CONTENTS

ODDS AND ENDS
Steve Fankuchen ........................................... 1
LETTERS ......................................................... 3
UP FROM SELTZER: REVIEW
Steve Fankuchen ........................................... 10
JULIA VINOGRAD: INTERVIEW
Dana Sachs .................................................... 12
THE CALLING OF JERUSALEM
Julia Vinograd ............................................. 14
FORTUNES
Julia Vinograd ............................................... 16
REASSURANCE
Julia Vinograd ............................................... 17
JERUSALEM AND THE LAWS
Julia Vinograd ............................................. 18
COSTUMES OF JERUSALEM
Julia Vinograd ............................................. 18
A RAISED CONSCIENCE IS NOT A YEAST CAKE
Ronica Stearn ................................................ 19
THE LOVERS
Julia Vinograd ............................................... 22
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
Julia Vinograd ............................................... 24
ACCUSATION
Julia Vinograd ............................................... 24
VICTOR ERLICH: INTERVIEW
Burton Levine ............................................... 25

STEVE FANKUCHEN
Publisher/Editor

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Recently SHMATE co-sponsored a talk by Lenny Zeskind at a local synagogue. It fell on me to make a fund-raising pitch to pay him. It was pitiful! My shpiel, not Lenny’s talk. Nonetheless, here I am again talking about money. Listen, if there were anyone money. But mean, that’s the other side of producing this magazine alone: I don’t get to palm off anything on anyone else. Now, I’m not complaining (at the moment). After all, I no longer have to call a meeting, break up into small groups, and convene a plenary every time I want to decide what color toilet paper to buy. I can satisfy all my previously closeted authoritarian feelings by just going out, demolishing the Charmin display, poking holes in every brand to see if it is a stinky perfumed type, and then buying whatever the hell strikes my individualistic, non-collective fancy.

Hmmm, I guess I can’t avoid the subject any longer with another digression. Too transparent. O.K., here goes nothing!

Hi out there! MONEY! Does SHMATE need money? Do bears crap in the woods? Uh oh, that’s gonna cost me. I’d better start again, maybe with some nice dry statistics this time. How about this: I did a little addition and discovered that about 30% of all subscribers were being carried after their subscriptions had expired, many for well over a year. In fact I could count on one hand the number of people I’d cut off. I figured it was simply more important to get a lot of the information in the magazine to people than it was to be picky about whether people actually paid or not. As a result, most folks seem to ignore my somewhat endless, laborious, and expensive reminders: why pay attention—let alone money—, if you are pretty sure you won’t get the axe?

Now even I know that you can’t run America’s only independent, general interest, general circulation progressive Jewish periodical that way. In fact, even if everybody were paid up, that wouldn’t pay for SHMATE. Don’t misunderstand me, subscriptions help. In fact if each of you renewed your sub for two years before I sent a reminder, if you got your school, local, or Jewish library to subscribe, and if you gave a gift subscription, it would help a lot. However, it would still take substantial donations for the magazine to improve and expand. The price of a subscription simply does not pay for its cost. After Issue #11-#12 was published, I received $335 in donations. After Issue #13 the amount was $130. That’s just not enough!!

SHMATE exists for two purposes: to provide a progressive presence within the Jewish media and to provide a Jewish presence within the progressive media. Though there are eleven opinions and ten publications for every nine Jews, there is, sadly, almost no diversity among those publications. Clones! Sustenance for our communities depends upon the vitality of our ideas, culture, and activities. The requisite diversity needs a nurturing forum if it is to thrive. That is what SHMATE is for. If you believe that this diversity is important, if you want access to what others so inclined are thinking and doing, if you want a forum that is accessible to you and not just your interests, then SHMATE is for you. And the only way to guarantee that it will do the job you want is by supporting it, not merely as a magazine subscriber, but as a supporter of a belief, of a movement.

Almost all those whose subscriptions expired with Issue #10 or earlier have, effective with this issue, been cancelled. That still leaves many folks whose subs expired with issues #11, #12, and #13 who have received reminders and still not renewed. If you fall into that category, please renew now, preferably for two years. No more reminders—or SHMATEs—will be sent unless you do. Those of you whose subscriptions expire with this issue, #14, it would be most helpful if you renewed at once, before reminders are sent. You can determine the last issue of your subscription by looking at the last two numbers in the four number code after your name on the mailing label.

One other Sisyphusian reminder: please let me know if you are moving. At least 80% of those who move do not send me a change of address, which causes expensive, time-consuming, needless problems.

When I was in 8th grade, Pat Boone said he’d shoot his daughters if he thought the Russians (or communists—I forget which) were about to take over this country. Some of us took up a collection to buy him a gun. Now, a quarter century later, I have learned that Comrade Boone has maintained his exquisite sense of sensitivity, appropriateness, and family concern. To wit: unable to make a Sunday memorial service for 16,500 aborted fetuses found in a storage locker, he sent along a cassette of his new recording, “Sixteen Thousand Faces”, dedicated to the fetuses, to be played at the service organized by anti-abortion groups at a Monrovia cemetery.
LETTERS

THE VIEW FROM OUT THERE

Letters are the lifeblood of SHMATE. I have tried to make this magazine a participatory process, not merely another consumer item. As such I have encouraged readers to write letters and, at times, letter writers to write articles. In general, this has worked well. I have managed to resist the ever-present temptation to stick my 2¢ in after every critical letter, especially the ones I consider out to lunch. However, at this point I would like to make one request and one comment. Please, please, please make sure that when you refer to specific points made in an article, those points actually have been written. Too often writers are being set up as straw men and women. At times I get the feeling some readers view the magazine as one big Rorshash blot, seeing in an article that which they would like or are afraid to see, rather than what is actually there.

This puts me in the difficult position of balancing my desire to allow the widest possible latitude to letter writers with responsibility and fairness to authors and readers. Usually I give the authors the opportunity to respond to all substantive disagreements. However, sometimes this simply isn't practical. Readers are then faced with the difficulty of going back to the original, when they read a critical letter. If they are new readers without the referred to issue of SHMATE, the problem posed is even more difficult.

The criticism is made in the following letter, that the authors of issue 11-12 on the Right were negligent in their failure to engage in criticism of the Left's inability to address the problems of the American people or to propose a vision for the future. In fact, the authors wrote exactly what they were requested to write, and the substance of that request was made clear in my introduction. If there was a fault in devoting an analysis of SHMATE entirely to the analysis of the Right rather than to an analysis of the failure of the Left or a prescription for the future, then that fault is one of the editor, not the authors.

I would also like to apologize for any lack of clarity in my introduction to the issue on the Right, which might have lead readers to view it as an apologia or criticism of the authors. It was merely intended to indicate the scope of the situation to which we were addressing ourselves.

Please note that letters will be printed anonymously or with pseudonyms only if the writer's name and address are included for verification.

Keep the letters coming! They are invaluable for the improvement of this magazine. They are, also, the only pay which authors and artists receive.

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SHMATE #11-#12 is an impressive collection of information about the Right, but I was ultimately disappointed by the lack of self-criticism exhibited by most of the writers. None of them seemed willing to wrestle with the challenges that the Right, in all of its success, presents to us. Most seemed content, instead, to curse the devil. But what we need is an articulation of a vision of heaven that might win some converts.

I'll give you some instances:

1) Does Jean Hardisty really feel okay about dismissing the morally complex "Baby Doe" question of the right-to-life of a deformed newborn simply because the Right has lumped it together with its anti-abortion posture? Hardisty seems so sure that the moral issues of the New Right are mere opportunistich plays that she refuses to take moral questions seriously: a strange and disturbing logic.

2) Does Lee Jaffe feel content, truly, to summarize Falwell's court­ship of the Jews without offering a single quote from the man? Without dealing with Falwell's renunciation of the idea that we Jews must gather in Israel before the Second Coming of Christ (see the book of interviews, Jerry Falwell and the Jews by Merrill Simon for Falwell's latest preach­ments about our people)? Without commenting on Falwell's opposition to Reagan's Bitburg escape? Without mentioning the problem of Soviet anti-Semitism and its impact of "softening up" the Jewish com­munity for men like Falwell? Without dealing with the genuine spiritual challenge that rightwing religious revivalism presents to our spiritually shallow but hungry Jewish commu­nity? Jaffe's superficial handling of a complex and developing issue neither alarms nor reassures, and reveals a lack of thought about the state of the American Jewish commu­nity today.

3) Your own box, "Whither the Jews?", also misses the boat by fail­ing to identify the church-state issue as the one that saved the Jewish vote for the Democrats. Before Falwell opened his yap at the Republican Convention and called for the "Christianizing of America" (a remark for which he apologized this past March), Reagan had the majority Jewish vote, according to the polls; after that Fundamentalist­dominated Convention, the Jews ran scared to the Democrats, "Hymietown" notwithstanding. Much as I am a fan and defender of Jewish liberalism in general, these are the facts—dankn Gott! But it seems hard for Jewish secularists to come to terms with the importance of church-state struggles...

4) Did Jean Hardisty write her paragraph about George Gilder's...
Wealth and Poverty—namely, that Gilder holds that “men by nature are violent and aggressive, characteristics that stem from the male sexual drive…”—without hearing echoes of feminist separatist rhetoric of the past? Did she truly not think about the alienating impact some of our movement’s rhetoric and upon America?

5) Does Lenny Zeskind (a pioneering investigator and writer) think we need his historical synopsis of the “Development of the Right” more than we need for him to share his thinking about why “the Left never found a way to include the millions of middle-class whites…”?

Etcetera! Where is the recognition of our failures? Where is the recognition of the constructive role of religion in the reconstruction of today’s left? Where is the careful thought about the mass psychology and symbolism of rightwing thinking and leftwing thinking? Where is moral conscience?

We have to think harder, not just write more.

On the other hand, Lyn Wells’ reflections on her work within the National Anti-Klan Network did have a feeling of “where do we go from here” and was a very constructive, informative piece. And Lenny’s detailed description of the Far Right’s thinking and activities was revealing in and of itself, as usual.

Thanks to all for the hard work.

Lawrence Bush
Rosendale, New York

By all means issue “The Right” issue of SHMATE as a book. [It is] a very well-done issue—very politically sophisticated!

Noel Peattie
Winters, California

I don’t like being guilt-tripped and I don’t believe in publicizing tzedakah, and therefore appreciate your sentiments in “Help! Fire!” Wonderful magazine, judging by Issue #11-#12.

Ruth Seid
North Hollywood, California

You asked for comments on the SHMATE issue [on the Right], and I have just gotten a chance to go through it with some care. Most of my thoughts are very flattering—I think it’s a useful and well-put-together piece. I do have one reservation which I thought I would pass along.

I found that I was a bit uncomfortable with the section of your introductory article in which you review the shortcomings of each piece in the issue. While it is impressive that you were able to do that exercise, I felt that it weakened the issue to have each piece’s omissions spelled out. My reaction was: why didn’t he tell this to each author and have the omissions corrected? Readers are reluctant to accept defensive gestures like this one, in my opinion. Rather than being impressed that the editor is sensitive to the issue’s shortcomings, they tend to read such disclaimers as apologies. As a result, they go into the issue with their attention focussed on its weaknesses.

