready.”

Disappointment looms inevitable. First love and pride.
“That is why I love you! The rich think only they have omelettes . . . I’d like to eat omelettes every day. Hinde, you hear what I’m telling you?” Then surprise, “somehow, it’s sour, unsalted, sticky . . . God should not punish me for my words . . . Awful! Disgusting!” And then finally resentment and sour grapes. “The devil knows them, the rich! Why do they like omelettes so much?”

It can only be added that Sholem Aleichem transmitted rather than creating in a fanciful sense. He added the ironic twist, but these were scenes from life, a bitter life of the doubly- and triply-oppressed. In his genius, he saw to the root of their sorrow and explained it all as simply as a modern folk-tale.
THAT'S JEWISH, YOU DON'T LOOK FUNNY
A HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE SHORT HISTORY OF YIDDISH HUMOR AND MUSIC IN AMERICA
by HENRY SAPOZNIK

If you’re expecting this article to be able to tell you the first Jewish joke told in America, forget about it. And while you’re forgetting about that, forget about the first Jewish joke being told by a Jew to a Jew. I’ll tell you something: I don’t think the first Jewish joke was told by Jews, but about them. And I’ll tell you something else that’s not funny, there’s a lot of people around today who still think those jokes are funny . . . and true.

I’m not going to go into a whole meglia here about the history of the developments of the “Jewish type” character in European literature and folk tales. I’m certainly not going to dwell on the excessive influence that Shakespeare’s “Shylock” had on successive generations of non-Jews and Jews (nor will I mention the 1903 portrayal of Jewish tragedian Jacob P. Adler as a Yiddish speaking Shylock in an English language Merchant.) I should mention that? No. Facts have never been needed to have a negative image of the Jew. Whether it was the Moneylender, Internationalist, “Christ Killer,” or any variant, facts never ameliorated the problem. You don’t need Jews to have anti-Semitism. But it can’t hurt (only the Jews).

For our purposes, the beginning of a modern concept of the American Jew was perfected in the pages of the popular press of the late nineteenth century. Magazines like Puck, Life, and Judge portrayed Jews and other immigrant flotsam in the most one-dimensional, crude ways. Though unabashedly vicious in the standard portrayals of ethnic “types,” magazines such as Life (then, not now) were even more chutzpadik in their own defense: “Life has always admitted the existence of the ‘intelligent, intellectual and refined’ Jews of whom our correspondent speaks. It sympathizes with them in their suffering from the acts of the great majority of their race. Life has never criticized the Jews for their religion, but for their racial characteristics.” (1901).
Oh, is that all?

When I started writing this piece a fragment of a song came back to me from my brief stint in the junior American para-military, the Boy Scouts. Sung to the tune of “Hatikva” and in a very heavy “yid” accent the song began:

“Vunce I had a kendy store, the biznis vas so bad . . .”

and ends with:

“Take a ken of gasoline and pour it on di floor.
Take a metsh, give a skretsh. Poof! No kendy

At the time I didn’t quite understand the association; it was only later that I learned of the myths surrounding the image of the Jew as an “arson-for-profit” ear:

“There was a fire recently in the building that Cohen occupies and he hit the insurance company pretty hard on his losses by it. Of course, the insurance companies had the Fire Marshall investigate the matter pretty thoroughly to discover if possible the origin of the fire. After going over the matter exhaustively, the marshall had to acknowledge that he could find nothing about the origin of the fire, and he started in to quiz Cohen as follows:

FIRE MARSHALL: Mr. Cohen, where do you suppose the fire started?

COHEN: Vy id mighd haf orichinated on ter tob floor mid dose arc lights, or id mighd haf orichinated on der second floor mit dose ingandescent lights, or id mighd haf orichinated in der cellar mit dose gar lights. I don’t know vich of dem mighd haf orichinated it.

FIRE MARSHALL: Well, Mr. Cohen, don’t you think it might have originated on the office floor with an Israelite?”

The immediate source for this type of classic ethnic stereotyping was from a series of records appearing under the character name of “Cohen.” There was “Cohen on the Telephone,” “Cohen at the Wedding,” “Cohen Visits Tutankhamun’s Tomb,” “Cohen . . .,” oh, you get the idea. These records were recorded by a healthy number of ethnic impersonators including Monroe Silver (“King” Cohen — the best known), Joe Hayman, Julius Tannen and more. It’s plain that few if any of these men came from the culture they were impersonating.¹ They were the recording equivalent of the white black-face minstrels presenting exotic “foreign” culture to a white audience, making it grotesque, easily recognizable, and entertaining. (This is analogous to the fact that comedian Bert Williams, the first black star on Broadway in the Ziegfield Follies, was required to black up — “Uncle Tom” style — before being allowed on stage. Reality had to fit the stereotype. Even if it turns out that a few of the many “Cohen” impersonators came from a Jewish lineage, that doesn’t make their “Uncle Tomashefsky” characterizations representative of true Jewish humor or values any more than do the later “Amos ‘n’ Andy” television routines concerning black life.)

While the “Cohen” and its breed of “Hebrew” discs were being offered for sale to white people on the record companies’ popular labels, the “other side of the Cohen” (as it were) was offered simultaneously to the Jewish community. Columbia, Victor, Emerson, Edison, Pathe, and a host of other labels were quick on the bandwagon to record (and sell) the ethnic humor, music, and dramma of the immigrants back to them. Instead of the battery of “Levinskys” rattling on in stage. Yidoid, Jews heard Gus Goldstein and Clara Gold bring to life B. Kovner’s character Yenta Telebende, the cynical, acerbic wife whose name has come to mean a “chatterbox.” These records were joined by others by Molly Picon, Anna Hoffman, Jacob Jacobs and, of course, Aaron Lebedeff. The major difference can be found in the language. Names like Ikey, Jakey, Izzy, Bennie, et. al., which abound in the “Cohens” are just not there in the

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Yiddish records. Moishe, Chaim, Mendel, and other more Old World names are present. The opening to the 1922 Yiddish disk “Meshiakh Kimt” (The Messiah Is Coming) by Anna Hoffman and Jacob Jacobs is interesting:

“Gevalt, Gevalt! I'll tell you why I'm screaming! Our Rabbi has told us that the Messiah has arrived! The Rabbi has seen him with his own eyes at the Castle Garden. But he's afraid that they won't let him in because they're sure that he's a Bolshevik.”

In fact, the only difference between “Cohen at the Opera” (1927) and “Yenta Telebende Geyt Kayn Opera” (1923) is everything. While “Cohen” is constantly worried about getting a cheaper ticket (and falling into an argument with an “Italian” character), Yenta is ruminating on the preposterous affectations of Grand Opera:

MENDEL: “How can he sing so loud with a sword in him?”

YENTA: “If you had something like that stuck in you, you'd scream too!”

The original Yiddish comic dispenser was the badkhn. A combination poet, rabbinic scholar, social critic, and social director, whose improvised rhyming couplets were indispensable at weddings. Because of his expected great learning and the relative security of the cloak of satire, the badkhn could say things in jest that were unthinkable in other situations. Add to this that his poems were delivered utilizing some of the same melodic structures used for the reading of the Torah and cantorial singing. By the time the recording industry got going the badkhn had lost favor in America, the last great one being Eliukhm Zunser. But, quite a few parodies of the two edged advice offered by the badkhn were recorded throughout the 'teens and 'twenties. (For a good example of badkhn parodies see my Klezmer Music 1910-1942 Folkways FSS 34021.)

The tradition of the Klezmer in Eastern Europe to accompany the badkhn is well known. The sad, insightful or biting words sung by the badkhn were followed by the fiddler or clarinetist anxious to mold a connection between the singing of the voice and the singing of his instrument. The fact that the klezmer didn’t have an easy time of it is also well known (though the extreme of putting the image of the klezmer solely in the domain of “cutthroats and pimps” is as simple-minded as extolling the virtues of klezmer as a “Jewish Soul Musician” (“James Brown as Falasha”).

The recording of klezmer music began in the early years of the twentieth century. Though it never rivaled cantorial disks or pop songs from Yiddish theater, the major labels did wax a pretty good amount of fine old-time dance music. Bands like Abe Schwartz’s orchestra, Harry Kandel’s Orchestra, I.J. Hochman’s Orchestra, and others utilized some of the finest blowers that lived in the New World. By the time the recording of this music began, the 19th century style of klezmer music (fiddles, tsmibl [hammered dulcimer], flute, etc.) had given way to a more military style using brass and clarinet lead. The music reached its recording peak before the advent of electrical recording (1925) and was only kept going after the 1930’s by a few practitioners such as Dave Tarras.

Klezmer music is not Jewish Jazz! Feh! Henry Ford in his vitriolic racist Dearborn Independent newspaper used to refer to it as such, so take it from there. Klezmer developed hundreds of years before jazz. (So does that mean we would refer to jazz as “Goyisher klezmer music”? Again feh!) Klezmer music arrived in America just at the point that American popular musical forms were in gestation. Marches leading to Ragtime leading to “Jass” into jazz. The Jewish musician was trying to make sense out of this as much as any other immigrant musician. But those elements that seemingly link klezmer and jazz together were in place long before the two met. Collective improvisation, syncopation, glissando and scooping middle voice lines all are part of both music forms. This just meant that the Jewish musician had more to work with in making the new musical world familiar. The fact that the casual listener hears similarities between the forms reveals more about the nature of the physical characteristics of instruments, independent development, and a good amount of diverse influences.

“Klezmer music was the music that reminded people where they came from. It was used endlessly in the Yiddish theater as a device for presentation of the obligatory wedding scenes, or for utilizing familiar tunes attached to catchy

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new words. Some Yiddish music players like the venerable clarinetist Dave Tarras, found work in the theater. Many did the Catskill circuit like the legendary Naftule Brandwine, Tarras' predecessor. Some also found work in society bands while others tried their hand at vaudeville. In 1922, violist Joseph Cherniavsky organized the first Yiddish-American Jazz Band whose aim it was to play the prestigious Keith-Orpheum circuit. Dressed in either Hasidic caftans or Cos-sack blouses, their arrangements of Yiddish melodies in featherweight "jazz"esque settings were anything but jazz. In fact, it's quite possible that the people playing the music had heard as little real jazz as the people they were playing for. But that didn't matter. It was good enough theater to last a few more years of touring. What's more important than their inability to play jazz is their tremendous awareness of the power of the word "jazz" in their ability to make a statement about their arrival in America. That statement clearly says: "We have one foot securely in both worlds." (This kind of artificial mixing demands the establishment of a musical mesh-giakh to assure proper "Kulture kashruth." A few years ago the Jewish listening public was offered an album entitled "HasiDisco," but that's the making of another article . . . )

With the decline of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe (American political xenophobia) and the rapid assimilation rate of young Jews born here, the Yiddish popular taste for theater and music began more and more to reflect the surrounding dominant world. The rich tradition of the "kunst" (art) theater slid beneath the surface of acceptance in the face of more "shund" (trash) popular offerings. Yiddish actors such as Muni Weisenfreund (Paul Muni) found, as did his counterpart American-Jewish landsleit, that the lure of the "real world" was greater than that of the Yiddish one. The need to assimilate, to be another Andy Hardy, was important to those Jewish youth who had to suffer the humiliation of having parents who spoke with an accent and didn't relate to them as did Andy's screen father, the unaccented Lewis Stone.

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But the two worlds continued to collide. In 1939 American-born clarinetist-bandleader Benny Goodman incorporated an old Yiddish dance melody, Der Shitler Bul-gar (The Quiet Bulgar) and turned it into a popular hit, And The Angels Sing, replete with a fabulous klezmer-style trumpet solo by Ziggy Elman. (Elman recorded the tune a year earlier as "Freilach in Swing," but it went nowhere.) The Goodman Orchestra's predilection for using a few Yiddish tunes as flavor didn't stop here. They also recorded Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn, Sholom Secunda's big hit, (thought by some Mid-Western listeners to be My Dear Mister Shayne and My Little Cousin (A Disney-izing of the earlier biting political song Di Grine Kuzine (My Greenhorn Cousin). Goodman's breaks are straight swing whereas Elman's, even with his knowledge of only two Klezmer ornaments, is closer to home in both genres.

The Yiddish scene in America during the war years produced singing sensations like Seymour Rechzeit whose crooning radio voice, a veritable vocal pomade, drifted out over radio station WEVD ("The Station That Speaks Your Language," named in honor of Socialist Eugene Victor Debs), while relatives and friends tried to understand what was going on back home.

With the destruction of the world that nurtured the development of the Yiddh, much more attention was given to the development of Israel as the new home for the Jews. In its attempt to create a "New Jew" Zionism continued to contribute to the staggering losses sustained by the Jews of the Yiddish world. Add to this the 1952 Stalinist purges of noted Yiddish actors, writers, and intellectuals and the dissolution of the famed Moscow Yiddish Art Theater. It was in this period that a new American Yiddish fusion came about.

Mickey Katz had been a member of the Spike Jones orchestra as a "dialectician" with the distinction of having made the "glug" sound on "Cocktails for Two". Soon after that Katz, who was born and grew up in the musical community of Cleveland, recorded a Yiddish-English (Allright: Yinglish), "Yiddish Square Dance" and "Haym Afn Range" using some of the finest L.A. jazz session men including Mannie Klein, (later Ziggy Elman), Nat Farber, and Benny Gill, among others. The record was a big success. He quickly turned out more of his clever pop parodies. (Here too, I'd like to meet the shmo who bubbled Mickey Katz "The Jewish Alan Sherman").

One of my earliest record memories is of Mickey Katz's "Mish Mash" album on Capitol. His 16 Tons has stayed with me.

"I was born one morning and I gave a geshray. My mishpokha was happy it was a holiday. I wanted my bottle I felt real chipper, I didn't get nothing 'cause it was Yom Kippur."

There are a lot of people who literally cringe when his records are played. They're worried about this excessive "yid" image that is being perpetuated. Katz is considered the shundiest of the shund. Well, that's too bad. His mixing of Yiddish melodic themes with exceptional musical flexibility and his very clever juxtaposition of Yiddish and English create a seamless flow. Though he was never a part of the New York Jewish musical scene (or any scene in New York), his understanding of both popular and Jewish tastes make his records eminently listenable for us today.

I recall very clearly growing up on the hotel circuit in the Catskills, accompanying my father in numerous choirs during Passover. In the early sixties the hotels were still full of Yiddish speaking Jews who played pinocle and canasta (both words I thought, for years after, were Yiddish). By day they responded lustily to announcements such as: "Dinner will be served at approximately 6:30 sharp." At night, they danced to the music of the same men who had been, 20 years before, playing freylekh and shters, and were now warbling "Red Nails In the Sunset" and "The Alley Cat" between occasional Yiddish Theater medleys. As my father was cantor, I was obliged to get up and sing some song. Terrified, I once piped out "Sheyn Vi Di Labune" to the enthusiastic response of people who had forgotten that it was possible for someone to speak Yiddish even if they
FUNNY: continued

hadn't been through the Holocaust. This was where I first experienced the real depth of Yiddish understanding: The unguarded moment that the Jews gave themselves up to while listening to a nostalgic Yiddish song. The experience in shul is more guarded especially by those people who have an image to maintain. But it was there, and also to another degree in the Lubavitch yeshiva of my youth, that this depth came to the surface.


Why, I should know? It could be the dissatisfaction of American Jews who previously swore allegiance to Israeli pop culture (Jerusalem meets Las Vegas), or to the destruction of the Fiddler On the Roof myth that had Teyve living just down the block from Ward and June Cleaver. Or maybe it's just the same mishegas that helped produce the Cohen records of 50 years ago. The Jews have been trying to be real "yenkis" for so long that we need to revel in our own distinct folks kultur.

This could, of course, also be a blossoming fad which could rival disco — or it could be co-opted by Lawrence Welk and turned into something easy on the ears called "Jewzak." Believe me folks, I don't know. I just play the stuff and try to keep on good terms with one of the most important Jews in my life, my landlord.

1. In addition to the "Cohen" character there was also the "Levinsky," "Levi," and "Einstein" (among others): "Mr. Einstein, a mythical Hebrew friend of mine who plays the leading part in an original series which I'm introducing... organizes a Hebrew regiment which disbands upon the appearance of three drunken Irishmen...." (Excerpt from the Nov. 1900 Edison house journal, the Phonogram, about humorist Will N. Steale's new series).

2. The continued confusion of the uses of klezmer music in America has also helped create the myth that it was used in the soundtracks of Betty Boop cartoons and other features produced by the Fleischer brothers. Granted Max and Dave Fleischer were Jews, the assertion that Yiddish music was a part of their wonderful music soundtracks is, unfortunately, untrue.

3. Entirely too much emphasis is placed on Goodman's Jewish heritage in making a connection between Jews and Jazz. Goodman's clarinet style is as far from the vocabulary of klezmer as Dave Tarras' from cutting edge jazz. On top of this, I would be interested in one day finding the wise guy who dubbed Tarras "The Jewish Benny Goodman."

My thanks to Michael Corenthal for materials related to the "Cohen" recordings, taken from his book on the same subject.

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**Israeli Rabbis Sanction Cloning**

Jerusalem... Israel's Chief Rabbis today gave religious sanction to Prime Minister Menachem Begin's plan to be cloned, but warned that future cloning procedures should be under the strict supervision of the Orthodox rabbinate, the only branch of the Jewish clergy recognized in the Jewish state.

"Jewish genealogy derives from the mother," said Chief Sephardic Rabbi Efraim Asour. "A clone, however, is a replica of only a single parent. But since no new genetic material is introduced in the cloning process, we can consider these baby clones to have the same mother as Menachem Begin," he explained. "The clones are Jewish."

In a separate statement, Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi Sholom Schneir deferred more subtle points about the clones' status to "future deliberations, study and rulings," but urged that the petrie dishes in which Mr. Begin's clones will be cultivated be kept very kosher.
EARLY JEWISH FILM STEREOTYPES

by ERIC BREITBART

The late 19th century vaudeville stage was a human rights commission nightmare. Prancing minstrels and “coon shouters” vied for space with baggy-trousered “Dutch” comics, “merry wops”, dumb Swedes and, yes, bulbous-beaked Jews. In her classic study of American humor, Constance Rourke discusses these ethnic caricatures as a first step in integrating foreign elements into the popular consciousness. Over time, the glaring stereotypes assume more subtle, and human shadings.

For Jews, the cloak of humor was a comfortable, and familiar disguise, but it was not necessarily one they themselves adopted. Unlike stage and Borscht Belt humor of the 20’s and 30’s, “funny Jews” of the turn of the century were directed at a non-Jewish audience, and were often played by actors who were not Jewish themselves. A few tufts of hair on a bald head, a battered frock coat, a false nose: voila! a Jew! Frank Bush, a popular comic of the early 1900’s supposedly developed his Jewish persona by close observation of a Grand Street pawnbroker.

Images of these Jewish comic stereotypes are rare, but a few short film fragments, preserved in the Library of Congress, offer a tantalizing glimpse into the dim recesses of the American popular imagination: COHEN’S FIRE SALE (1903) and COHEN’S ADVERTISING SCHEME (1904). Both rely on flat stage sets for the dominant action — a millinery shop in the first, a coat store in the second — and were probably filmed versions of vaudeville set-pieces.

COHEN’S FIRE SALE, about eight minutes long, is half stage comedy, half documentary on early 20th century garbage collection. Cohen’s shipment of Paris hats is accidently picked up by the local sanitation truck. The wind blows them off, and poor Cohen runs through the streets trying to recuperate his merchandise from the various housewives and street urchins who gathered it up. He catches up with the truck as it dumps the remaining hats into the river barge. Undaunted, he returns to his store and sets a fire which will give him a chance to sell his smoke-damaged merchandise — possibly a visual derivative of the slang term for arson — “Jewish lightning”. The fire gets out of control, giving the producers of the film, the Edison/Porter studio, a chance to delve into their fire-fighting stock shot library (Porter produced THE LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN as well as other fire shorts) for scenes of horse-drawn trucks racing through the streets. The fire is put out, the crowds return to the store, and the film ends with Cohen and his wife gloating over their profits.

The last shot produces a disturbing and revealing note. It is a medium close-up, in a film composed entirely of long shots showing the full figure, and permits us to see the make-up of a clown-caricature of the Jew, a money-grubbing relative of Fagin and Shylock.

COHEN’S ADVERTISING SCHEME (1904) a minute and a half fragment, continues the same theme. An unsuspecting customer is persuaded by Cohen, our Baxter Street merchant, to purchase a coat which has an advertising sign on the back. Exit. Laughter.

Comic figures often play a magical role in societies, embodying the taboos and contradictions of the culture. The Jewish shopkeeper was a convenient peg upon which to hang the cloak of anxieties in an urbanizing, industrializing America. With the waves of immigration, the Jewish merchant joined the American comic triumverate of the Negro minstrel, the Yankee, and the backwoodsman, an urban luftmensch accompanying his rural predecessors. It was, no doubt, easier to go about one’s business after having laughed at the hook-nosed funnyman, rubbing his hands with glee.