I particularly like the attractiveness of the issue. Many of my lefty friends feel that I am too attentive to style, but I think it is an important part of any propaganda effort and should not be neglected. This issue looks good, and you should be congratulated.

Jean Hardesty
Chicago, Illinois

Congratulations on your terrific work with Lenny Zeskind in putting together the special issue on the Right. The whole thing is such a serious, intelligent, and useful analysis; and looking at the Right that carefully has been difficult for leftists to do. It’s tempting to just be overwhelmed, or to go into conspiracy mode, or to dismiss the Right as cranks, or to think that they’re all the same. SHMATE did an excellent job of articulating the actual situation, and of encouraging action in response.

I especially appreciated Lyn Well’s piece and Chip Berlet’s analysis in this context: the need for left organizing to deal with the potential for a popular fascist movement that, after all, comes from somewhere real. I’ll look forward to seeing reports from folks who are involved in countering the Right in different areas.

Sara Miles
New York, New York

In characterizing the “Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory” as a racist, eugenics organization (Issue #11-#12, p. 2) I believe you do a disservice to a great scientific institution.

There are actually two scientific laboratories at Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island, New York State. The Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory of Quantitative Biology has been mainly concerned with cellular biology, biochemistry, development, neurology, microbiology, evolution, and genetics. It has never been involved with racism or eugenics. Its leading scientists, including the director, John D. Watson, and geneticist Barbara McClintock, are neither racists nor eugenists by any stretch of the imagination.

The other laboratory at Cold Spring Harbor is a branch of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. It was formerly called the Eugenics Record Office and was under the leadership of human geneticist C.B. Davenport, whose work in genetics and eugenics did indeed have strong implications for racism. Davenport is dead and the Eugenics Record Office has been abolished. It has been replaced by the Carnegie’s Genetics Research Unit, whose leading scientist in recent decades has been Alfred D. Hershey. Hershey shared a 1969 Nobel Prize for his work in virology; he has never been involved in racism or in eugenics.

Let’s keep the record straight concerning these two totally distinct institutions.

Stanley Weinberg
Ottumwa, Iowa

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I think your issue on the Right missed an opportunity to talk about the Chassidic connection with the Right. In the last issue of the Chabad Journal in Berkeley, the Lubavitcher Rebbe endorsed the Right's attempt to put prayer in the schools. Also, the Lubavitch position on abortion, dress, drugs, crime, and even the Republican party are no different from Falwell's. That must be said because I don't believe the Lubavitchers, who I like and admire, are some aberration within Judaism. They're the real thing. It's a tough contradiction. But the Right is not just in the South, where I'm moving: it's in our own faith.

Joshua Miller
Portland, Oregon

First let me tell you how upset I was to hear about the fire. My father's store was burned out when it's in our own faith. He's in our own faith. It's devastating.

I have been going through the recent issue on the Right slowly, because a lot of the information in it is new to me, and shocking. I especially enjoyed the piece on pornography and the box of moral majority quotes. In more general terms, I admire the tone of SHMATE and find the production delightful. You are doing very important work.

Lev Raphael
East Lansing, Michigan

The Summer, 1985, issue of SHMATE (#11/12) concerning the Right was one of the most cohesive, interesting, well-written, and researched pieces on the subject I've run across. Anyone can read the newspaper stories about New Right activities, but it's very difficult to put the bits and pieces into a meaningful and understandable context without the kind of analysis this issue of SHMATE provided.

It was Lyn Well's Cedartown and the Klan that piqued my interest in this issue; aside from being written in a readable, compassionate style, it explained how everyday folks could get involved with a group any decent human being ought to have enough sense to despise. Lenny Zeskind's articles on the New Right and the Far Right seemed to bind the issue together, and Jean Hardisty's Roots of the New Right was the kind of overview one needs to put this particular movement into its political context.

The articles concerning family issues, abortion, creationism, and civil liberties touched the kind of immediate, personal subjects that bring an issue home and therefore put it in a realistic light. (I think there is some truth in John Galsworthy's statement that "Idealism increases in direct proportion to one's distance from the problem). I read the entire issue and felt I had a broadened understanding of the New Right and the dangers it poses to all of us, as individuals, families and members of our respective communities. Thanks!

As to the letter from Linda Rosenberg in Issue #11-12 deploring your "father/son/baseball rah-rah/fraternity crap" in the previous issue: Whatever one thinks about the subject of men and sports, anything a father can do with his children that gets them outdoors and away from their mother has a great deal going for it. All the good politics in the world don't amount to a hill of beans when you've got a cranky, bored kid, a long afternoon and nothing to do...

Peggy Shearn
Highland Park, Illinois

The issue of SHMATE on the Right addresses the subject of the New Right as well as any publication I've seen. By presenting the information clearly and in a non-hysterical fashion, you have given all of us a valuable tool for educating large numbers of people. My donation towards your efforts is enclosed.

Gerre Goodman
Durham, North Carolina

Linda Rosenberg, your kind makes me sick. You're in fuckin' HAWAII living off the dole (no pineapple puns intended) and you're bent outta shape because some guy's been having a good time at the ballgame with his son?!! Whatsa matter, princess, you think they oughta be doing a needlepoint vagina tapestry to hang on the wall instead?

If you feel oppressed by boys playing baseball, maybe somebody oughta wise you up to the REAL problems women face. Nobody likes a whiner, Linda — didn't yer ma ever tell you that?

Margie Schutzie
Pontiac, Michigan

Even though I found your Summer '85 issue on the Right to be extremely informative and timely, I was disturbed by your inclusion of Anne Finger's article on pornography. Within the last year some progressive newspapers and journals have tried to link anti-porn feminists to the New Right. They say that no formal alliance exists, but imply that they share similar ideology and philosophy. A rational examination of the facts shows that this is simply not true.

First of all, almost all feminists support sex education in schools, a woman's right to an abortion, the ERA, government sponsored day care and government funded women's shelters, birth control accessibility for all women, and comparable pay for comparable work. The Moral Majority is vehemently opposed to all of these. One issue does not a coalition make. On the vast majority of issues, the New Right and feminism are diametrically opposed.

Even the definitions of what pornography makes a coalition impossible on this specific cause. Just as most of us would not equate Zionism with racism, most feminists do not confuse erotica with pornography. Human relationships can be

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portrayed in print, still photographs, and film without the brutalization, degradation and dehumanization of women. The Religious Right would totally ban all materials that are sen­sual and sexual, while feminists are only trying to limit those materials that depict abuse and violence against women as a positive human interaction. And just as the 1st Amendment does not protect por­nographers from making “snuff” films and “kiddie” porn, it should not por­tray women as receiving sexual satisfaction by being brutalized and raped. The media is powerful. Men are being gradually taught to believe and are being graphically shown that women expect to be sexu­ally exploited and enjoy it as well. This is offensive to most women and dan­gerous to all. And just as Holocaust victims now have the right to sue those who spread the lie that there never were any 6,000,000 who were murdered, an abused woman should have the same right to go to court and prove the personal physical harm of pornography. Pornography may not be the only cause of vio­lence against women, but its wide­s­pread distribution certainly accelerates such effects. This is what anti-porn feminism is all about.

These days even the so-called non-pornographic men’s magazines such as Penthouse, Playboy, and Hustler regularly use racism and degradation in there depiction of women. In order to protect their blo­ated profits they, too, claim that there is a link between feminism and the Moral Majority. Last year Pent­house featured an article on “Radical Feminism and the Moral Majority: The Unholy Alliance”. Does Ms. Finger consider herself to be in alliance with these peddlers of flesh who grow rich while exploiting others?

Pornography flourishes in a capi­talist environment. Pornographers make millions from films and maga­zines, while the women they use get the left-over­s. Ronald Reagan has said that the #1 freedom in the U.S.A. is the right to become rich. As a male Socialist anti-porn feminist, I see no reason to protect the likes of Gucci­one, Flynt and Hefner’s right to make money by exploiting women.

Henry Finkelstein
Brooklyn, New York

The mag came. Beautiful! Your artical was fascinating as you talked about all the issues you were not going to cover. Anne Finger’s article on pornography was excellent. Needless to say it’s an issue I deal with regularly. My art has been pulled out of several shows, yet sex magazines are available at the corner grocery store. It is frighten­ing to read about how many organi­zations are involved in ridding the U.S. of what I had once believed could be protected by an inviolate Constitution. Here in Canada the Right has just recently been getting power, partly through a lot of U.S. money, which is interested in switching the power base from French to English, the English hav­ing more support for American Corporations.

I really liked some of the other images in the mag. Tuli Kupferberg especially. He’s a fine artist.

Jeannie Kamins
Vancouver, Canada

The main reason I am not renew­ing [my subscription] is that, not blessed with your ineffable lovel­ing-kindness and unselfrighteousness, I find it extremely difficult to attribute the quality of decency to those who evidently have no qualms whatever about actively supporting, or at least warmly endorsing, policies whose cruelty and destructiveness are probably unsurpassed in history. (I refer primarily to foreign policies, though of course these are comple­mented nicely by the domestic ones.)

In your letter of December 15, which announced the impending birth of your pride and joy, namely the special issue about the Right, you declared that “The large major­ity of people who are apathetic or who support right-wing causes are decent folks with real concerns and fears.” I am aware that in recent years the concept of decency has, inevitably, been as egregiously abused and debased as the con­cepts of human rights and democ­racy, but I would not have expected a self-styled progressive to further the decay. According to your kind of thinking, neither members of the Committee for the Free World, who respond to atrocities in Central America by screaming for more, nor the Young Americans for Freedom, who feted Roberto D’Aubuisson in Washington last year, nor Caligula, nor Tamerlane, nor Hitler, nor Nixon, nor Reagan himself should be thought of as lacking basic decency, since all of them have had real concerns and fears. (And I sup­pose those Klansmen and Nazis who murdered five radicals in Greens­boro in 1979 are, when you subject their actions to precise analysis, not really such bad fellows at all.) Every human being who has ever existed has had real concerns and fears, which are the fabric of life, and which, I submit, are no excuse for the kinds of behavior for which you seem so eager to furnish apologies.

But as if the above-quoted sen­tence were not sufficiently stupid and nauseating, you added this: “Thus, this SHMATE is being created as a tool for progressives to use outside of meetings and coffee­houses, a tool to be used not so much for talking with each other, but rather for talking with those we ordi­narily only talk about.” I really doubt that even you are capable of believing that those YAF yahoos and thugs and their like would have anything but contempt or revulsion or, at best, a bemused tolerance for whatever sweet reasonableness you might smilingly offer them. But if this really is what you believe, then I’m not sure whether such gross self-deceit should be pitied or despised, though I incline toward the latter.

Robert Becker
Baltimore, Maryland
In general, I found the articles informative and useful. The only substantive criticism would be the relative lack of space on the impact/relevance to the Jewish community of the New Right. The overviews of the Right were the strongest and most useful. The specific articles focusing on certain issues seemed weakest.

Robert Spencer
Jackson Heights, New York

Many thanks for the superb job you have done.

Ruth Denton
Berkeley, California

Enjoyed reading [Issue #11-#12] a great deal. Your publication was well-written and direct....I found out a lot about the right wing that I didn't know before. Keep up the good work.