In his study of humor, Freud remarked that there has probably never been a people who has made such unreserved fun of their own shortcomings as the Jews. Still, in looking at these early 20th century stereotypes, one is reminded of the need to distinguish humor from Jews as the object of humor, embodying dark and disturbing fantasies. The seventy-year journey from the hand-wringing glee in COHEN’S FIRE SALE to Jack Lemmon’s goyishe kreichst in SAVE THE TIGER reflects many of the changes in American society and popular culture. Jews don’t always have to be played for laughs any more. They don’t even have to be played by Jews; but then again, they never did.

Arabs Protest Begin Cloning
New York (United Nations) … Representatives from six Arab states and the Palestine Liberation Organization today issued a joint statement to the U.N. General Assembly denouncing the Israeli plan to extensively clone Menachem Begin.

The statement, signed by the heads of state of Syria, Iraq, South Yemen, Algeria, Libya and Kuwait, and by Yassir Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, threatened an “international boycott of diapers, bottles, safety pins and infant feeding formula to the Zionist entity” if the cloning plan is implemented.

“It is time for the world to stop pampering the Zionist aggressor,” the Arab leaders noted.

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Mordechai Allon scored the statements as “an attack on the Jewish people of today and of the future.” The Begin cloning plan, he insisted, is strictly an internal Israeli affair.

17
THE BUNCH LIKED TO GO TO SATURDAY ROLLER SKATING. SHE LIKED THE HOLLER!

STUDE SPITZER
THE LITTLE KING

THE BUNCH MET STUDE THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL. THE 1962 JUNIOR HIGH PEASE.

SHE NEVER NEEDED A SCREW AGAIN!

She's never needed a screw again!

Girls, LAVATORY

IT WAS A BIG DAY FOR HIM.

SHE COULD GET STUDE IN TAIL!

DON'T CROSS THE WIRE StuDE. YER IN TAIL!!

STUDE WENT TO HIS PARENT'S SWETER BUSINESS.

SOMEONE ELSE WERE IMPRESSED.

THE BUNCH NOTICED SOMETHING STRANGE.

STUDE WENT TO HIS PARENT'S SWETER BUSINESS.

YOUR SWEATER 28 CENTS.
JEW/OF ALL COUNTRIES
UNITE! YOU HAVE
NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR
CHAIN STORES!

HE'S RIGHT
YEAH-EXTREME
RIGHT
COME TO PALESTINE
LAND OF HOPE &
GLORY!

I READ THE
NEWS TODAY O BOY!

THE JEWISH ARMY
HAD JUST WON THE WAR

AND THE NEWS
WAS RATHER SAD

WEE! VEE!

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AL SCHACHT

THE CLOWN PRINCE OF BASEBALL

by ERIC BREITBART

Put the words “Jew” and “sports” together and you’re bound to get a laugh. A chosen people, everywhere but on the playing field. Almost everyone I’ve ever mentioned it to thinks Harold Ribolow’s The Jew in American Sports (Bloch, 1959) is a joke book. There is, in fact, a grain of truth in this misconception. Sandwiched between Al Rosen and Moe Berg is Al Schacht — the Clown Prince of Baseball.

Before Billy Ball, ballyhoo, and the San Diego Chicken, there was Al Schacht. Though best known for his pantomime comedy routines, Schacht was a legitimate player. Born in the Bronx in 1894, he played in sandlot and semi-pro games as a teenager, then signed with Cleveland of the Federal League in 1912. After W.W.I, during which time he served in the U.S. Army, he played for the Washington Senators and played for two seasons until his arm gave out. The high point of his career came in 1920 when, as a 26 year old rookie (the Washington papers called him “Rip Van Winkle” Schacht because he’d been playing pro ball for so long), he beat the fearsome New York Yankees 4-1 in a crucial game, substituting for an ailing Walter “Big Train” Johnson.

Soon after his early retirement (he made several comebacks), Schacht and another Washington coach, Nick Altrock, convinced Miller Huggins and John McGraw to let them do some clowning before the 1921 World Series. As Schacht describes it:

Altrock and I started with exactly three routines — a burlesque prize fight, a pantomime tight wire walk, and a band concert, in which I directed the 71st Regiment Band . . . Before the game, during the second infield practice, Altrock got on first base and I on third, and we played ground balls and popups like a couple of drunken sailors. Next came our feature stunt, a burlesque of Ruth St. Denis’ “Death Dance” . . . with me taking the part of Ruth St. Denis and Altrock my slave. Instead of a snake though, I had a string of frankfurters, and where Ruth St. Denis used to wind up by sticking the snake in her mouth and dying, I took a bite out of a frankfurter, barked like a dog, and died like a dog.

(Al Schacht, My Own Particular Screwball, Doubleday, 1955, p. 139)

In 1921, vaudeville was still the premier form of American popular entertainment, and the success of Schacht’s act depended on an audience already familiar with the burlesque genre, as well as the specifics of Ruth St. Denis’ dance. By bringing the comedy of the vaudeville stage onto the diamond, he also reminded the spectators that baseball was, after all, a form of popular entertainment, and not a deadly serious business.

Altrock and Schacht were soon signed by B.F. Keith to appear on his vaudeville circuit — well known athletes and personalities were used to bolster the diminishing audiences — but their “professionalized” act fell flat. Schacht was back on the diamond in short order and for the next twenty years he entertained the fans with his mimicry of star players and burlesques of popular culture. A perennial favorite was his takeoff on Valentino in Blood and Sand, using a goat instead of a bull for the matador scene.

During W.W.II, he played the USO tour circuit, dressed in his working costume: baseball pants, tuxedo jacket and top hat. After the war he opened a Broadway restaurant, the walls of which were decorated with photos of Schacht miming the actions of famous players — the Clown Prince mirroring the Kings of the Diamond.

Because his act took place on the ballfield, Schacht is never mentioned in books about comedy — Jewish or otherwise. Still, in his baggy pants and top hat, he was re-enacting an ancient ritual — the role of the Clown Prince who stood just to the side of the King, to remind him of the close relationship of power and foolishness. For the famous athletes of the 20’s and 30’s, Schacht’s presence on the diamond was a silent reminder of their tenuous place in the spotlight.

Comedy may also have been Schacht’s defense against the hostility he faced as a small, skinny Jew in major league baseball. He certainly would have had difficulty putting together a minyan from a team roster. At the beginning of his autobiography, beneath the table of contents, the pain is there:

There is talk that I am Jewish — just because my father was Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I speak Yiddish and once studied to be a rabbi and a cantor. Well, that’s how rumors get started.

The fact is, I am Jewish, plenty Jewish. And I was never allowed to forget it when I was a kid. Nor sometimes later in life. Now I see others getting slapped down because of their religion, and it makes me feel bad; it doesn’t happen to me anymore because now I am considered a “success”.

There always was something blocking my way. It was either because of my religion or because I was sickly as a kid and then ill for years afterwards; even my mother blocked my path for a long time.

In another life, Al Schacht might have been a comedian, had he been less gifted as a pitcher. But there he was, a drop-out from PS 42 and Cantor Cooperstein’s choir, with a chew of tobacco in his mouth, striking out Babe Ruth with the bases loaded . . . And that, friends, is no joke.
I BEG YOU

Let me be drunk, my dear wife.
I am so unhappy when I am sober.
Everything is bad.
Bitter.
Revolutionary.
Slap the children because of unhappiness with myself.
Make fun of you, my golden, beautiful, supreme wife.
Cry, because I want to fly away from this alien place.
From your terrible blintzes.
I want to be drunk, my beloved, unfortunate wife.
Not sober with the water of reality.
Water throws back my true reflection.
My head of wild hair, my expressionless eyes, my long
and delicate hands.
Let me be drunk, and I will be good.
Help you wash the dishes.
Give the children their meals.
Speak with the landlord about the rent.
I ask you: my pigeon.
Let me be drunk!

MOSHE NADIR

Israel Women Doubt Cloning

Tel Aviv ... Israel's plan to clone Prime Minister Begin, its details shrouded in secrecy, has brought together an unlikely coalition of Israeli feminists and Orthodox women in opposition.

Citizens Party MK Shulamit Aloni is leading the feminist protest, aimed at the fact that the Begin program will produce, they say, only males. The Israeli government has so far refused to deny or acknowledge this charge.

The Orthodox wing of the protest movement bases its opposition on "the threat to motherhood, to the family, to Jewish life" that cloning represents, according to a spokeswoman, Prof. Sharon Orfalea of Ben-Gurion University.

So far the women's coalition, though participating together in teach-ins and demonstrations, has been unable to develop a mutually agreed-upon name.
America wrestles with The Three Stooges. The shlock of art or the art of shlock? The names Moe, Larry, and Curly are not uttered with the same hallowed ring from the lips of cineastes that echoes through the halls as Chaplin, Keaton or Stan and Ollie are reverberated. In the Museum of Neurotic Post-Industrial Comedy, the Stooges have been relegated to the sub-basement storage room, somewhere on the pariah side of Abbott and Costello. Their 260 films (almost all of which were 16-18 minute two-reelers for Harry Cohn at Columbia) are still, however, revenue-producing properties for Screen Gems, shown in local TV markets across the non-Communist world. In New York City, for example, a local station offers Stooges films twice a day, Mondays through Fridays. The 5:30 p.m. slot is obviously for kids home from school waiting for dinner. But who, O Demographia goddess, is watching at midnight?

"In 1929, while rehearsing material for our new act, we took some time to relax by playing a few hands of three-handed bridge. During one hand Larry insisted that he had four honor cards. This was impossible as Shemp and I each had one. I became incensed, and in a fit of anger, I stood up, reached over and poked my fingers into Larry's eyes. Curly started to laugh hysterically and fell over backward in his chair, crashing through a French door and cutting his arm. The next morning we opened with this at the Paramount," Moe autobiographizes.

Like millions of Americans, I watched The Three Stooges on television almost every day for about the first dozen years of my life. I hated Moe but grew to understand his necessity. Larry made the sense of space filled. I can see now that his genius lay in being in the right place at the right time. A Philadelphian, he hooked up with the crazy Horwitz brothers from Brooklyn and what would The Two Stooges have been? Shemp (Sam Horwitz) was Moe's older brother and had been his partner in vaudeville. I remember nothing of his work except for his distinctive snore: "... ee bee bee bee bee bee bee bee bee bebee beebee bee.

And then came Curly. Just as Groucho, Chico and Harpo will always be the Marx Brothers, Moe, Larry and Curly are The Three Stooges. Curly was the greatest, a dancing, prancing wisecracking unadulterated id. Born Jerome Horwitz, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, 1907, the fifth and youngest son of Jewish immigrants Sol and Jennie Horwitz, Lithuania, Europe (brother Moe was ten years his senior), Curly was aggressively infantile. He took Moe's relentless and unwarranted punishment as a matter of course, rarely displaying resentment in any act more hostile than his famous snapping bark. Unlike Larry, who impotently grovelled before the tyranny of Moe and the Moe-like world, Curly was terminally endowed with every imaginable sensation. The sight of a pretty shiksa walking down the street could interrupt him from conversation and transport him into rapture. Jumping up and down, screaming "Woo, woo, woo, woo, woo, woo, woo," slapping his own face with both hands, he danced the very rhythms of the body electric. In response to Moe's disciplinary slaps, eye gouges, nose rips and haymakers, Curly evolved a repertoire of imitative gestures which packed no wallop greater than the sting of a satire of physical aggression which Moe could never understand.