Norman Edwards
Akron, Ohio

I want to compliment you on your fine publication. Issue #11-#12 is the first SHMATE that I've read, and I found it most informative. The New Right is a troubling phenomena for me, as I live in the Midwest and am a member of a religious minority that is frequently attacked by right-wingers. In light of this, I was particularly concerned with Lenny Zeskind's article on the Far Right when he mentions the "Christian Identity" groups. Within that section of the article he cites James Wagner as being a founder of the Odinist Nordic Faith Movement and that "forms of Nordic spirituality were the religious orientation of the (German) Nazis during Hitler's Era." I will not deny that Hitler perverted and distorted Nordic spirituality during his reign, nor will I deny that there are those who use an Odinic context to espouse racism and fascism. But, there is another side to the story — one that I fear your readers may not see.

There are growing groups of people who refer to themselves as Neo-Pagans. They are people who are interested in revitalizing the pre-Christian beliefs of their European ancestors. This pre-Christian faith was often brutally and forcibly wrested from their forebears when the Roman Catholic Church became a social/political tool during the colonization of Europe and during the Inquisition. There are many Neo-Pagans who are of Nordic heritage. They seek to rediscover their religious and indigenous roots in a kind of Odinism that is not racist or sexist and is purely the rediscovering of the ancestral beliefs of European peoples.

As Neo-Pagans (and I am one — a practicing Odinist), we are frequently attacked by Right-wingers as being 'devil worshippers' and Satanists. It might be noted that the fate of my pagan forebears, who clung to their religion in the face of extremist Christian tyranny during the Inquisition, bears a similar appearance to that of the Jewish peoples in the Holocaust. (This is not to minimize the Holocaust — during the Inquisition 9 to 13 million people died — some of whom were Jews — but the vast majority of whom were women, children, gay men, and lesbians accused of practicing the "Old Religion." In fact our traditions call this period "The Burning Times").

What I'm trying to say is that to link Odinism and Nordic spirituality without explanation or qualification to racism and fascism is an injustice to those who seek to "protect Midgard (the earth) and Asgard (the Heavens) from the tyranny of grey slave gods who would deny freedom and individuality for any people." It also obscures the fact that Hitler broke with the "New Heathen" movement in the 1930s because the Odinists within the group refused to espouse his anti-Semitic and Aryan supremacy doctrines. The charters of the Asatru Free Assembly, the Icelandic Asatruarmanen and the English Odinic Rite expressly prohibit discrimination by sex, race, creed or color. In addition, these organizations have opened themselves up to dialogue with other pagan and/or religious groups in order to dispel the notion that we, as Odinists, are in any way allied with the fascist/racist movements your publication so accurately describes. I just wanted to set the record straight so that your readers might have a more accurate accounting of the sides. Not all Odinists are racists or fascists.

Tika Tuane
Kansas City, Missouri

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! for your Issue #11-#12, "Focus: The Right".

Elizabeth Voldstad
Gorham, Maine

In some ways I was disappointed with the issue [on "The Right"]. It seemed more a catalogue (useful, too) than an analysis. That may be my problem of expectations, though.

Lesley Apt
Newton, Connecticut

[The issue on "The Right"] was great.

Morton and Esther Stavis
New York, New York

I thought your issue "Focus: The Right" was excellent.

Jesse Sank
San Diego, California

I pray that through your esteemed publication, the word of the Cause of all Causes will emanate to enough people to dramatically and drastically change the direction of many homosapiens, not Homo Sapiens.... "Focus: The Right" is truly enough food to gorge upon. I propose that in the not too distant future, you compile another blockbuster focusing on how God's eminations can educate the non-Jews.

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How can we accomplish this goal? How can we utilize the help of the Christian community to best influence the Christian community? I eagerly await my future issues and am pleased to find Jews so involved in carrying out God’s will.

Ralph Berger
Hyannis, Massachusetts

I found most necessary and most penetrating what you, the editor, had to say about missing children in Issue #11–#12. What good does a face on a milk carton accomplish? Your suggestion that the faces should appear on alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, in school staff rooms, etc. makes more sense. But, even here, isn’t it dangerous for the children’s faces to be exposed? I don’t think that a kid is going to survive a concerted kind of publicity. The kidnappers aren’t asking for money…. Let me suggest that you devote all or part of an issue to “What to Do For The Missing Children”.

Flossie Lewis
El Cerrito, California

I commend you on your editorial “Bitburg or Bust” (Fall 1985).

You may be interested in reading—and even publishing—what follows below: the very slightly amended body of the tiny letter which I sent on April 22 to the editor of the New York Times, who, naturally, did not deem it fit to print.

In fulfilling their charge, nothing, nothing may ever be more important, more necessary for the United States Holocaust Memorial Council to do than to resign now. I speak as a Jew. I seek to overcome fear.

Stephen Levy
New York, New York

Excellent Bitburg editorial. I’m with you. I’m not sure I can figure out where SHMATE is coming from—or going—but I think that’s what I like about it. Thanks!

Tom Freudenheim
Worcester, Massachusetts

I enjoyed #13 very much. Gerassi’s article was so good, I have been recommending it to anyone I see. I also like #13 in general. It had a nice balance between fiction and fact, the serious and humor, Jewish and non-Jewish.

Burton Levine
Hamden, Connecticut

[SHMATE #13] was a good issue. I enjoyed Burton Levine’s “Jewish Holidays and The Left”, especially since my parents said similar things for years — and neither of them were religious. I agree with you about Bitburg, was moved by Rankin’s piece [on AIDS], found Stern’s story very funny and involving, and was glad to get something comprehensive about Nicaragua, which I’m pretty ignorant of.

Lev Raphael
East Lansing, Michigan

You claim that Burton Levine’s article gets “the Left to clean up its act” (Fall 1985 issue). Who named Levine the expert on what offends Jews? This article is extremely insulting to active progressive Jews who attended the Socialist Scholar’s Conference. Why does SHMATE go out of its way to alienate its subscribers? Your gross insensitivity to Jewish progressives is beyond belief. I really should not be forced to defend my Jewishness or anyone else’s, but Levines’ hysterical outburst demands a response.

Granted that the Socialist Scholar’s Conference could and should have been better scheduled, (only the conference suffered from a possible diminished attendance.) But Jews should not be castigated as infidels and traitors to the faith for attending. Especially since no real conflict existed. Secular Jews like myself are not hampered by any religious restraints, but I didn’t attend Friday afternoon’s (erev Pesach) sessions because I worked all day. Nothing stopped me from attending a seder that evening. If Levine slaved all day looking for chometz or preparing chicken soup, couldn’t he have done this work at an earlier time? I attended Saturday’s workshops and was still able to go home and personally prepare a meal for the seder at my house. I even found time to attend a 3rd seder on Sunday, which was organized by Brooklyn New Jewish Aganda. I had my seders and conference too. Boycotting the SSC would have been fruitless, and having Jewish issues discussed was enlightening to Jews and Gentiles alike. By insisting that Jewish concerns be included, progressive Jews were really standing up for themselves. The cause they were “promoting” was the fight against anti-Semitism. On a holiday celebrating our emancipation and continuing struggle to exist I found the SSC to be part of a perfect way to celebrate Pesach. And with a bare minimum of preparation and initiative, no conflict existed on Friday for any Jew, and no conflict existed on Saturday for any secular or Reform Jew to attend the SSC. So, “where’s the Beef?”

As one of the few who voted for Barry Commoner in the 1980 presidential election, I resent Levine’s totally gratuitous and slanderous labeling of him as a “court Jew.” Unlike Jewish Reaganites such as Decter, Kristol, and Podhoretz, Commoner never campaigned as a Jew, never tried to appeal to the Jewish electorate, and did not promise to deliver Jewish votes. He promised nothing to Jews for their support of his candidacy. For over twenty years Commoner has been one of the leaders in the scientific community in the fight for progressive causes and his support of Jackson came out of honest convictions and not for promised rewards. I, on the other hand, as an early McGovern supporter could not switch to Jackson, even though his stand on the issues was almost exactly the same as McGovern’s. The motivation of progressive Jews who stayed with Jackson were decent, and I would not criticize their decision. Their Jewishness is not for the likes of Levine to judge and, in effect, undermine the unity of the progressive Jewish community.

Likewise, any Jew who chose to participate in the planning of the

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SSC should not be excommunicated from Judaism or subjected to Levine's personal "committee on Un-Jewish Activities." Every one of those condemned by Levine has an outstanding record in fighting anti-Semitism, fascism, and Nazism. To us progressive Jews, these are the real Jewish issues we fight for, and as Jews we have the right to articulate our concerns wherever and whenever possible. Attendance at this conference in the role of fighting Nazism clearly indicated that we do "stick up for ourselves." Obviously Levine has higher priorities.

The non-Jewish organizers of SSC may be guilty of insensitivity, and a clear, direct commentary could have been directed to this issue. But Jewish participants are not guilty of anything, except rising to the defense of the Jewish people in violation of religious tradition. Does Levine remember that the Warsaw Ghetto uprising took place on Pesach and that it was led by progressives, Socialists and Communists? The Orthodox "stick up for themselves" in the traditional manner. Contrary to promoting unity, Levine is being unnecessarily divisive by putting the mark of Cain on some progressive Jews. Levine has learned his lessons well from the ultra-Orthodox. They would unite all Jews behind Halacha and stone Jewish transgressors. But Orthodox Judaism's religious values are irrelevant to me and their political ideology is personally repugnant. Some Orthodox Jewish groups even appeared on local television news to criticize the "other" Jews who condemned Reagan's Bitberg visit. These "other" Jews, (including The Generation After) were at the SSC. Who does Levine want to ally himself with?

The Left in this county is too fractured without SHMATE continuing to drive a wedge between the Left and progressive Jews and, even more important, splintering the Left into hostile camps. SHMATE should learn to build bridges within the progressive community and not burn them. It should also know that unity within the progressive Jewish community does not come by insulting any segment of it. Tactics such as these can only lead to isolation.

Henry Finkelstein
Brooklyn, New York

My mother liked Ronica Stern's story. A lot. So much, in fact, that she schlepped the whole rag to a hospitalized friend (an 80-year old guy with lymph cancer) as a pick-up. Something to laugh at. I liked it, too. Also the Gerassi piece on Nicaragua. Not the cartoons. though.

Sandy Berman
Edina, Minnesota

Please stop sending SHMATE. No offense—I just have a lot to read.

Liz Temkin
New Haven, Connecticut

I enjoy and appreciate SHMATE tremendously! I'd love to see more of the Jewish feminist perspective.

Fran Koski
Millersville, Pennsylvania

I sent a [renewal] check for two years because I wanted to show you that I believe you will make it for another year (and hopefully more).

Nathan Hurvitz
Los Angeles, California

As much as I like and appreciate your magazine... I am well over 89 years old and can no longer do very much reading.

Hartwig Heymann
Albany, California

I think SHMATE is terrific, especially up here in the mountains of New Hampshire!

Laura Treuman
Franconia, New Hampshire

Great magazine!

Larry Blum
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The comment by Aryeh ben Root on Burton Levine's articles on Israel, while inelegant, is to the point. You claim that Israel is not the issue on which you test a progressive, yet you constantly publish articles critical of Israel. I have been waiting for an article that will point out some of the positive and progressive aspects of Israel. Are there none? It's O.K. to criticise, but only negative criticism?

Your articles on so-called progressive countries are always laudatory. Don't they have any defects? How about some balance?

Simon Fellner
Long Island City, New York

You complained [in Issue #9] about the "double standard" of the Left in criticising Israel for abuses it doesn't seem to notice in the Arab bloc.... We have to focus our energies... where we are most likely to achieve some results. Criticism of democratic, open societies has at least the hope of influencing public opinion and, thus, official positions — eventually. Where there is no democracy, criticism from outside the regime (unless supported by economic or political boycott) is irrelevant and useless. That doesn't excuse the Left for ignoring abuses by undemocratic states, but may help to explain the concentration on U.S. and Israeli misconduct. After all, if these two nations won't act with some evidence of moral concern, who will? I think the criticism meted out to Israel by the American Left is a measure of the hope placed in that country.

The material on Israel and its foreign policy, Bolivian connection, etc. was excellent stuff.

Jane Sass Collins
Medford, Massachusetts

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21
REVIEW

UP FROM SELTZER


First things first: this book is very funny. It's not that you will roll on the ground shaken by convulsions of uncontrollable laughter. It's the kind of funny where, if you tend to read in the bathroom, there will be a long line angrily banging on the door wanting you to get it in gear. Hochstein's cartoons divide the American Jewish experience into four generations, exemplified by four generations of "nice Jewish boys", Yussel, Irving, Robert, and Sean Pincus and "nice Jewish girls", Yetta, Shirley, Barbara, and Kimberly Koplowitz. The names—and the pictures of the people—tell it all. The book proceeds to evolve as variations on a theme. For instance:

Typical Jewish Male Occupation
1st generation: Sells on the street from a pushcart.
2nd generation: Owns a retail store or a dress factory.
3rd generation: "My son, the doctor."
4th generation: Leads sensitivity training sessions.

Typical Jewish Female Occupation
1st generation: Worked in a sweatshop till marriage, then became a housewife.
2nd generation: Became a housewife the day she was born.
3rd generation: Taught school until she got married.
4th generation: "My daughter, the doctor."

The practice of developing different descriptions for men and women is common in Up From Seltzer. This innovation is not only a comment on Hochstein's strength but also on the weakness of most social criticism and satire.

The most creative aspect of Up From Seltzer is the author's recognition and portrayal of a "fourth generation", what one might call "The California Generation."

Cure For Nervous Tension
1st generation: Work, work!
2nd generation: A drive in the country.
3rd generation: Valium.
4th generation: Rebirthing

The Official Cause Of Death
1st generation: He worked himself to death so you could have a better life.
2nd generation: When he heard you flunked out of medical school, he died of a broken heart.
3rd generation: I warned him not to play tennis after a big lunch.
4th generation: He blissed out on quaaludes.

Most cartoons and jokes involve a certain amount of stereotyping to make their point. This is not an inherently individual situation, even though it is often exploited to produce sexist, racist, and homophobic "humor". Hochstein uses his stereotypes to illuminate and poke fun without being oppressive. In the tradition of Lenny Bruce, he tries to get us to look at some of the realities of ourlives, including some of the less attractive ones, by substituting the door of humor for the stone wall of rhetoric.

Hochstein includes a very clever section in English-Yiddish grammar as an addendum. He begins by referring to the context in which Yiddish evolved.

"Yiddish conversation was as subtle and precise as you'd expect from a language that had 432 ways to express feelings of pain... Remember, Yiddish flowered in the ghettos of Eastern Europe where spies and Czarist agents—real and imagined—secretly lurked to denounce a poor Jew for heresy or subversion. To stay out of trouble, Jews learned to communicate through indirectness, innuendo, and subtle shades of meaning. The consequence is that while Yiddish is extremely precise, it doesn't always mean what it seems to be saying."

Then, he illustrates:

The Imperative Negative Miserative
Another form of speech that asserts misery, in this case by ordering the listener to cease an interrogation.
EXAMPLE: "What's wrong? Don't ask!"
Note: In polite conversation, the hearer of an imperative negative miserative must immediately respond with, "So, who's asking?" to which the only polite answer is, "So, all right, I'll tell you!" (assertive capitulative)

The Objective Advancetive
Another way to give special emphasis to a declaration is to advance the direct object of a verb to the head of a sentence.
EXAMPLE: "Trouble I could live without."

One could spend a lot of time analyzing the generations and stereotypes in Up From Seltzer. Certainly, they are not always appropriate. Many articles will be written discussing the "real meaning" of the situations pictured in the book. But, when that happens, we will be fortunate if Peter Hochstein writes a number of them.

STEVE FANKUCHEN

HOW TO TELL
A DEEPLY RELIGIOUS MAN

1ST GENERATION: Never misses morning prayers, evening prayers, Shabbos or High Holiday services.

2ND GENERATION: Never misses Shabbos or High Holiday services.

3RD GENERATION: Usually makes it to High Holiday services.

4TH GENERATION: Never misses going to Acapulco on Yom Kippur.
**JEWISH LEISURE UNIFORM**

1st Generation: “So who has time for leisure?”

2nd Generation: For her, a mink jacket over checked slacks. For him, a Hawaiian shirt over blue serge suit pants.

3rd Generation: Anything with an alligator on it.


**EXCERPTS FROM A SUICIDE NOTE**

1st Generation: My wife Yetta is dead. My sons Irving and Max have taken over my business and are running it into the ground. The grandchildren never visit. I have nothing left to live for. Somebody say Kaddish for me, if it isn’t too much trouble.

2nd Generation: The business is bankrupt, my son the doctor is too important to return telephone calls, and my wife Shirley puts on perfume at night and says she’s going to the movies. I hope you all have a wonderful time at my funeral.

3rd Generation: A cross-eyed woman is suing me for malpractice during wrinkle surgery. My wife is having an affair with the tennis pro. My children never write from the commune in California. Enjoy your lives, because I just wrote my will leaving everything to the United Jewish Appeal.

4th Generation: I have decided to reunite my karma with the universal wholeness of the ecosphere. Please scatter my ashes so that they won’t intrude on anybody’s space.

**THE TRAGIC STORY OF MY CHILDHOOD PET**

1st Generation: “She was a wonderful cow, but when Grandpa Yussel lost his job, we had to eat her.”

2nd Generation: “We were so poor, we couldn’t afford a pet. I used to put a leash on my brother and teach him to pee on fire hydrants.”

3rd Generation: “I had to give up my pet puppy dog when I was sixteen, because my mother was too sick to walk him for me.”

4th Generation: “We decided it was ecologically unsound to keep a boa constrictor in the city.”

**JEWISH MARRIAGE DISASTERS**

1st Generation: Never got married.

2nd Generation: Married a gentile.

3rd Generation: Married a black.

4th Generation: Married somebody of the same sex.
Julia Vinograd is well-known in Berkeley as both a poet of the street and an inveterate blower of soap bubbles. Several of her street poems appeared in SHMATE #9. Her poems, which appear on pages 14-18 and 22-24 in this issue, are unlike any others she has written. They come from The Book Of Jerusalem, a group of poems written in a several month period about seven years ago, but only published this past year in an edition of 400 copies. Readers interested in the entire collection should write to Bench Press, 347 Teddy Ave., San Francisco, CA 94134. The artwork appearing with the poems on pages 14-17, 22, and 23 are papercuts done by Gerre Goodman specifically for this edition of the poems. Folks interested in her work can contact her through Galia Graphics, 1806 Palmer St., Durham, N.C. 27707.

The following interview by Dana Sachs is an edited version of one that appeared in the Summer, 1985, issue of J.A.C.O.B.'S LETTER.

Dana Sachs: Tell me a little bit about your background.
Julia Vinograd: Well, let's see. I'm forty-one. I was born in Berkeley but grew up in L.A. — Pasadena, to be exact, and I came to Berkeley for college. L.A. without a car is the pits, forget it. And I can't drive. I got my degree here in '75 in English and was one of the eight hundred people busted in the Sproul Hall sit-in for the Free Speech Movement. Went to Iowa University and got a Master of Fine Arts, which is a totally useless degree except for teaching poetry, but it's a lot of fun. Then I came back to Berkeley, and I've been here ever since, I've been writing poetry since high school, and I just didn't stop. My first book came out in '69, and I've had either one or two books a year ever since. I've had two selected works, "Berkeley Street Cannibals" and "Cannibal Consciousness." And I've been in anthologies and stuff like that. That's all one type of poetry. The Jerusalem poems are something else. They happened about five to ten years ago in about two and a half months. I don't know where they came from. Yes, I'm Jewish, but I didn't grow up Orthodox or anything. I don't know the tradition. When I first wrote the poems and was showing them to people, somebody congratulated me on my use of the Shechina myth, and I didn't know what they were talking about.

Dana Sachs: What influenced you to write it?
Julia Vinograd: I haven't the damnedest! It came from nowhere. Nothing like that's ever happened before, or since. It left me very much impressed and a little bit bewildered. I think they should have landed on a Hebrew scholar or someone who knew what they were doing. But also I'm somewhat flattered. I think they're dignified, and I've never done anything dignified before.

Dana Sachs: So do you find the reception you've gotten from this poetry different from what you've gotten in the past?
Julia Vinograd: Oh yes. Well for one thing, I can't — I have a sort of hot buttered popcorn approach to selling my street poems. And I can't do that with these things. They take time and interest. Like I say, it took me a long time to get them published and I mainly sell them to people that I've shown the manuscript to and that are interested in them, or that have seen them and expressed interest. It's a whole different set of people. People are either totally turned off by them or totally enthusiastic. There's no middle ground. And the street poems — people like 'em. They bring 'em home as a souvenir of the street. It's all in context.

Dana Sachs: So this is more personal maybe.
Julia Vinograd: They're the closest I've ever come to writing love poems. My friend who typed them up said it reminded her of the Song of Songs — five years later when the honeymoon was over. But yeah, it's about love.

Dana Sachs: It's very cynical though.
Julia Vinograd: Well, you know, it's a difficult love, but it's love all the same.

Dana Sachs: What are you trying to say about love?
Julia Vinograd: I don't think there's ever anything to say about love, except that it exists. I mean, nine-tenths of most human writing is about it. People call it heaven, people call it hell, everything in between, but the main thing is simply that it exists.

Dana Sachs: How do you think spending so much time on the streets has affected your writing?
Julia Vinograd: Well, apparently, it hasn't affected the Jewish stuff because that came out and I'd been on the — I don't live, I don't sleep in a doorway or anything like that. I live in the Berkeley Inn. I have a room there. And most of my stuff is about the street. And the Jerusalem poems — they came from nowhere. It's the closest I've come to inspiration. It made me acutely uncomfortable.

Dana Sachs: And that was... a message from God?
Julia Vinograd: I don't know!

Dana Sachs: How do you feel about being Jewish?
Julia Vinograd: It's a part of my identity. I wouldn't want to be anything else. I didn't know if I felt it strongly until I found myself writing those things. I mean, I don't even read that much Jewish literature. I sort of avoid World War Two books. They make me a little bit uncomfortable.

Dana Sachs: Why is that?
Julia Vinograd: I don't really like the feeling of moral superiority because we got kicked around that you find in such books. That's not moral. That's accidental. Just because the bad guys were bad doesn't mean the people they kicked around are all saints. I'm not a saint and I don't like being told I am.