As is the case with most American storytelling, The Three Stooges narratives are obsessed with the theme of upward mobility. With a veneer peculiar to American high school dropout children of penniless immigrants who become Hollywood millionaires, they act out the Pygmalion ritual in such films as Hoi Polloi, Wee Wee Monsieur, Cuckoo Cavaliers, Gents Without Cents, Idiots Deluxe and Loco Boy Makes Good. Larry, the eternal nebish, often proves a slob at the table. Yet dressed in an expensive suit, he manages to "pass." It is the gross, dynamic of pleasure and pain as realized by Curly and Moe that grosses out bourgeois society. A gentleman raises his monocle. Some ladies giggle, "It's cute." But Moe, as uptight and power-obsessed as ever, is "embarrassed" by Curly's organic regression and smashes the punchbowl over his head, thus sending the whole party into a riot which culminates in the Stooges' inevitable expulsion from 'society.'

Moe: "We did vaudeville all over the South and Midwest. One time we were hired for a big-time club date on the outskirts of Chicago. We put on rented tuxedos and found ourselves at a posh dinner of the Black and White Society, so named because the men wore starched black dress shirts, white tuxedos and white bow ties. The women wore white dresses with black scarves around their necks. They really looked grotesque. For high society, I never saw so much

continued next page
drinking in my life, or heard so many off-color jokes. The woman who booked us had been concerned whether our slapstick-style routines would be offensive. She followed us around like a mother hen. When Larry started talking to one of the women guests, she whispered in his ear, ‘You performers are not to mingle with the guests.’ Larry turned to go and just then one of the Black and White women vomited all over him. Can you beat that?

The greatest of The Three Stooges films is probably their 1938 masterwork, Violent is the World For Curly. The title is enigmatic, perhaps an attempt at irony, for as usual, Curly harms not a fly. This story begins with the boys as grease monkeys. A fancy car pulls into their station carrying three snobbishly genteel professors, on their way to take up tenure at the local women’s college. The professors want service, but instead get into a fight with the Stooges who proceed to steal their caps, gowns and car and take off for the college to take a stab at the scholarly life. Curly is simply driven mad by the student body. The rest of the film consists of a supercharged Curly driven to new heights of adrenal release by the scores of tight-sweatered coeds. The highlight occurs when the Stooges perform one of their rare musical numbers, “Swingin’ the Alphabet,” with Professor Curly, complete with cap, gown, blackboard and pointer, delivering the lyrical exigesis to a chorus of frolicking freshmen.

Both Moe Howard and Larry Fine led fairly conventional offscreen lives. Moe married Helen Schonberger (a cousin of magician Harry Houdini) in 1925 and remained with her until his death fifty years later, acquiring the of two children, three grandchildren and a house in Hollywood (across the street from Bing Crosby’s). Larry wed hoochie-kooky dancer Mabel Haney in the 1920s and this too lasted until death did them part in 1971. Curly however, like so many exceptional talents, was quite another story. Married four times and the subject of numerous unsuccessful paternity suits, the crewcut, bulldog-faced comic led a short and burdensome existence. Often lonely and distraught, Curly was famous in Tinseltown for his obsession with dogs. He owned as many as 100 at a time. According to Moe, he often bought a new dog in each city as the Stooges made their rounds. The results included: Snow White and the Three Stooges, The Three Stooges Meet Hercules and The Three Stooges in Orbit. The group also did spot work in The 3 Stooges in Texas, Set in the 1920s and 1930s, the film stars the Stooges as a group of young men who become involved in a series of adventures in the Old West. The film is notable for its humorous and slapstick moments. The Stooges perform a variety of stunts and mishaps, including a concert where they are hired to entertain the town. The highlight of the film is the Stooges’ performance at a carnival, where they are hired to entertain the fairgoers. The film is notable for its humorous and slapstick moments. It features the Stooges in a variety of costumes and settings, including a performance at a carnival and a concert. The film is a showcase for the Stooges’ comedic talents, and their antics are sure to bring a smile to the faces of audiences of all ages.
INTERVIEW

HARVEY KURTZMAN

by PAUL BUHLE

Harvey Kurtzman, remembered by tens of thousands as the architect of Mad Magazine's devastating attack upon the commercial culture of the 1950's, is also considered by scholars of graphic arts as one of the great realists in the comic genre. Only twenty-six when he joined EC Comics in 1950, he immediately became famous for his unromantic treatment of war themes. It is safe to say no editor/artist has taken such pains researching comic art or guiding its production down to the last detail. Perhaps this compulsive attention to detail explains the grandeur of the early Mad and the enthusiasm it aroused from such contemporaries as Bob & Ray, and Roger Price. A generation will never forget the way he and artists like Willie Elder took apart Dragnet, the right-wing show of the era, skewered Terry and the Pirates, turned Archie (whose creators aided the Comics Code suppression of smaller comic firms) into a petty crook, and generally played hell with the cultural authorities. The paperbacks The Mad Reader, Mad Strikes Back, and Inside Mad, which come in and out of print even today, offer an example of how to take on the culture from the inside.

PB—What was your family background?

HK—I was raised at 182nd Street and Clinton Avenue in the Bronx. The neighborhood was essentially Siciliano Italian and a mixture of everything else. My mother and stepfather came from Russia. They occasionally spoke Yiddish, but were irreligious. Dad worked at a German trade, brass engraving, part of the printing trades union. Times were tough in the 1930s when I was growing up, but he always worked. We had food on the table.

PB—Were they political?

HK—They were politically left... took the Daily Worker newspaper and belonged to the International Workers Order. We were raised with a radical bent as regards things like race and labor unions. One summer they sent me to Camp Kinderland.

PB—How did you react?

HK—I didn't like Kinderland and I didn't like the Daily Worker. It seemed disagreeable, ideologically and visually. Other daily papers were more fun. And I had a terrible time at Camp Kinderland. I tried not to go, and I didn't make friends. I especially didn't like the Russian magazines and propaganda tracts that were distributed at the camp. I had the feeling they were taking cheap shots at America, and exaggerating about how wonderful life was in the Soviet Union. Without thinking, I reacted to the smell of the magazines from Russia. They smelled bad. There was something wrong with the paper, and the ink. It affected me emotionally, I enjoyed going with my family to places where we could swim and pick berries. But Kinderland seemed so goddamned programmed. There was something grim about the place.

PB—Could this also have been somewhat of a rejection of Jewishness, a special ghetto identity?

HK—Perhaps. Like a lot of people my age, I didn't want to be identified with a minority group. I didn't want to go to shul, not to religious weddings or bar mitzvahs.

PB—But you might have had a touch of Jewish radicalism?

HK—Before the War, when I was a printer's devil and worked in a printshop, I attended a couple of meetings where they were trying to start a union. After the War, when I started to do comic books, I was one of the cartoonists interested in starting a guild of some kind. We didn't succeed. But I was very pro-union at the time.

I remember being emotionally pro-Negro, anti-Southern, although we had no real contact with black people at home. When I was in the Army down south and a large group of redneck soldiers and I were standing at a bus stop, a black officer from a black work battalion — something very unusual back then — came by, and the rednecks turned away instead of saluting. One could always claim ignorance by turning away, unless one was called to attention. So I called the group to attention, forcing them to salute. That was my outstanding blow against racism. It was a radical act at that time. I might have been lynched for it.

PB—Was there a Jewish quality in the humor you started developing?

HK—I don't know. I wanted to draw as long as I can remember. My mother was the driving inspiration — she had me going to the children's school at Pratt Institute. I started cartooning for reproduction in high school where I would do satirical stuff, for instance what happened when our class went on a boat ride. One of my cartoons was reprinted in The New York Times and I got invited into fancy homes — the outside world.

In high school we did these routines in the lunchroom, based upon the movies of the day. We'd act out all the cliches... the Operating Room Routine, with the surgeon operating (on a paper milk container), the nurse wiping the sweat off his head, handing him the instruments (scalpel, forceps, screwdriver). Or First World War routines: the air battle with the German ace going down gracefully in a flaming fokker (hard cheese). And all over New York there were Jewish guys in separate high schools doing the same routines. Sid Caesar eventually did all the routines we anticipated. And it was no coincidence. We were feeding off the same material,
KURTZMAN: continued
reacting to Hollywood the same way, coming to the same conclusion.

PB — And during your high school years, you began working at a studio, for Louie Furstadt, who drew a strip for the Daily Worker?

HK — That’s right. Louie worked us as hard as any capitalist boss, but he was really nice to us.

PB — After you did some postwar humor strips, “Hey Look!”, you started as an editor at EC working on serious material, historical material.

HK — I had never been interested in history as it was taught at school. But working with history professionally was something else. I’ve always liked to think of myself as a teller of truth . . . truth as I see it. I would seek out historical truth for comic stories by studying the various versions of a historical event. If you read enough versions of a single act, you can come up with the truest one by cross-reference.

PB — You wrote realistic war stories for EC then. Didn’t they show a pretty radical attitude in regard to war generally?

HK — I was interested in the reality of war as opposed to the fantasy. The real war is a terrible thing. The fantasy war where they blow the bugles and have a lot of fun killing the bad guys—that’s mostly lies.

PB — Many of your war stories concerned the Korean War . . .

HK — The Second World War was a real idealistic war. The Korean War—I didn’t understand very clearly what it was all about. A recent critic, John Benson, was angry at me for not being out-and-out anti-war. But I wasn’t voicing opinions, I was telling about reality on the battlefield. I wasn’t trying to spread my personal views as much as trying to say, that’s the way it was, on Bunker Hill or Iwo Jima.

PB — How did you get started doing Mad Comics?

HK — I was worn down from research on the war comics, I wanted to take it easy, so I went back to my high school days when I used to make fun of everybody and everything in my ever-present sketch pad. It was fun to do and didn’t require research. In trying to know what Mad was all about, why it was so popular, I wonder how much of it was the originality or the look of the thing, and how much of it was its “profundity.” I think Marshall McLuhan knew, when he said, “The Medium is the Message.” We were instinctive in doing Mad, using techniques which we didn’t analyze too deeply.

PB — When I look at the crowdedness of the panels, the style reminds me a lot of the Groyser Kundes and other Jewish comic art, the urban scene as chaos and carnival . . .

HK — A lot of that had to do with Willie Elder. But it also had something to do with the Marx Brothers, whose zany humor I admired at the time (and still do).

PB — It also seems to me very radical, in relation to the burgeoning commercial culture of the time, the invasion of the public mind (especially children’s minds) by the programmed fantasy of Walt Disney and the others. I’m thinking especially about the “Walt Dizzy” story where animals are dragged away for not wearing white gloves. What else can this be but a critique of cultural totalitarianism?

HK — Of course I knew of Disney the strike-breaker. But I wasn’t so deliberate politically. My thinking was a lot more subconscious than I might admit to. I was more aware of details in which I could point out a truth, rather than of trying to make a broader point about the world and life. Like the truth that Disney Mickey and Minnie characters were actually rats. Or that Donald Duck didn’t wear pants . . .

PB — But your comments on Joe McCarthy, for instance, in “What’s my Shiner?” were obviously political . . .

HK — We certainly rejected McCarthy as an evil, wrong-thinking fellow. We pushed a point of view that didn’t take a great brain to do. McCarthy was a disagreeable personality; he was easy to write critically about.

PB — You also took apart the New York Daily News for its reactionary yellow journalism . . .

HK — I never liked the News. We made fun of it in Mad for its sensational approach to news. The front page News was unimportant news, and the real news got buried down the page. That’s how it was with the Daily News.

PB — As you found out later, you were seen as some kind of demigod of opposition by a lot of kids who later showed in radical movements . . .

HK — I was not at all comfortable with the guru role. It was all a terrible mistake! I never liked the instability of the ’60s.

PB — You see yourself as a truth-teller, and not a prophet . . .

HK — Telling the truth is at the heart of what I like to think I do, and in that way I feel like I’m a useful person.
Among the post-immigrant generations, the point of Yiddish Humor understandably became confused and sometimes almost lost. Comentary intellectuals represent the allrightnik in power: the conscience, who needs it? They are aided unwittingly by all those who think Yiddishkayt is fine for the old folks, and for the era of village minds generally, but inadequate to the demands of cultural sophistication. Vapid modernism and vapid materialism never stand far apart.

Ah, but the old spiritual uneasiness will not be appeased. We see it cropping up across the breadth of the Jewish novel, theater and film. There is not getting rid of repugnance at insensitivity and feckless materialism, jabbed in Goodbye, Columbus, in Private Benjamin, and in so many other treatments. Behind the punch lines about Long Island bar mitzvahs, behind the critique of contemporary American life, lurks a venerable dybbuk. The real subjects are eternity and the soul.

Isidore Haiblum comes in here. An unknown treasure, the Yiddish writer in English. He acquired his mama-loshen near Coney Island of the 1930s-40s and, unlike Woody Allen, actually dug into the cultural roots for a linguistic training already becoming rare. He read the Yiddish daily press, later the literary classics, while Americanizing underneath the boardwalk. So naturally he became a writer: what else could he do? A Yiddishist in vernacular, but enough of a stylist to range from humor to nostalgia to science fiction. The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders (Doubleday, 1982, N.Y.) is all three, and something else besides. Haiblum has forged a new link in the golden chain which leads all the way back to the prophets.

The book’s plot is overly complex and sometimes downright confusing. One of the Tsaddikim, whose task is to keep the world in proper order, is called in to repair what turns out to be a leak in time, caused perhaps by the mystic text, the Zohar. The Tsaddik is aided by an 8” tall homonucleus, whose nonsequitors remind you of conversations among those affable types who used to sit around the automat all day shooting the breeze. The two characters and others get lost in Jewish History, which plunges them down from Mosaic Egypt to modern day 115th St., connects them with a Polish princess, a luftmensh, Hasidim and other supernatural creatures.

You might take all this as backdrop for Haiblum’s one-liners. They do come fast and furious, quite a few unsuccessful but some delightful. I like the parts that remind me of the intense Mad Comics circa 1951, as where Haiblum has the princess saying emphatically “this is something I feel deeply; this is something I’ve got to tell you (the Mad version would have added “mainly” just here) “… DON’T OPEN THAT DOOR! Jinx, baby! The hex sign. Heap big trouble. Snake Eyes, kid …” The humor lies in the reversal Heine once perfected, and in the sheer improbability. Or again, Haiblum shows his stuff when an averaged kid gets stuck in his own six-year-old mind from the days of the Second World War, with Plastic Man, the Shadow and the Marvel Bunny come back like a happy delirium. Haiblum has made all this part of Jewish history, most especially his own.

The age-old Jewish radicalism, Haiblum’s own shamanistic humor, emerges in that allrightnik to end allrightniks, the arch-villain, Myron. A mysterious figure who constantly tries to get someone to eradicate the earth’s inhabitants, he turns out to be a real estate hustler, agent for some inter-planetary corporation which seeks to parcel off the planet as vacation spots for aliens. A kind of galactic neutron bomb freak, you might say. Had The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders been written after the Lebanon invasion and the Beirut Massacre, one might almost take Myron as a stand-in for Ariel Sharon, the opposing Tsaddikim our Jewish progressives who call for peace, tolerance, co-existence among all traditions and peoples. Actually, as Haiblum explained to me in a recent interview, Myron is Gentile or Jew, any race or religion, cruel result of the human condition. Whoever and whatever he may be, Haiblum has his number. And like the jokester of old, the Yiddishist author poses the noisome, chaotic but beautiful folkishness of authentic tradition against moloch the defiler. Haiblum, you’re a mensh — and an artist.
"Oy vey, oy vey," I pulled and pulled.

"What is it? What's happened?" A murmur went up from the congregation.

"Can't you see? It's his beard; it's stuck in the door!" I yelled.

"That's it." I knew it had to be something like that.

"Ah! His beard."

"It's plain now."

"It's obvious."

"We should have seen it at once."

Together they chorused: "His beard is stuck in the door.

I stopped pulling for a moment.

"Is that the best you can do?" I asked irritably.

"It's a problem," a voice said.

"A catastrophe."

"It's an umglik."

"Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"What's to be done?" the congregation wailed.

There was a general shrugging of shoulders, a scratching of heads, a multitude of sighs. The usual thing.

A voice from the rear of the congregation made itself heard:

"Wait!"

It was Yankel the Tailor.

All eyes turned toward him. I looked too. What else was there to do?

This Yankel was a short, near­sighted man who wore his yarmulka at a rakish angle. He tapped his forehead.

"I think I've got it," he said. "I think, maybe, I know."

"Look who's talking," someone chortled.

"From a tailor, he's become a knower," someone else said.

A third party put in: "If he knows so much why isn't he a Rothschild?"

A learned man began a dissertation on the meaning of the word "know."

It was interesting, so I listened too.

In due course the dissertation, as was obviously the custom here, evolved into a disputation, when a wise man — one who habitually occupied a place of honor near the coveted eastern wall — bitterly attacked the entire concept of "knowing," claiming it was an illusory, unattainable objective. Everyone took sides and vigorously expounded his own approach to the problem. A problem's a problem.

This amazing "spirit drawing" of Elijah was done by the parapsychologist Hans Holzer of New York's prestigious Institute for Paranormal Research.

I had a few ideas of my own, but, because my beard was stuck in the door, which was on one side of the chamber, I couldn't make myself heard over the tumult. The whole experience was proving quite unsatisfactory.

After a while it began to get dark, and it was time to go home.

People made ready to depart — but, of course, they couldn't.

Because my beard was stuck in the door.

There was, as might be expected, general consternation. Chagrin.

"Now we'll never get out," one of the wise men lamented.

"We're doomed," the fat, bearded dairyman cried out.

"It's a lost cause!" someone wailed.

Just then the little tailor pushed his way through the crowd.

"Wait!"

"So what else is there to do, with his beard stuck in the door?"

"Oh, here's the khokhem again."

"Advice is cheap."

"With advice, you can buy an empty egg shell."

"Listen," the little tailor said, "I think I have a plan . . ."

"Nu?"

"Let's hear it, already."

"So what's this so-called plan?"

The tailor surveyed the crowd and said in a trembling voice:

"Maybe we should open the door?"

They did, and the scene changed.

We were walking along on a wide, seemingly endless desert. It stretched in all directions. The sun was directly overhead. It was hot — too hot. Fortunately, I was clad in only a loincloth. Sand sifted through my toes. Hot, burning sand. Quite understandable. If it had been ice cold, under the circumstances, we'd have been in trouble. For ahead of us, a little to the left in a shimmering haze of heat, a structure of some kind was barely discernible. We trudged toward it.

"We" was Greenberg and I. Greenberg wasn't actually doing the walking, you understand. He usually left that to me.

continued next page
Greenberg was Greenberg the homunculus, who sat on my right shoulder.

"Greenberg," I said, "We're still in the same line?"

"Sure," Greenberg said. "Where else?"

"You're positive?" I was concerned.

"We've gone back a bit," Greenberg said. "But it's still the same line."

"This is some desert."

"Sure it's some desert. It's the best desert; they don't come any better than this, believe me."

"So why is it we're out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"What nowhere? We're going over there where that building is. See? We just missed the mark a little bit. You shouldn't worry so much. Remember, Greenberg's on the job."

Greenberg was dressed in a checkered suit. He wore a bow tie, a bowler hat and carried a bamboo cane. His shoes were white. Long ago he used to wear a toga and sandals, but no more Greenberg has gone modern with the rest of us.

I said: "Greenberg, what was the name of that place back there?"

"Chelm."

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**FAMILY WISDOM**

*by ARLENE GOLDBARD*

For me, Jewish humor is first and foremost a homemade teaching device. My family moved to northern California when I was very small, and that meant leaving behind most of the commercial forms of education — they no longer had access to the Yiddish theater, and they didn't go to nightclubs, or listen to recordings. But they told a lot of jokes and stories, mainly of two types.

First, my uncle, who was a salesman, had a constantly growing repertoire of dirty stories that he'd acquired in the line of duty. He was considered a great raconteur, and while we children were young, we would be included in his audience, since we had no idea what these stories were actually about. We liked them for the gatherings they occasioned, for the fellow-feeling and knowing laughter they produced. Of course there came a moment when each of us was old enough to guess at the jokes' meanings, and some perfunctory attempts were made to exclude us. But then, after all, we were suddenly old enough to understand — so what was the harm in a little laughter?

The second type of humor consisted of little stories and aphorisms, each with its own moral, each repeated many, many times. Most of these have stuck with me. They are the immutable laws of human behavior — the real laws, as opposed to the exhortations to goodness, the "thou shalt nots" honored more in the breach than the observance. My grandmother would say, speaking of a couple who had found each other late in life, or another who seemed ill-matched to our outsiders' eyes: "Every pot has its cover." I have never encountered any evidence to disprove this.