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DS: What do you think is the most difficult thing about being a poet?

JV: People don't think poetry is to be read. They think it is to be respected from a safe distance and avoided at all costs. Most people will have had to memorize something like "The Charge of the Light Brigade" in fifth grade and then write a fifty-page essay on Milton's "Paradise Regained" in college. By the time they've been through that they want nothing more to do with the stuff. They think it's all written in code and it's a form of intellectual torture. My street poems are an attempt to make poetry accessible. I can't say the same thing about the Jerusalem poems. They take time and patience. But at least you don't have to know some kind of code like you would for Ezra Pound or Finnegans Wake or something like that. And it's not necessarily people's fault. A lot of poets go in for, "You have to be initiated in order to understand my work." And the whole idea of the poet's personality—the extra-sensitive soul—I don't know where people got that. I mean, I know them!

DS: How do you see yourself as an artist?

JV: Well, I'd have to give you two answers. One is for everything else I've written and one for the Jerusalem poems. In the street poems I'm a communicator so people won't just edit nine-tenths of what they see because they don't think it's important. And people walking down the street will go to great efforts not to see the street because it's not nice to see a "spare-changer." I don't mean talk with them, I mean literally SEE, have visual memory of. There's a whole type of editing and censoring process inside people's heads, that cuts them off from too much of the world. With my street poems, I describe street-people, con-men, people who read murder mysteries, drunks, musicians, street dancing, drugs, parties, tarot readers. I try and show them a world they look at but don't see. If they see it in a poem maybe next time they'll recognize that they're seeing it. Now that's what I do with the street poems.

The Jerusalem poems...I think it was an attempt to show something beautiful and strange. The Jerusalem poems...that feeling of being Jewish is so strange that it's almost been forgotten. I last came on it reading the Old Testament. It's not pride. It's not moral. And it's certainly not cultural. It's an emotional link. It's a passion. I don't know.

DS: Do you feel the Jerusalem poems should speak for themselves?

JV: I hope they do. I really do. Of course, I may have written them, but I'm certainly not qualified to speak for them. I didn't know what was going on and I still don't.

DS: So you wrote it really quickly?

JV: About two and a half months.

DS: Do you see yourself as moving more toward The Book of Jerusalem's style of poetry?

JV: No. I must have written six or eight books of poetry since I've written that. I think it's like getting struck by lightning. It doesn't happen that often. One of the reasons I waited so long before it got published was that I wanted to see if it would happen again, but it didn't.

DS: And you get inspiration from what you experience?

JV: Oh yes. Whenever I see anything interesting I wonder how to turn it into a poem. It's not journalism, but the street stuff is very close to being journalism of the emotions, the unseen, unnewsworthy things. You know, catch a moment and write it down. It's a large part of my identity. I've been writing for a long time, and it's what I do. It's not the only part. I blow soap bubbles on the street for the kids and I'm known as the "Bubly Lady." And lately I was part of the anti-apartheid demonstrations, and that was something too, but I mainly think of myself as a poet.

DS: Do you think people see you differently as an artist because you live a life so different from most poets?

JV: I'm not all that sure that I do. I mean, I know a large batch of poets in North Beach and a lot of them are on S.S.I. too. It's the closest you can get to a government grant these days. I don't think I could stand spending nine-tenths of my life in literary conversation, which is the main problem I have with North Beach.

DS: Was it difficult to get the first ones published?

JV: The street poems. The first book of street poems was published by Oyer Press. I had trouble selling that. It was my first book. It had things wrong with it. The next two were published by Fred Cody and the second was a big hit. Berkeley Beat Game—that sold 3,500 copies and it could have sold four thousand, but my feet were beginning to hurt.

DS: Did you put them in bookstores, too?

JV: I always do. Cody's, Moe's, Shakespeare's, Shambhala takes them sometimes. The one thing that bothers me with the Jerusalem poems is that I simply cannot hustle them the way I hustled the street poems. One reason I'm glad they're going to have a review in this JACOB magazine is to get them some dignified publicity. I don't do dignity!...I want the Jerusalem poems to have some publicity, not the bubbles. I got interviewed by one other person. Their interview was called "Vinograd: Bubbling with Poetry."

DS: I won't do that. But why does it bother you?

JV: Well, the bubbles are separate from the poetry. And they really don't match the Jerusalem stuff. It doesn't bother me. I enjoy the bubbles, I'm fond of them, and I'm kind of proud of the whole shenanigan. It's just that it doesn't match.

DS: What were you trying to express with all the violent imagery?

JV: Jerusalem's never been exactly a peaceful place...People have sort of flaunted her throughout history like a trophy. She complains about that—they don't want to keep her and live with her. It's almost impossible to live with the object of your desire, you know, to live an ordinary, mundane life. And that's, I think, what's necessary to go on living. The problem is not to let it all become ordinary, but at the same time to do the errands.

DS: Were you trying to say anything political?

JV: Not really. I don't think I have a political ear. I pick up, every time I read about the Mideast, just echoes of violence. So Jerusalem has violence around her, but that's only an echo. The thing I was judging was the need for caring.
“Jerusalem,” the Lord called softly and his voice reached all over the world till drunkards shook their muddled heads and the smiles of businessmen wavered briefly, and lovers were suddenly jealous for a moment, though not of each other. But there was no answer.

“Jerusalem,” the Lord commanded with all the authority of grief, “Where are you hiding and why?”

There was no spoken answer but the air between his hands shrugged of its own accord and the invisible hair, most sacred and desolate, fell against his face. The Lord carried Jerusalem as a woman carries an unborn child.

“What are you doing here?” he asked her.

“I’m tired,” Jerusalem drowsed, but forced herself back into words.

“They look, they pray, the dance, they’re exalted, and then they worry if their parking meters have expired. I don’t mind the wars, I never and my lips are even more brazen and it’s all small and unworthy and most wearisome. I’m tired of them, they’re not and they make me lonely. I want to stay with you.”

“No,” said the Lord, “not yet.”

“Soon?” pleaded Jerusalem.

“And you promised you’d never forget her. The Lord reminded her gently, “It hurts,” she answered simply, “to be always open in a haven shut in elegant boxes, but far They don’t know how to touch They don’t want me, only my
They want to win their arguments, not understand what they're arguing about, they couldn't care less. What have I to do with them?"

"You are them," the Lord told her, "when you were passionate and fickle, so were they. When you were restless and bitter, so were they. Now that you want more, they may too. Go back where you belong and make their parking meters explode; you've been called a thief many times, pry open those boxes. Do you think it will happen of itself?"

Jerusalem cast down her eyes, shuddered as if with cold and nodded. "But why did you call me then?" she asked as she re-inhabited her stones. The Lord caressed the air between his hands, where she had been.

"I was lonely," the Lord admitted to nobody, "but it's over now."
FORTUNES

The Lord locked himself away from Jerusalem as from a loathsome plague of tenderness. Her blood had spilled on his heart, he was contaminated and afraid and cursed with certainty. He gossiped with death and learned nothing. He made and destroyed many tall cities, each splendid enough, with its straight towers and crooked passions.

Then he stood looking at his hands without interest and waited.

"Shall I tell your fortune?" Jerusalem asked.
"I know the future," the Lord answered heavily, without looking up.
"Not your future, your fortune," Jerusalem corrected. The Lord looked at her then, a single raw glance, but she hid her head in her whispering prayers and trembled.

"You are my fortune," the Lord spoke almost clinically as doctors speak of terminal illness, "should I count myself fortunate?"

Jerusalem looked up, her face burning with unwholesome and holy fire and fantastic pride but her voice was steady and detached as the Lord's. "Should I?" she countered.

'No," the Lord admitted, "I'm not a rabbit's foot or suchlike charm. But love is real only among equals and I have no equal. I am alone."
"Not now," Jerusalem's voice was low and warm, sand sifting gently in the desert to cover footsteps. "Now even more so," the Lord spoke briefly. "That is why you are beautiful."

"I don't care," Jerusalem blazed. "'Real' is a door we've both lost count of closing, we love each other and I tell you I don't care." The Lord tossed her a small tired smile. "But I do care," he reminded her, touching her blood on his heart with a sense of wonder, "and you are very beautiful."
"You look at me when you're bored with the world,"
Jerusalem cried against the Lord,
"and only then, I'm a hobby for you,
a vacation for your eyes.
You wear my beauty like sunglasses
to soften the glare of things going wrong.
And they are going wrong,
I've seen black fire stir sluggishly beneath men's minds,
I've watched a compass take its clothes off,
I've heard a homesick orchid
distill poison, one inevitable drop entrapping others, like music."
She paused for breath,
shadowed with the memory of charming disasters.

"And what have you done about it?" the Lord asked her.
"Why should I do anything?"
she raised her startled eyebrow.
"If things weren't going wrong
you wouldn't wear my beauty at all.
But they are going wrong, I've seen—"

"I know," the Lord interrupted, "I've seen myself.
You're one of the things
going wrong, you know.
You might do something about it."
"You might do something about it," Jerusalem countered,
"I was going to lead up slowly
with classical poses and graceful reproaches and a great show
of indifferent fireworks.
You won't do anything at all then?"
"You might try yourself," the Lord suggested again.
"No," Jerusalem reassured him, "I won't take my beauty away.
You need me too much."
"I suppose I do," said the Lord without enthusiasm.

"And after all," Jerusalem added as an afterthought,
"things go wrong anyway."
Jerusalem is reading the book of the laws.
Her dark prayers fall away from her gleaming neck
arched in concentration, a careless swan mocking the axe.
Her long fingers pull at the drowned letters to entice them off the page
and into her skin. "There are so many," she comments finally,
combing her prayers back into place, leaving the book open,
"so many big and little details. Why?" she asked the Lord,
touching her defeated fingertips lightly with her tongue
(the words have not followed her pulse).
"Why did you make so many?"
"Process of elimination," the Lord replies,
"so that even the wicked and ignorant would sometime do something right,
simply by living."
"But," Jerusalem considers his answer and tries to hide her smile.
"I never do."
"I know," the Lord says wearily. "Close the book. I can wait."
The book closes and her smile breaks into war.

Costumes of Jerusalem

Time does not matter to Jerusalem.
The sleek modern treachery of a nation
or the out-of-date religious sacrilege?
She tries them on impartially like a professional model
showing how wedding dresses should be worn
without a wrinkle.
There are enough, too many, and the Lord removes them all
out of forgiveness, or desire, or simply a gentle reminder
that Jerusalem is still too young and may only play
at weddings or betrayals.
The skin of Jerusalem is always the same,
luminous and accusing,
a body made of eyes that never shut
except when the Lord caresses her
and at the same time creates new dangers that require her blindness.

The wedding dresses fragment, nothing quite fits,
white lace decays over stone,
like the many versions of legends, no single one can be true
all by itself, it would not be enough all by itself.
So Jerusalem wears many costumes of faithfulness,
yes, and believes each one is the last while it lasts
and the same of the next.
She is always convincing on honeymoons
as a professional virgin who slips off her nightdress
to reach out trustfully for well earned trouble,
and finding it sensual and full of sorrow.
Time does not matter to the Lord.
Everybody is very busy telling me what to do. And they are very careful to tell me what to do by first telling me, it's your life and who am I to tell you what to do.