When we railed at the corruption of the politicians or the greed of capitalists, she would say "Where there's meat, there's flies." My work for the last few years has brought me into contact with hundreds of Washington bureaucrats and politicians. Teetering on the edge of madness as one of these creatures delivers the verbal equivalent of Chinese water torture, I have saved myself time and again by repeating my grandmother's saying as if it were a mantra. And I have its companion piece to ward off the attraction that every evil, no matter how banal, evokes: "When you lay down with dogs,"

Grandma used to say, "you get fleas."

My grandfather could be relied on for these bits of wisdom as well. To illustrate the deprivation he suffered as a boy in Russia, he would tell us about his family's poverty, so profound that he and his brothers had only one pair of shoes among them, which they would trade off wearing on alternate days. I can't decide whether it's a tribute to my grandfather's credibility with children (it was never high with adults) or to my own gullibility (still legendary) that I never bothered to question the veracity of this story until I reached the age of 36!

My grandfather was a gambler. He had that naive faith in chance that comes to someone who has been dealt a very fortunate hand in very bad circumstances. He was drafted into the Czar's army, but got away; he lost money gambling, but someone was always there to cover for him. And when he was faced with a knotty problem, a difficulty that threatened not to evaporate and looked too big to be swept under the rug, he would grin and shrug his shoulders and say: "Don't worry. It's as easy as one-two-six!" I suppose it was.

Grandpa used to look over the obituaries and say, "People are dying today who never died before." Each time circumstances summon one of my family's homilies I see a vivid picture of their faces. It's as if they lived again, but this time without all the conflict and disappointment that marked our lives together the first time around. Through their humor, I'm able to learn the lessons no amount of discipline and stern instruction were able to impart.
MENDY AND THE GOLEM

Willfully naive and childish as the Bal Shem Tov explaining to an eight-year-old, unpsychological as Heckel and Jeckel (only with love and morals rather than vitriol and nihilism), amalgamating puns and prayers, Mendy and the Golem is strangely charming. The script is so unworliday in its inner message that it recalls the fanatical Catholic comics of the 1950's — but with plot and drawing that resemble Captain Marvel or one of the obscure Funny Animal comics rather than the pseudo-realistic and quasi-historical ambience that didactic strips almost invariably project. The odd relation between Hasidism and radicalism — utterly hostile but sharing the same territory and similar qualities of millennialism — persists across continents and generations. Religion remains the heart of a heartless world (to quote another secular Jew with more than a touch of unconscious spirituality), and laughter may be the red thread that reaches from the court of the East European rebbe through modern capitalism to a future and better world.

written by Leibel Estrin
drawn by David Sears
colored by Barry Grossman

At this time of world crisis, it is incumbent upon Jews to heed the call of history and return to the land of their ancestors. As we have wandered in the world, we have lost those parts of our historical character which are intrinsically tied to the land. At the same time, the land of our ancestors lies bereft of its former glory.

It is at this moment that we should return to cause the land to bloom, to make our ancient land once more flow with milk and honey. In our own historical land, we can regain our ancient communal arts and institutions. We can live as did our ancestors, in a closer rhythm with the realities of life and nature.

Therefore, we call upon the Jews of New York to return to the Lower East Side, of Detroit to Dexter-Davison, of Pittsburgh to the Hill District, and so forth throughout the country.

 PLATFORM PROPOSAL OF THE CHELM CHAPTER OF NEW JEWISH AGENDA
INTERVIEW

WALLACE MARKFIELD

That novelist, what's his name, Markfield, has written in a story somewhere that until he was fourteen he believed "aggravation" to be a Jewish word.

Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*

Someday—you know what's going to happen? They'll make a Yiddish word and nobody will come to laugh.

Wallace Markfield, *You Could Live If They Let You*

Maybe it is his name. Wallace Markfield. It sounds like an English lord. Bellow, Roth, Friedman, Malamud, Heller, and Markfield. The token WASP in a Jewish law firm. If only it were Merkfelder . . .

On the phone, though, it becomes clear. All it takes is the "Hello, this is Wallace Markfield." Maybe it's the tone in the voice: angst, pride, suspicion, aggravation, joy, all seep through the words. In person, he turns out to be a charming and dis,tinguished man in his mid-50s, living in an unpretentious Long Island suburb with wife, Anna, a dog and a 16-year-old car; a daughter, Andrea, is away at college.

Markfield's first novel, *To An Early Grave*, received high praise and was made into a movie, *Bye Bye Braverman*, by Sidney Lumet in 1968. His second novel, *Teteelbaum's Window*, describes a Brooklyn boyhood through the journal of Simon Sloan—a verbal collage (and barrage) of 1930s Yiddishkeit. His third, *You Could Live If They Let You*, (Knopf, 1974), is the comic clash between WASP and Jewish cultures, personified by Jules Farber, a stand-up comic, and Chandler Van Horton (*"Is that a name, or an intersection?"") Farber asks him), a gentle academic who is researching Farber. Markfield is also the author of short stories, as well as numerous reviews and articles, including the seminal piece, "The Yiddishization of American Humor" (*Esquire*, 1966). What follows are excerpts from an interview with Markfield, interspersed with sections from *You Could Live If They Let You*. The reader should be warned, though, that art does not imitate life: Markfield has as much to do with Farber as Breitbart does with Van Horton. Wait, maybe I should take that back . . .

MARKFIELD: I was born in 1926, delivered by a midwife. I forget the exact address but it was on South Second Street, on the fourth floor, overlooking the Bridge Plaza, in Williamsburg. Shortly after I was 2 years old, we moved around the corner to 188 South Third St., and lived there until I was 9. We moved to Flatbush after my mother spent four years looking for an apartment. She's still living there.

I remember going to school directly across the street. My mother wanted to keep an eye on me, and since we lived in the back, she would go across to a neighbor's apartment that faced the school. I was under her eye almost the whole day. It was a kind of shadow play. I didn't have to say anything and she didn't have to hear me. When I was banished to the back of the room, something that happened quite often, I could look up and see her wagging her finger at me.

I was a bad kid. Maybe it was because I was fat and had to fight all the time. I was always being picked on so I had to fight. I couldn't sit still and I couldn't keep my mouth shut. And in those days, it was monastic silence, or else.

VAN HORTON: Nonetheless your father was a socialist . . .

FARBER: I think because it gave him an excuse to read the *New York Daily News*.

"Here, kiddo, in the News, which I make it my strict business to never buy, thank God I find it every day on the subway, is insight into how latter-day capitalism in modern America degrades the masses and divides the classes. It's to me interesting and it's to me instructive to bring to bear my socialist insight upon such prostitutes of the pen, I see the iron heel on the American mind, look at Ingrid Bergman without makeup, without makeup she's all nose . . ."

But I used to love it when his socialist cronies came. They'd eat a little sponge cake, they'd finish between the nineteen of them half-a-bottle slivovitz and one—one would go . . .

"Nah!"

And they'd all go, "You said it!"

"Because the way it was—"

"The way it won't be again."

"We had leaders with qualities. You could say that the leaders of those days — you know what they had? Leadership qualities?"

"Class and color! Personalities and powerhouse! You take a Morris Hillquit . . ."

"Hillquit? I'll tell you about Morris Hillquit. Morris Hillquit was a moral nix."

"A moral nix and a shallow thinker. You want a thinker? Eugene V. Debs was a thinker."

"Debs? Debs was a great thinker. A very great thinker and a very great drinker."

"At least he didn't lack charm. You shook the hand of Debs and you were shaking the hand of a charming man. Not like Alexander Kerensky."

"Kerensky? Kerensky I had one name for—Mr. Fish Eye. Talk to Kerensky and you were always conscious of one thing. You're talking to . . . ALEXANDER KERENSKY!"

"But with Kerensky you knew where you stood because continued next page"
MARKFIELD: continued

Kerensky stood by his principles. And if he hadn't stood by his principles he wouldn't have been Kerensky."
"He would have been Abraham Cahan. You know why? Abraham Cahan was Kerensky without the principles."
And one, one would go, "Giants. Heroes."
And another would go, "Heroic giants."
And then they'd start talking — now it would soon be Norman Thomas' birthday dinner for a change and for a change they'd each be stuck with two tickets.

MARKFIELD: I had an Orthodox upbringing, but I didn't go to a yeshiva or anything like that. I went to the Talmud Torah for an hour and a half after school every day. The trick was to learn to read Hebrew as quickly as you could without understanding what you were reading. The rabbis would give you pinches, nibbles, if you did anything wrong. There was one rabbi, I remember, who hit all the time, with a stick. Whatever he could reach, he schmessed. One day I heard a terrible noise in the room and I turned around and there was the rabbi with one of my friends, rolling around on the floor, fighting. Just like in a Western. Oh well ... just your typical Jewish upbringing ... circle jerking, squeezing titties on Ocean Parkway, looking into windows ... I will always insist that on any given night you could walk down any street in Flatbush and you would find a woman getting undressed in front of an open window. All my life in Manhattan I never saw so much as a window shade raised. In Flatbush, there's all I ever saw. Eleven o'clock at night, I'd start walking out of the house, and my mother would ask me where I was going. I'd say that I had to get out. What I knew was that at 11:15 the baker's daughter would be standing in front of the mirror, admiring herself. I would stand there and watch, along with a little old Jewish man who pretended to be walking his dog. We'd stand there and smile at each other. That's my memories of Flatbush ...

FARBER: But the thing is — this is the thing — he gave me what all Jewish fathers give all Jewish kids. A foul and sinister affliction which has no name. If it had a name, though, that name would be the Hoo-Hah syndrome.

"'Hey, sonny, kiddo, what did you get?'
"'A model airplane kit, Pop.'
"'Hoo-Hah!'
"'For the Cessna C-34, Pop.'
"'Hoo-Hah!
"'Listen how you make it, Pop. Pop, you make it with balsa wood and you make it with a very fine paper and a certain glue, airplane glue, and with the motor—you know how you make the motor? With rubber bands!
"'Hoo-Hah ... Hoo-Hah ... Hoo-Hah ...'"

In the years that followed, avowed Farber, he was to hear this morbid, mocking "Hoo-Hah" when he offered to open a jar, to change a fuse, to drive a nail, to turn a screw, to press down a thumbnail, to free what was stuck, to oil what was squeaking, to plug or unplug, to install or remove, to paint or strip a surface, to shut off or turn on. And a terrible ineptitude was born; let him unto this day so much as look at a hammer and the hammer would shake its head and bleat, apologetically, "I'm not for a Jewish boy." Why, it would be easier for the Pope to change his religion than for him to change a tire. Was it his fault? It was not his fault nor even his father's fault. For even in the Old Testament the essential klutziness of his race stood inscribed.

"You know why we had to leave Egypt in such a hurry? I'll tell you why: We were just finishing up the pyramids and one of us yells, Vey, we forgot to put in windows!"

MARKFIELD: I've worked for a lot of Jewish agencies over the years—the Council of Jewish Federations, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, the Anti-Defamation League — doing publicity and speech writing, things like that — make-a-living writing. When I was growing up I really didn't think of myself as a Jewish writer. It's the same argument that Ralph Ellison once made about doing publicity and speech writing, things like that — make-a-living writing. When I was growing up I really didn't think of myself as a Jewish writer. It's the same argument that Ralph Ellison once made about being a Negro — the word was still fashionable then — and an American. He laid claim to Thoreau and Hemingway and Melville. I feel the same way. I feel more of a kinship with Melville and Whitman than anyone else. I never made too much of my Jewishness until 1945 or '46 when Commentarv first appeared. Then it became "in" to be Jewish, to be Jewish and an intellectual. My greatest ambition was to be a Jewish intellectual and this meant not being a novelist or a short story writer, but a critic ... being in the back of the book, so to speak, with the critics. We were always trying to write the definitive article on someone — James Joyce, Arthur Koestler, Thomas Mann. I also remember the power of the Stalinists, the American Stalinists around that time, the cultural commissars ... their power was so great and they used it so nastily. Ah, well.

continued next page
MARKFIELD: continued

I've written a lot of criticism, too much really. Some of it's quite good, though one of the truly brilliant book reviewers and article writers, I ain't. I can get away with it with flash; it covers up the paucity of thought. Let me put it this way: I can write better than Lionel Trilling, but I can't think better than Lionel Trilling.

VAN HORTON: And I soon perceived that I was to him an object of supreme curiosity—part Penrod, part Andy Hardy, part, certainly, Caliban. For he began improvising on themes from some mythical monstrous Middle-American boyhood, conjuring up a "shkutzy shtetl" compounded of Dr. Pepper and ham hocks and fish fries and snowmobilies and pickup trucks and Rotary Club bake-offs where lumpen lugs joined on American Legion bowling nights to talk of trailer hitchs and creeping socialism. Here, between nothing and nowhere ( "There's no place to go, but when you get there they give you plenty of parking" ), he had me coming of age. (At 19 months, uttering my first sentence: "Trouble at the mill!") And he begged and baited me to tell him what, precisely what it was like to be a goy, one of the managers, nay—the owners of America. Wasn't handy with fists and tools? Did I know the names of flowers and herbs? Had my mother risen with or among roosters to prepare, before she went off to her shift at the foundry, fantasizing? Had my mother rised, drunk instant: "That's why the Egyptian soldiers yell across the Suez, 'Down with Nescafe...''") Would she worry over my very last cell and secretario, kissing my "doodooy and my poopoo and my vooovoo" Celebrating my tiniest triumphs? ( "Not because he's mine, but with three matches he kin burn down the biggest barn." ) Or was she dry, spare, neutral, rearing me with typical "shkutzy stoicism?" ( "A mile touch polio is all." ) My father—what of my father? Had he been a ballsy brute of a man ically indifferent to his eighteen children—each of whom had a different vitamin deficiency—given to wearing a tiny peaked hat of Howard Johnson orange ( "his tailgating hat" )? A stern disciplinarian? ( "Maybe when ye finish drainin' the leech field ye'll remember tuh call me 'Sir'..." ) Accepting, with his kind's unthinking conviction, the world as it was given him? The pleasures it could afford him? ( "An annual fire-hose festival, a breweray tour, a pig gelidng, once a week a box of Fanny Farmer mixed creams or a milk shake at Dairy Queen. . . ." ) Oh, and guns. Did he make a move without a gun? ( "The way my people carry shopping bags your people carry guns. . ." )

MARKFIELD: Manny Farber once called me up and he said, Wally, I love the way you write but I can't stand your ideas. You want to work with me? I'll give you the ideas and you do the writing." In spite of this, I think that Farber has been much more of an influence on the shape of modern American writing than people give him credit for—not so much as a critic, but that marvelous blend of street vernacular and academic posturing, which he claims, with some justification, was stolen by the likes of Saul Bellow...

I started writing poetry at the age of 9. I found out you could impress your teachers with it. Up to a point, it impressed my parents too. But when I was too old to be shown off in front of visiting friends and relatives, they discouraged me. I don't think my mother ever read a line that I wrote. She calls my novels "articles". She has them in her house, under plastic, like the lampsheads and the sofa.

VAN HORTON: Is this, then, your point? That the sufferings of Jews are different from and deeper than the sufferings of all others?

FARBER: Not different, not deeper, I would say... here's what I'd say: You goyim don't, simply, know how to suffer. Am I blaming you? How can I blame you? It's a question of basic training. Your God, He feels for you, He's all the time suffering for you. Our God, you tell Him: "It hurts, it hurts!" He'll answer "I know, I know, and in a minute you're going to hear me with some y'all!"

MARKFIELD: My mother claims to have been born in this country, but I don't believe it. My father came from Galicia, around the border of Poland and Austria, before the first World War. He died in 1967, We weren't very close. We was a clothing cutter, a dedicated rank-and-file unionist. He worshipped Sidney Hillman. Hillman and Roosevelt. Remember the Upton Sinclair character, Jimmy Higgins? That was my father, a Jewish Jimmy Higgins. He couldn't take me to union meetings. I don't think he took me anywhere. Maybe to the doctor's.

VAN HORTON: "Look here," I declared, "if I can forgive your people their Mah-Jong, I think you can forgive mine their soft ice cream. I am not Middle America, you are not Levittown. If the milk shake is not the repository of the higher wisdom, neither is the egg cream."

While he protested ("Our ritual baths are better than your saunas.... Moses Maimonides could beat up Thomas Aquinas.... We gave you Exodus, you gave us the U-Haul") I pressed on with an account of my parents. My mother, I informed him, had been a Colorado state senator who had put some 35,000 miles on the odometer of her converted hearse to petition against dismissal of three devoutly Reichian schoolteachers. She was—I could not resist hectoring him with this—a superb, a gourmet cook, named for her were a poached fish sauce, two salad dressings, and a summer squash pie. Apart from rearing three children passably well, she had been—indeed still was—a serious photographer, a cellist in a highly praised string quartet and the author of one of the basic texts on organic gardening. If anything more was needed, my mother, at the age of 58, managed to hold a black belt in judo.

"So all in all," said Farber in a spasm of self-delight, "a typical shikse dilettante."

MARKFIELD: I was also funny as a kid, even won a couple of amateur contests doing imitations. At one time, I seriously considered being a stand-up comic. In a lot of ways, it's...
easier than being a writer... Life goes by so quickly. It's always gone. The moment you write or understand something, it's gone. I think the Spanish Civil War must have been gone for Hemingway in 1937. If you're a comic you do your 45-50 minutes and it's over. Even if you bomb there's always someone in the audience you can reach. Then it's over. You have a drink, relax, and start over the next day. With a writer, if you publish a book that doesn't go over, it takes years to recover.

That reminds me of a joke: Lefkowitz is walking along in Great Neck and he sees his friend Ginsberg, looking depressed. Lansman, he says, why are you depressed? Oi, Lefkowitz, you'd be depressed too if for 35 years you couldn't get into the Great Lawn country club. Why, asks Lefkowitz? Because there's this one momser, Levine, he's 95 years old, ready to slide into the grave. What keeps him alive is to blackball me.

Well, says Lefkowitz, today is your lucky day, you lucky person, because today you are looking at the nominating person of the Great Lawn country club, yours truly. You'll get in. I'll see to it personally.

Next Wednesday, he's made sure that the waiter has slipped a little something into Levine's drink, and the alte kocker is sleeping away, his head on the table. Lefkowitz begins: I want to propose for membership a man who has so many qualifications I wouldn't begin to list them all except alphabetically: A, he's able; B he's beneficial; C, he conscientious; D he's distinguished; E, he's energetic; F, he's friendly; G, he's a gentleman; H, he's handsome; I, he's intelligent...

All of a sudden the blackballer wakes up: Just a minute!! K, he's a kvetch; L, he's a louse; M, he's a momser; N, he's a nudnik; O, he's an ox; P, he's a putz; Q, he's a klutz; R, ich hab' vergessen already; S he's a schmuck; T, he's a toochis; U, You can have him; V, Ve don't want him; XYZ, I blackball him!

When I picked up a copy of You Could Live If They Let You in a bookstore, the proprietor, who was Jewish, said, "That's an interesting title. My mother used to say that to me all the time when I was a little boy. Finally, I got up the courage to ask her who the "they" were. And she said, "Don't worry, don't worry. You'll find out."

**Suspect Israel-South African Clone Link**

**Washington** ... A highly placed source in the U.S. intelligence community reported today that the U.S. State Department will investigate rumors of Israeli assistance to the South African government in the form of cloning technology.

"We have good reason to believe that the white minority in South Africa is seeking a radical, non-violent solution to that society's problems," the source said. "And there is strong, if circumstantial, evidence that Israel is sharing some of its remarkable cloning technology with the South African government. Our inference, obviously, is that the white South African minority hopes to become a majority—fast."
Dear Abbie,

Today is April 19, which is the 40th anniversary of the Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and the 60th anniversary of the Kishinev pogrom. Jews all over are feeling pain and feeling the strength of their survival. But I'm on a bum trip. I'm freaking out. Bad scene. I'm coping the horrors, Abbie. I've been hallucinating that Ronald Reagan was the keynote speaker at the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors — Ronald Reagan to tell us "Never To Forget" while the blood of Salvadoran peasants is still drying under his nails. And then, man, I hallucinated that Jean Kirpatrick was named the "Humanitarian Laureate" of the Simon Wiesenthal Institute. Worst of all, Abbie, I'm not stoned! I swore off acid way back when I found myself hallucinating that Henry Kissinger got the Nobel Peace Prize!

BURN'T OUT.

Dear Burnt Out:

Take some B-vitamins and cool out. As we learned in the '60s, things are not always what they appear to be (Look at Jerry Rubin, for instance!). I assure you, pal, that the speaker at the Gathering of Holocaust Survivors was Daniel Ellsberg wearing a Ronald Reagan mask, while the Wiesenthal Institute laureate was Daniel Schorr (in drag), who leaked a stunning report about CIA protection of Klaus Barbie.

ABBIE
THE TVnik TALKS JEWISH

by ERIC BREITBART

I was born in Boro Park, Brooklyn, in 1951, and until I was 7 or 8, I thought America was made up equally of Jews and Catholics — I had never knowingly met a Protestant. I actually assumed that half the country was Jewish. I was shocked to learn that Christmas was not a civil holiday. And because there was always certain Jewish things on television, like words that begin with the phoneme “sh,” I was positive that Jewishness was at least an important subculture — although there was certainly less Jewish material on television than out on the street. That the opposite was true for most Americans.