And then they tell me.

Look, I'm no big corporation. So many advisors confuse me. I'm not clever, either. I can't evaluate every opinion by looking into the background of my well-meaning board.

Take Bebie. She's now in Las Vegas living with a man, who is hanging around to become her fourth husband. Suddenly, she's not taking chances. She tells me:

"The young people know what they're doing. You got to live with a person for a few years. After you've been together, then you can try marriage."

Bebie is sixty-two and married three times. Her first lasted fourteen years, her second, twelve, and her third, fifteen. They all ended in divorce. "Mainly," she says, "we couldn't get along."

Bebie's advice I can live without.

So—who's next? Barney, my husband? He doesn't want to give advice. He would just like to get me to a doctor. A mind doctor. His story?

"What are you trying to do to me? The first time in twenty-eight years I can lay my head down in peace. We made a fire from the mortgage and now you wanna leave. With respect in my heart I am telling you, you are crazy, Gertie. One year more and the last one (God spare him) finishes school, the business is quiet — and I don't have angina. Gertie, what's wrong? Don't leave me. You want me to have angina?

How can I explain? How can I tell him, I'm a woman and my consciousness is raised. Don't laugh. I may be sixty, but I feel "untried".

Alright. I'll try to make you understand without all the words I'm just learning, so I don't have to go to the dictionary every minute. If one of those words creeps in, consider it a bonus along the way. So — I'm gonna tell you quite a few things and they're all serious. Just have a little patience.

First, they tell me — you're not a chicken. This, my best friends tell me. The women I meet once a week at Ms. Petrinelli's house say age is a feeling, not a number. And Ms. Isaacs threw in, if someone is feeling you that's the best way to forget the number.

I'm not crazy about Ms. Isaacs.

But, in general, the talk was about responsibility and contribution. You had a responsibility to yourself. To find out what your main contribution was as a woman. To find out how you can make it. And to do it.

So I'm asking: You think you can find this out watch-
a church by yourself. And more important, you must. Have you ever tasted the wine of isolation?" (I tell you—this other me was not embarrassed by fancy talk!)

And she kept going. Telling me I must walk alone at night. Daring me. "Could you do it in New Rochelle?" She wouldn't leave me alone. "Eat at a small cafe. Gertrude, you must come forward and meet the people."

I swear to you, the first few days it was as if I was led by the nose by a power stronger than myself. And every joint in my body seemed eager to help. I walked lighter and faster. When I looked in the mirror (something I avoided entirely), my eyes were wide and actually winked back. Every day the clothing I wore seemed looser and less confining. It was as if I had been lacquered up—like those hair sprays—and was caught in a spring rain. Like there was a natural shine to me!

What a trick! What a secret! I liked myself. Me, Gertrude Gettler. Not once did I think of things I had to do. Just arranged a program for myself, for what I wanted. Sometimes I sat at the edge of the water watching the fishermen cleaning their fish. And thoughts would come to me that would puzzle me. Years ago if Barney ever went fishing (a few times it happened) and would bring me home fish to clean, I really resented the work. I didn't sing in the sun over it. I cursed the cuts in my fingers and bit my lip, because I didn't want to fight over something he brought into the house like it was a big present.

Yet here I was, getting up earlier, just to make sure I didn't miss any of the steps. I watch how he makes a neat cut in the belly, gets rid of the intestines and then soaps up the octopus, beating it again and again on the stones. You know, I will probably never cook an octopus in my life—but suddenly, I'm excited. Because I know exactly how to clean one. It's like that here. Every piece of information I collect, I feel is a gold mine. Like no one ever had it before. Alright, crazy. But it makes me feel "new." You know what I mean? Not young—new. A very good feeling.

Like the time I walked through a field and picked parsley and camomile. I really examined the grasses and berries that grew there. On one of those afternoons, I took along a whole bread, a fat wedge of cheese, and some tomatoes. And I was laughing to myself. At home—always the diet, the diet. Here, I could eat a whole loaf of bread and my clothes were loose on me.

"Well," my friendly voice explained, "now you only eat when you want. You're not cooking for when other people are hungry or eating leftovers they shouldn't go to waste. Or that killer—remember stuffing your mouth during the television commercial because it looked so good? Now, you eat when you're hungry and that's enough."

I was completely in agreement. That voice inside me was stronger and much happier now that I was seeing things her way. The day was beautiful. So I thought I would put my face up to the sunlight a little. I lay down on a large stone in the grass. And maybe I dozed. When I woke I felt the sun's warmth, but there was a shadow blocking it.

A dark-haired man with a lot of creases in his face smiled down on me. He said something in words I didn't understand and then: "Good afternoon. You are English?" And, pointing to the little basket of herbs and flowers I had assembled: "The English always love the garden, I see."

Now—go explain why that was such a compliment to me. First, that he should think I'm English—like Mrs. Miniver, maybe. And second, that I'm a nature lover. My God—this was maybe the second time in my life I was sitting on plain grass—without a blanket and a thermos. Usually I itch or I'm afraid of mosquitoes or it's too damp. But now, my heart opened because he recognized that I was at home here. Which I was! Do you understand?

Well, there didn't seem to be any harm in it. I offered him half of the bread and cheese. And he spoke enough English that we could get along. I answered his questions honestly. Why should I lie? And it was a wonderful afternoon. Maybe you'd like it if I spiced the story up a little? Told you we had romance or even that I wanted one? I can't say that. First, it didn't happen. Second—that's not the reason or the problem. It's just one of the lovely things that happened. That's all.

Two strangers took time—had time—to listen to each other—talk—admire the sky and the earth and not be frightened that we wanted something from each other. At home, a man would sit down next to me on the grass, I would run a mile. To ask him a personal question? I would never have the nerve. It was delicious. This personal touching with hands off. If you know what I mean.

You think it happened only once? No, over and over again. On a bus, if I was lost or asked a question, six people became my guides. In a grocery if I pointed to a certain cheese, someone would make a face and point to maybe a cheese that was fresher or better tasting. Who would know? But that the person wanted me to take advantage of his superior knowledge or that he was simply being helpful—that I understood.

Alright. The twenty-one days flew away. I came back and everyone fussed over me. "You look so much younger and rested." And my best friends would pull me aside and say, "What did you really do, Gertie?" And their husbands would slap Barney on the back and say, "You old rooster. You're gonna have to run to catch up to her now. She became a spring chicken!"

I hated everybody. There was no one to explain it to. Barney listened politely the first few days—but each conversation, I'd notice, would start in the kitchen or the bedroom and would inch its way into the den (if I'm talking to a person I have to be where he goes!) Sooner or

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later the television would go on and the conversation would drop dead.

What was the good of listening to your own feelings — opening your eyes — stretching out a hand ready to take a bite out of the world if no one was interested?

Here, it was: “Yeah, yeah, Ma. Sure — I’ll bet it was great. Er — Ma — did you remember to get my dungarees out of the cleaner? I wouldn’t had you wash ‘em, but some dumb dame sewed rhinestones around the patches. Do you think they’ll come off?”

My college senior was worried about the rhinestones on his patches — and I’m worried about the patches on my life. I want to shake them — scream. Don’t take me for granted. Don’t ignore me. I found something wonderful. Help me give you a present.

But no one takes it from me. Not in the life I know. And that other Gertrude person? She’s not a smiling voice anymore. She thunders like Samuel or Jeremiah. Except in my voice.

“Fool”, she storms. “They’ll never let you go. They have a good thing going. A cook, a cleaner, a washer and a worrier. And that’s all they want. Their own traffic and you should clean the footprints. Gertrude, you have got to go out and make your own footprints. When did you feel alive? Now — or in those twenty-one days?”

I didn’t have to answer. She knew.

“You must tell Barney. You must fight for your life.”

And she starts again and she never lets up. She may be a passionate person, but she’s also something of a nag. I overlook this only because I ache in my heart so much, I know she must be right. Otherwise, why am I not at peace?

So I’ve told Barney and the consciousness raising group and my own mother who is eighty-four and is “functional”. That’s her doctor’s word — not mine. She lives with her younger sister near the boardwalk and they cook together, argue about the afternoon stories on television and seem to enjoy themselves.

I look at them and think, if I am lucky that’s a happy ending to life. What will happen from here to there? I don’t know, but the point of what I started to say is — I simply have to try to find out. Do you understand?

LETTERS: continued

Thanks for sending the free copies of SHMATE. Although I support the focus of the magazine and admire all the hard work you put into it... I am not subscribing. However, I wanted to take the time to support your work and maybe at some point when I have a better job, I will financially feel comfortable getting another magazine subscription.

Renee Franco
Atlanta, Georgia

I read about your periodical in the Skeptical Inquirer, and it sounds interesting. The monolithic Jew is more Begin then Peres, and though the sad reasons for the Jewish united front are indeed compelling, reason and justice must be given their time also. I am a longtime “fan” of the Jewish people, who thinks that they should, nevertheless, be seen whole, uncosmeticised, warts and all. You sound like a welcome change from the likes of Commentary and Kahane.

T.J. McKiernan
South Bend, Indiana

There are quite a few Jewish Eskimos, though many don’t acknowledge and/or practice Judaism?

Debra Schwartz
Anchorage, Alaska

Mine is a gift subscription from my daughter, an ardent feminist and an enthusiastic subscriber to your magazine. She does her best to indoctrinate me, and I, too, enjoy your publication and want to wish you good fortune....

Minda Mills
Evanston, Illinois

I notice that you occasionally use the term anti-semitism or anti-Semitism. The term is quite out of date. A more accurate word is anti-jew.

The term 'semitic' is derived from the old concept of a language and cultural grouping and applies particularly to various middle eastern tribal groups that had a common linguistic structure. The surviving groups are Arabs and Jews.

Speaking bluntly, there are few people in the modern world who are simultaneously anti-jew and anti-arab. So the term anti-semitic is just plain inappropriate.

It is also about time the term is dropped for other reasons. It originated with the Anti-semitic League in Germany in the mid 1800's. Of course the term was a euphemism for anti-Jew. If it ever worked for us to accept that euphemism, I'm not aware of it. It was premised on a racial theory of Jewish inferiority.

It may be the time to review the reasons why an oppressed and vulnerable people tolerated such a misnomer and the concepts associated with it. But it is certainly the time to stop using it.

Michael Phillips
San Francisco, California

I'm a sucker for an artful (or artless) soft sell. Here's my $20 donation, with this warning: Stay as rough and free-wheeling as you are. If you go slick and respectable, you'll lose my support. Mazel tov!

Henrietta Wexler
Washington, D.C.
Jerusalem watched a pair of ordinary lovers walking down one of her crooked back streets, arms enlaced, indifferent to everything except each other, immortal for a moment as the evening shone on their flesh like phosphorus. Jerusalem watched them with pity that lapsed into envy as they kissed.

“When?” Jerusalem turned on the Lord, watching over her shoulder. “When can we be like that, so—” her empty hands hunted for a word for the wound, “so unimportant? So easy with each other and so innocent?”

“She’s deceiving her husband,” the Lord observed, “and he’s wasting his time. I have work for him at home, he’s a scholar or he will be.”

“I don’t think he’s wasting his time.” Jerusalem watched the man stroke the woman’s face as if learning it by touch, reading emotion, a passionate Braille far older than sight. “We’ve loved each other so long.” Jerusalem stated the archaic fact as if she’d just found it in the dictionary, “but you’ve never even touched me. When—?”

“They’re not in love,” the Lord answered. “They’re just trying their private fantasies on each other for a moment. It isn’t real, it never lasts. We do.”

“When will you touch me like that?” Jerusalem insisted.

“At the world’s end,” the Lord rebuked her gently. “You know that, my beautiful wound.”
“And when will that be?” Jerusalem continued.

“Soon,” spoke the Lord.

“In their lifetime?” Jerusalem pursued, indicating the lovers with her long eyes. There was no answer.

“In their children’s lifetime, or their grandchildren’s?”

“Soon,” the Lord repeated. “Life is no way for us to measure time. Only love.”

“Love,” Jerusalem echoed, “it isn’t fair.”

“To them or us?” inquired the Lord.

“To both of us,” said Jerusalem absently as the lovers parted and the woman held the evening up like a lamppost with her dreams.

“Is she happy, at least, that woman?” Jerusalem asked.

“Somebody should be happy.”

“Her husband beats her,” the Lord remarked, “and her lover has a woman on the other side of town and was silly enough to tell her about it. As a thing of the past, of course, to make himself seem desirable.”

“I’m tired of both of them,” Jerusalem decided abruptly and she turned her face with its marvelous weary shining back to the Lord.

“Do you still love me?” she asked again.

“Yes,” spoke the Lord, “and it isn’t fair.”
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The Lord was exceedingly angry with Jerusalem; she had not only disobeyed all his commandments, she had ignored his suggestions, stepped on his hints and thrown out his pity to beggars in the street, tearing off fingers to offer each other. She entangled their screams in her heavy, formal robes. Claws of her silence caught in lace, in dust of old sequins and cinnamon. She gloried in nothing but her own crystalline reflection; she preferred it distorted with human tears and the smokey perfumes of burning flesh whipped with over-ripe rose vines.

She worshipped herself alone and used the Lord only as another proof of her beauty, another nakedness to dazzle her poets, a net of her footsteps tickled their words into touch like a blind man’s lust. Her skin fluttered like coiled wings and worms crawled over her emotions, unclean, supple and ageless. Her bestial heart was sucked clean of air where the worms buried.

The Lord saw and was angry. “I will give you your desire,” he told her. “You shall be whole again and men shall take pride in you. Men shall live under your shadow till they cannot see you, only another city which they own, and trade in, and govern in, they will lessen you with their eyes, then they will blink and forget you in bed with their women.”

“No,” cried Jerusalem while fear woke in her face like a sleepy bird beginning to sing. “Yes,” spoke the Lord. “But you,” Jerusalem whispered, as everything tumbled into place, “You will not forget me?” “No,” spoke the Lord, “I will not.”

ACCUSATION

The Lord told Jerusalem what her enemies said against her, every charge made against her, in alphabetical order. The Lord told Jerusalem to answer.

So Jerusalem spoke:

“My Lord and my only master, those are many hard words and they do not matter, not to my enemies. My enemies accuse me only of beauty and to that I plead guilty. There is no hatred without desire, and I have refused my enemies for only the Lord is my master. And so they are angry. They charge me with wading barefoot in their blood; that is true. They say I will not wear the sandals they made for me; that is also true. Very splendid are those sandals, when did I deny it? They are woven of human skin, with bells of silver and anklets of gold. But I go barefoot in blood of the sleep of men, and such men turn from their lives, their honor, their desires, to follow me like sleepwalkers for the sake of my beauty. The sandals of my enemies are scented with mandrake and clove. My enemies accuse me of beauty, and I accuse them of love.

You have heard. You shall judge.”

The Lord spoke awkwardly, as if ashamed: “I shall forgive your beauty, Jerusalem, city of death, my city where even death is defiled, on the day you forgive my love.”

“I do not want that day to come,” said Jerusalem, and she smiled.
I spoke to Victor Erlich during the summer of 1985. He had just retired as professor of Russian at Yale and was moving to a new office. Chatting about his family among the boxes of books, discarded papers, and almost emptied bookshelves seemed especially appropriate. His parents and grandparents were constantly on the move. Also his grandfather, Simon Dubnow, one of the greatest Jewish historians, broke with the tradition of kvetching about constant Jewish migration. He saw it as a source of renewal.

Dubnow was one of those extraordinary products of the Jewish Enlightenment, who escaped traditional Judaism with a total mastery of its culture, absorbed all that was best among the gentile cultures of Europe, and then combined the two. He was one of the first Jewish historians to question whether religious books were necessarily the truth, seeing them, instead, as rich records of Jewish cultural life. He also collected and used the communal records of Eastern European Jews. Dubnow proposed a theory of Jewish nationalism in which religion was only one element of the national culture. In his ten volume *World History Of The Jews* (still in print in English) he showed how that culture developed and preserved itself. A key mechanism was a national center or nucleus, that periodically moved as world conditions changed. The center unified Jewry and invigorated it by absorbing elements of the most vital cultures of the age. In contrast to Zionism Dubnow viewed ancient Israel as only the earliest Jewish national center. He did not believe that Judaism depended on revival of that center.

Dubnow was especially active during the 1905 revolution and campaigned throughout his life for Jewish civil rights and democracy in Russia. He wrote histories of the Polish and Russian Jews, as well as of the Chassidim. Neither his autobiography nor his daughter’s biography of him have been translated into English.

His daughter, Sophie Dubnow-Erlich, is a Russian poet and critic. Her husband, Henryk Erlich, was a leader of the Jewish Workers’ Bund in both Russia and Poland. During the Russian Revolution, as a leader of the Bund and the Petrograd Soviet, he supported Polish independence. After returning to Poland, he was arrested because he opposed Poland’s war with Russia. In the 1920’s and 30’s he was one of the Polish Bund’s best known leaders.

After helping organize Bund and Polish opposition to the Nazi invasion of Poland, he was arrested by the Russians in 1939. While in prison he and Victor Alter, another Bund leader, were interrogated by Beria and his assistants. In autumn 1941, when Russia’s future was most endangered, they were released to organize an international Jewish anti-Nazi organization. In December 1941 Russia’s chances of survival improved. Stalin saw that Erlich and Alter were too devoted to Jewish and Polish independence to serve him. He had them executed. Their deaths were only announced two years later in 1943.

Q: Your father was a leader of the Bund in Poland. Why was he in Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution?

A: My father was born and raised in Lublin in the center of Poland. My mother was born in the Minsk province of the Russian Pale of Settlement. She was a very small girl when her father, Simon Dubnow, moved the family to Odessa. She spent some of the best years of her life as a student at St. Petersburg. It was a very exciting period in the history of Russian culture, and she was very much a part of the ferment. My mother and father met abroad and they decided to marry. My father had just graduated from law school and was willing to follow her to St. Petersburg. By that time he was already active in the Jewish Labor Bund. In 1911 he was 26 when he married Mother. But he was already a rising star in the Bund. He took his Bundism to Russia and became by 1915 one of the leading figures in the Russian Bund. It was in this capacity that he was elected in 1917 to the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies in what was, by that time, Petrograd. You know he is mentioned by John Reed in “Ten Days That Shook The World.” He and Raphael Abramovitch, a leader of the Mensheviks, spoke respectively on behalf of the Bund and the Mensheviks. They decried the Bolshevik coup as it was taking place and left the meeting in protest.

Q: Is that why your father is occasionally referred to as a Menshevik?

A: Technically he was not a Menshevik, but he worked very closely with them during that period. In the fall of 1918 my family went back, back that is as far as father was concerned, to Poland. We returned to Poland for a couple of reasons. One, Poland became independent. With the Bund reconstituting itself on its territory, independent Poland became the major center of the Jewish workers’ movement. Two, the Bolshevik regime was becoming increasingly authoritarian and inhospitable to both Mensheviks and Bundists. Although a secession from the Bund, the KomBund, joined the Soviet Communist Party, the Bund mainstream was increasingly critical of the regime and was incurring increasing harassment. In addition, under the civil war conditions with Petrograd besieged, there was an acute shortage of food. So my parents worried about my brother and me. As I understand, the move was initially construed as temporary, but my

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father probably knew in his bones that he would never return to Russia. By 1919 it became increasingly clear that we were going to stay put in Poland.

Q: But your father did return to Russia?
A: No. He was arrested by the K.G.B. in the fall of 1939 in Soviet-occupied Brest-Litovsk and was executed under Stalin’s orders in December, 1941. But this is not to say that he ever returned to Russia. Rather, with the start of the war Russia engulfed Eastern Poland and came to him.

Q: Your Grandfather did not leave with your parents. He stayed on for awhile.
A: Dubnow left Russia in 1921. He was taking an increasingly dim view of the Bolsheviks, having had precious little use for Lenin to begin with. He was a man with a lot of courage, who sometimes could be almost reckless. It was very lucky that his apartment was never ransacked, because the feelings that he expressed about Lenin in his diary would have gotten him into major trouble.

He went for a short time to Kovno, where he was wooed by the Jewish community, even by the authorities. But he felt a bit claustrophobic in Lithuania. I think he briefly considered Poland. The main reason was that he was very attached to my mother. He decided against it, very much aware of Polish anti-Semitism. Also, he was about to launch his ten-volume history. He was a remarkably disciplined and very well organized man, but he could never be a pure scholar. I remember we spent a full year with the Dubnows in Berlin. It was a very open house. Traveling scholars would visit. Jewish public figures, both Zionist and non-Zionist, would come by to get his counsel, to involve him in a campaign or two. But he was also very self-protective as a scholar. He knew that in Poland he would go meshugge. Poland was like a cauldron. He went for a short time to Kovno, where he was ransacked, because the feelings that he expressed about Lenin in his diary would have gotten him into major trouble.

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Also, Berlin became a major center of Russian emigre life. I do not mean to say that he got actively involved in that milieu, but the backdrop of vital Russian cultural activity was quite essential to him. In addition there was a very organized Jewish community. Berlin was a metropolis where he could keep in touch with world Jewry. This was his most creative period.

Q: Did he choose Germany over Poland because some of his earlier attempts at social and political action had not been very successful?
A: There is something to that, perhaps. But I don’t think he had a sense of failure. His political activities were too part-time. Earlier in Russia he did launch a party, Folkspartei. It was not a success. He was not cut out to be a political leader. After launching the party, he let others take over. He was more of a scholar, a writer, a thinker, rather than an organizer. But he did father an ideology, a theory of national cultural autonomy, which was shared by two totally disparate parties, the Folkspartei and the Bund. The Bund gave it a socialist twist. Dubnow had all kinds of differences with the Bund. But the Bund was very much aware of an affinity between its national program and Dubnow’s concept of cultural-national autonomy.

Q: Your father and Dubnow had extended public polemics and debates about subjects like Zionism. What was the relationship between Dubnow and the Bund on the one hand and Dubnow and your parents on the other?
A: The personal relationship between Dubnow and Father was very good. Dubnow had not always approved of the men who courted Mother. One of them was a very bright, clever, and entertaining fellow Odessite, Vladimir Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky wooed my mother from a very early stage of the game. At the time he was better known as a very able Russian translator of Bialik than as a leader of right-wing Zionism. My grandfather could not abide him. Jabotinsky’s brand of Zionism bothered him. Worse, he was wooing his favorite daughter. Worst of all he serenaded my mother. Dubnow said, “The son of a bitch interferes with my work and sings off key!”