One of my very favorite childhood shows was Car 54. It was on against Ed Sullivan, but my mother tolerated it because Molly Picon was a semi-regular. The fact that she was one of the “greats” of the Yiddish stage wasn’t as important as the fact that she was noticeably Jewish. It was also clear that the show was connected with Sgt. Bilko, another one of our favorite shows. Many of the characters were right off Bilko; Bea Ponds even kept the name Lucille. Leon and Sylvia Schmauser, a great Jewish couple that could easily have been living in our apartment house, were the funniest people in the series. I remember an episode where a phony document had been concocted to prove that the Schnausers are heirs to the Romanov throne...

Later I found out that behind the cameras Car 54 employed some television workers who had been blacklisted in the McCarthy days for political reasons. In a way, that makes sense. Like Barney Miller, Car 54 had an ambience somewhat different from the standard police show; it was a neighborhood show with the police as focus. There was no machine-gunning of bad guys. This was implicitly Jewish (at least in the Diaspora).

If I had been a few years older, I could have seen the other side of the coin in the development of The Goldbergs. Gertrude Berg had developed the series and the characters for radio; it was a story about Jewish lower middle class life in The Bronx. The first year it came to television the setting remained The Bronx. The second year it moved to Anytown, U.S.A., with the neighbors separated by a big, spacious yard rather than a tenement airshaft. Something else happened between the first year and the second. Philip Leob, who had played Molly’s husband on the radio, was cited for alleged leftwing sympathies, and dropped despite Gertrude Berg’s personal efforts to save him. General Foods threatened a sponsorship boycott. A few years later he committed suicide. It was almost twenty years before a Larry Gelbart could bring forward M*A*S*H.

Of course, the old radicalism, an intimate rite of passage in the ghetto, had been left behind by Jakey Rabinowitz (the protagonist of The Jazz Singer) when he became Jack Robin. Years later, as a career move, he returned to New York; he was already more of an American Jew than a Jewish-American.

Veteran comics such as Groucho, George Burns, and Gracie Allen left New York for television land in their ’50s series. Crazy California gentiles are brought out, pair after pair, and presented to Groucho who swallows them whole. When George and Gracie’s son Ronny takes up with a hillbilly shiksa, nobody says to him, “The first time she gets angry, she’ll call you Jew.” In one cluster of episodes, George and Gracie visit New York. They do not stay in George’s old neighborhood, the Lower East Side, but rather uptown at no less a symbol of old line gentility than the Waldorf. California has become the real locus of their comedy and probably their Jewishness, too — whatever remains of it.

Likewise, Milton Berle played himself, sui generis. An unsuspecting gentile could watch Sid Caesar and never realize he was Jewish. No Jew was likely to make that mistake. Phil Silvers chose the very Polish name, Bilko, but we all knew that he was actually one of the chosen people. The only reason (secretly) Jewish Sgt. Bilko could get away with all those antics in the friendly U.S. army was that he had served in the Second World War, the fight against Hitler. If you make the contrast with M*A*S*H, Bilko’s Army was laughably inoffensive, at worst bureaucratic, and still living on the glory of the successful crusade against Fascism. The most important thing about the show, the base of its humor, is probably the ethnic and racial mixture of what pluralist America now meant.

Something still definably Jewish did remain on television in the late 1950s and early 1960s. But it was a style — the manic quality in certain types of humor. The Dick Van Dyke Show, written by Carl Reiner (who had worked for Caesar) is a good example. Rob and Laura, emphatically gentle, come to New York (they live in the goyish New Rochelle). Rob works with Jewish Morey Amsterdam and the metonymically Jewish Rosemarie. Rob, however, likes to think of himself in the classic (i.e., non-Jewish) mode of a Buster Keaton. Humor becomes genteel, a transcendent step removed from day-to-day experience, an inessential critique offered from the secure vantage-point of the bourgeoisie burbs. For Morey Amsterdam, on the other hand, humor remains expressive — “this is who I am.” The Jewish comic of this generation is on a constant I.D. check. Amsterdam was known as "the human joke machine." He likes to tell ten jokes in a row or jokes on any subject anybody can name. He has to perform. He also exemplifies the generation which is completing the journey, the transition, out of the ghetto, but rushing so fast that it is hardly aware of living through a transition.

The next generation has the consciousness to look back and capture the meaning. Let’s take Rob Reiner. Like Phil Silvers’ Bilko, Reiner plays a poylishe in

continued next page
T.V.: continued

All in the Family. However, he is no traveler in disguise, but rather a polished American actor taking on a role. He no longer has an identity problem, he doesn't have to be expressive anymore. We come all the way down to SCTV, where young Canadian Jews have so little anxiety that they can play very Jewish Jews without any problem. Thus Sid Dithers, shop steward of the union local at SCTV, leads the workers out on strike. During the strike episode, he says things like “The Voikers cannot take dis!” This is caricature, partly, but shows SCTV also has a real consciousness of labor traditions in the show biz trades.

Most impressive of all are the Bobby Bittman episodes from SCTV. Eugene Levy plays Bittman as the ultimate rat-pack Jewish comic. Like Joey Bishop, he cannot tell a funny joke. He appears on The Sammy Maudlin Show, and brings out his brother, Skip, for a maiden TV appearance. Skip flops with his monologue. Back at the desk-and-sofa, he calls Bobby “Hershel” — the first time Bittman has ever been called his Jewish name in front of the goyishe public. When the two argue, Skip is revealed as Zvi, and they finally lapse into Yiddish entirely. Imagine that! Sammy saves the show with close-up where he says something like “Only in America could two brothers argue with each other on national television in their native ethnic language.”

There are some other good examples, like Andy Kauf-
JEWISH (AND GENTILE) LAUGHS FROM THE RADICAL HUMOR MOVEMENT

Cultural Correspondence, N.S. #2 (Winter, 1983)
Documents the first Radical Humor Festival, with discussions/routes by Robin Tyler, Paul Krassner, Flo Kennedy, Radical Humor Theory by Paul Buhle, Women in Comedy by Susan McCarr, etc. Also Art Documents from June 12, 1982 Demo, Carnival Knowledge, Firesign Theatre, etc. 96pp. $.

Cultural Correspondence, N.S. #1 (April, 1982)
16pp Radical Humor Festival issue, articles by Paul Krassner, Bill Livant, Paul Buhle, catalog of art show including Tuti Kupferberg, Melinda Gebbie on Emma Goldman, Israeli cartoonists, Surrealists, etc. $.

Cultural Correspondence, old #12-14 (Summer, 1981)
Manifesto for a Humor International, American Culture from the 1960s-80s with David Marc on TV Critics' Code and the TV Sitcom Decade, Ron Weisberger on U.S. Humor, At Auster on Films, George Lipitz on Country Music, also Immanuel Wallerstein, Marge Piercy, Jay Kinney, Herbert Marcuse letters, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, etc. $120pp, $3.

Cultural Correspondence, old #9 (Spring, 1979)
Sex-Role Humor, featuring feminist-humorists Melinda Gebbie, Roberta Gregory, Aline Kominsky, Sharon Kahn Rudahl, Catherine Clinton. Poetry and paintings by Maurice Kish on Coney Island. Interview with Yiddish poet Martin Birnbaum. 86pp, $2.

Cultural Correspondence, old #8 (Fall-Winter 1978)
Naomi Weisstein's unfinished feminist/humor/detective novel. Also Ron Weisberger on Jewish Stage Humor, Paul Buhle on Rube Goldberg, David Ben-Horin and David Marc on TV. 70pp. $2.

Cultural Correspondence, old #6-7 (Spring, 1976)

Cultural Correspondence, old #5 (Spring, 1977)
TV Special includes Danny Czitrom on Sgt. Bilko, David Marc on Network Identity, Michael Starr on TV Evangelists, Todd Gitlin on TV News, Symposium on Norman Lear. 80pp, $2.

Cultural Correspondence, old #4 (Spring 1982)
Naomi Weisstein's unfinished feminist/humor/detective novel. Also Ron Weisberger on Jewish Stage Humor, Paul Buhle on Rube Goldberg, David Ben-Horin and David Marc on TV. 70pp. $2.

"RADICAL HUMOR:" 4pp. of Oct 1982 Northwest Passage (Seattle), edited especially for Radical Humor Fall Offensive by Doug Kahn, $1.

STARK FIST, #3 (Spring 1982)
Ultimate satire of New Right Born-Against, by the Sub-Genius Foundation. "Perfect your Subliminal vision — edit your Memory — relive your Reincarnality!" 56pp, $2.50

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<tbody>
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<td>FOCUS: THE HOLOCAUST</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish Resistance</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Sephardic Spirits</td>
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<td>Jewish Secularism</td>
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<td>Arab Press on the West Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humor, Poetry &amp; lots more</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June/July 1982</td>
<td>FOCUS: WOMEN, GAY MEN, LESBIANS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nice Jewish Girls, A Lesbian Anthology</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Harvey Milk: Mensch and Martyr</td>
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<td>Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement</td>
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<td>Orthodoxy and the Law of Return</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stories, lots more</td>
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<tr>
<td>September/October 1982</td>
<td>FOCUS: Jewish Film Festival</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish Feminist Conference</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Children of Survivors</td>
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<td>Library Cataloging</td>
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<td>Nazi Language and Israeli</td>
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<tr>
<th>Issue #</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number of Copies</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 1983</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Poems</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Resistance Bibliography</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letters &amp; lots more</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1983</td>
<td>FOCUS: RESISTANCE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Jewish Yets Of The Lincoln Brigade</td>
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<td>Resistance Bibliography</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Warsaw Ghettos Uprising</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stories, Letters, More</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 1983</td>
<td>FOCUS: HUMOR</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mad Comics</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Labor Humor</td>
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<td>Yiddish Theater</td>
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<td>Jewish Television</td>
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37
Labor Party Questions Cloning

Jerusalem . . . Israel’s Labor Party registered a protest with the Begin government today over plans to clone Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

“We are not opposed to cloning per se,” MK Haim Ben-Ami assured reporters at a press conference at the opposition party headquarters. “We do not, however, wish to see so important a matter dominated exclusively by this Likud government.” Mr. Ben-Ami argued that in all cloning programs, including the Begin pilot program, an equal number of clones should be developed from Labor Party and Likud leaders. A second alternative that his party would accept, he said, is proportional cloning based upon Knesset representation. He could not, however, name an appropriate Labor candidate to undergo cloning with Mr. Begin.

A Cabinet official who wished to remain anonymous commented: “I think the Labor Party’s got all the clones they need.”