It is my impression that when he met Father; his only objection was that he was about to lose his daughter. Otherwise he thought Father was a fine young man.

Dubnow’s attitude toward the Bund was respectful. He appreciated the difference between the Bund as a democratic socialist party and the Bolsheviks. But, still, he did not like Marxism or even socialism very much. He was a strict nineteenth century liberal. He also felt the Bund was much too hostile to Zionism.

Q: But he was not a Zionist himself?
A: No. He was every bit as critical of orthodox Zionism as he was of the Bundist approach to Palestine. He was not particularly interested in political Zionism. But he was attracted to the idea of building and strengthening the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine, as a major and increasingly important dimension of Jewish life. The Bund as a political movement was not concerned with this cultural vision, but with political Zionism. Dubnow was saying that Zionism was not the solution to the Jews’ problems. The Bund said, yes, it is not the solution, but it is also not a solution. It thought the cure no better than the disease. The Bund was right about the difficulties, the perils, and also the moral dilemmas. It did not, perhaps could not, anticipate the advantages in the post-war world.

Q: Dubnow was more interested in religion than the Bund. What was his attitude toward the Jewish religion?
A: The young Dubnow was a Maskil, a rebel. He came from an Orthodox Yiddish-speaking family, rebelled against Orthodoxy, and never went back. But his attitude toward Judaism changed from his rebel days. He never became a synagogue goer. But as a Jewish historian he was grateful to Judaism, because he felt, with considerable justice, that Judaism kept the Jews going, kept them together.

He remained alienated from Orthodoxy. He was basically a pantheist. One aspect of the Jewish tradition

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he emphasized was the seder. In this respect, I think, he would have much in common with SHMATE. To him and others like him the seder was primarily a festival of freedom. More often than not, as I recall, or as my mother told me, he did not preside over a seder at home. He would go visiting. But when he was in charge, though there was some Haggadah reading and singing, he would provide his own commentary, which, in the broad and best sense of the word, was more ideological than that of a traditional Orthodox seder. He did not need some of the corny American texts, which try to secularize and politicize. He would provide his own interpretations, speaking as a historian. So, yes, he went back to Judaism, but he went back as a very modern man and as a very non-Orthodox Jew.

Q: So although he rebelled against religion, he did not rebel against Jewishness?
A: Cultural assimilation in the sense of submergence of Jewishness was always alien to him. When he became a journalist, he was a Jewish journalist. He was a journalist writing in Russian about Jewish subjects. But he imbibed Pushkin, Lermontov, Fet, Nebrasov, Tyutchev, Turgenev and Tolstoy. They became part of his heterogeneous yet integrated identity.

In Russia there was a broad segment of intelligentsia who were truly as Russian as they were Jewish. When my mother was six or seven, she was sitting on a park bench in Odessa, where she was raised. An elderly Russian lady saw her and asked, “Who are you little girl?” She clearly meant, “What’s your name?” So the logical or proper answer would have been Sonya Dubnova. But she said, “I am Russian Jewish.” This statement of double identity coming from a girl of six or seven was characteristic of the atmosphere in my grandfather’s house.

So you have this symbiotic relationship. He knew that Russian culture, as represented by even some of its masters, was not hospitable to Jews. Gogol was openly anti-Semitic. Pushkin was not free from anti-Semitism, as far as his rhetoric was concerned. But I think that there was something else too. Consider the most enlightened Russian writers, such as Turgenev or Tolstoy. A man like Dubnow, a nineteenth century liberal positivist, was naturally drawn to the body of literature which championed those values. Much of nineteenth century literature is indeed much more humanistic than not only the Russian system but also Russian society. And it was this best aspect of Russian culture and the Russian intelligentsia that Dubnow felt connected with.

Q: But by writing in Russian, who was he writing for? Was he cutting himself off from part of his audience? Were there many Jews who read Russian?
A: He was writing for the rising Russian Jewish intelligentsia, for the literate Russian Jews. There were an increasing number of them by the early twentieth century. Of course he was linguistically versatile. Later he wrote the History of the Chasidim in Hebrew. He wrote topical journalism in Yiddish. But Russian came more naturally to him than Hebrew as the language of scholarly discourse. Hebrew also would have cut him off from another constituency. That it didn’t occur to him to write any major scholarly work in Yiddish at the beginning of the century is, of course, perfectly natural. It took the heroic effort of someone like Max Weinreich to make Yiddish a fit vehicle for Jewish scholarship.

The main thesis of Fun Zharpon tsu Yiddish, the only book he wrote in Yiddish, was that Yiddish had come of age. It was no longer a jargon. Until the beginning of the century there were few people who saw Yiddish as anything more than, at best, a vernacular language, possibly suitable for belles lettres and fiction. The notion of Yiddish as a vehicle of scholarship was a later one. But Dubnow was comfortable enough with it to be one of the founders of YIVO.

Q: When he wrote in Russian was he writing for the Jews he would like to see flourish in Russia? Were people like your mother and himself people he would like to see as models?
A: Yes, but even in the 1880’s, well before he wrote his large works, when he began writing for the Russian-Jewish journal, Voskhod, there was already a bit of a constituency. He was always wary of cultural assimilation in the sense of erosion, of the watering down of Jewish identity. But he was not against partial linguistic assimilation in the sense of the spread of Russian to more and more Jews. You might say he was hoping for this to happen.

Q: You were raised in Poland. Did Polish Jews have the same symbiotic identity?
A: I was barely four when we moved to Poland. I would say that in Poland symbiotic Jewish identity didn’t work so well. In Poland you had three segments. There was a very large Yiddish speaking population. The working class and often even the lower middle class spoke Yiddish with varying degrees of Polish. Sometimes in a shetl, especially, in Eastern Poland, there was almost no Polish spoken, or more Russian than Polish. But in any case, there were a number of Jews who were not at all linguistically assimilated and whose language was Yiddish. Then there was the educated middle class, the professionals. They were linguistically assimilated. For them the main language was Polish. Some of them were Zionists. They had no problem with their Jewish identity; they were not trying to pass. Many of the Zionists were Polish-speaking Jews, who believed in Hebrew. Whether they knew Hebrew was something else. Some didn’t. But they did not believe in Yiddish for two reasons: Polish snobbery vis-a-vis Yiddish and Zionist rejection of Yiddish as the language of the diaspora. Although you might say there was a certain blend of Polishness and Jewishness, they were ideologically Jewish and linguistically Polish. But, you see, your run-of-the-mill Polish Jewish doctor, lawyer, CONTINUED NEXT PAGE
or writer would sometimes not be an assimilationist just linguistically. There were attempts to pass. Even when he would reluctantly recognize himself as a Jew, he would view Jewishness as a burden and Polishness as his culture. Then there were people like my father, Victor Alter, my brother, myself and other leaders of the Bund. We were actively involved in the Jewish movement and at the same time culturally every bit as Polish as Jewish. But there were not many of us. The number of Jews who were happily Jewish and Polish was lower than in Russia. I am speaking in cultural terms; there was no reason to be politically happy. In contrast, in Russia you had somebody like Vinaver who was part and parcel of the Russian body politic.

Q: Who was Vinaver?
A: One of the leaders of the Cadets, the Russian liberal party, an important Russian public figure. “Vinaver” is a recognizable Jewish name. He didn’t try to change it or to pass. He also managed to see his Jewishness as an asset, as well as the burden and handicap it was. This was a remarkable thing. Only about two or three generations of Russian Jews were able to do this. It was a very limited period, that didn’t start until the mid-nineteenth century. I did not see much of this in Poland.

Q: What remains of the Bund’s thought today?
A: Some professional anti-Bundists seem to blame the Bund for not anticipating the Holocaust, which is preposterous, because nobody did. I, for one, have a tremendous respect for the history of the Bund, for the Bund tradition, not just as my father’s legacy, but for the courage and idealism of the Bund, for the ways in which the Bund kept alive the idea of an autonomous Jewish working class movement. The Bund was the only movement which was programatically invested in the existence and growth of Yiddish. I am grateful for this contribution because of the extent to which Yiddish matters to me as well as my respect for some of the reasons behind this contribution. Anybody who respects cultural pluralism would appreciate the notion that the Jewish worker, who was doubly persecuted, pushed around as a worker and as a Jew, was in dire need of self-esteem. Having a cultural vehicle he could call his own was part of that growing self-esteem and sense of dignity.

I am now very definitely an ex-Marxist, and even an ex-socialist in the sense of orthodox socialism. I consider myself a very rightwing social democrat. But if we speak about the Marxist or socialist universe, one of the more interesting Marxist thinkers is the Italian Gramsci. I learned about him from my son in the New Left. Gramsci was more interested than most Marxists in the workers’ experience, in the values by which the workers lived on a daily basis. I think the Bund, without knowing about Gramsci, recognized more than most other socialist groups the importance of the here and now. Much of its involvement with Yiddish culture, specifically through a network of secular Yiddish schools in Poland, was a matter of raising the tone, the quality of the Jewish worker’s life.

Q: Isn’t that another connection with Dubnow? He also saw culture as being as important as political movements and that cultural phenomena had to be addressed in order to get political change.
A: Absolutely. But, of course, he would have deplored Gramsci’s radicalism. He always deplored radicalism.

Q: Dubnow is not well-known today. He has been eclipsed as both a historian and Jewish thinker. Do you think that is because he was caught between two poles? You talked about how he defended Zionism to the Bund. Yet Zionists think of him as an opponent of Zionism.
A: It is wrong to say that he was an anti-Zionist. He was non-Zionist. But, yes, in a certain sense he was caught in between. The range of his impact, his resonance, his prestige, his appeal, certainly when he was at his peak, lay paradoxically in his not being associated with any major camp or any major school of thought. Not just substantively but even operationally. In Berlin he was not a party man; he stood above parties, above camps. A number of people found it imperative to talk to him, especially when they wanted to get away from a partisan view of Jewish life. But it is also true that in a number of Jewish political and social contexts other names are more likely to be mentioned.

I was impressed and gratified to see that he meant so much to Elie Wiesel. In a lecture this spring at Yale he spoke for five minutes or more about Dubnow’s death, offering a version very dramatic, though not necessarily accurate. But he also spoke for fifteen minutes about him as the leading thinker and ideologist of the diaspora.

In Israel today he is still a name to conjure with. There is a square named after him in spite of his non-Zionism. So he is still with us.

Q: You mentioned Wiesel’s version of Dubnow’s death. How did he die?
A: He was shot by a member of the armed forces in Riga, while the Germans were establishing the ghetto. This is the common denominator in all the versions. Wiesel was under the impression that the man who shot him was an SS officer, who was a former student of Dubnow’s. I don’t know what is meant by former student. Dubnow did not teach at a German university. He may have been a tutee. What I heard and what my mother wrote in her biography of Dubnow was more prosaic. Dubnow was being moved out of the residential section where he lived. His personal effects were placed in a cart and he was following it. One of the German guards accompanying him wanted to have some fun and cried “lauf Jude.” Dubnow refused to run and was shot on the spot.
Thanks to The Progressive Review for the following three tidbits.

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