

JEWVS AGAINST THEMSELVES



Edward Alexander

JEWS
AGAINST
THEMSELVES

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Edward Alexander



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In Memoriam

Sadie and Harry Alexander

Sadie's Last Apartment

here we are asea
in spice jars of hearing aid batteries
mothballs nestled like spider eggs among the canned goods
enough spools of colored thread to bandolier a tailors' brigade
the maker's mark on the dinner plates saved for best
isn't Rozenburg but union bug
take care and dry your eyes

with salted fingertips
orbit the rim of a sturdy dish and try to make it sing
like a glass harmonica but what rings out
is a full-throated stoneware chorus
a brother/sisterhood of potters
kicking the wheel of memory
take care and tune your ear to it

listen for the thud and wet shatter
of a milk bottle your grandfather's hand deployed
to keep his friend from the wrong side of the picket line
the same hand
that proffered chocolate coins and silver dollars
and bade you
take these tokens for the long ride home

the tunnel oscillates light and shadow
the passing trains of past and present chunter through
black and gold pulsate a syncopated tick and hum
in the scissoring interstices
on the hypnotic dial of Harry's watch
like the third rail of every untold story
take care and keep your distance

but come close now for the journey back
three brothers in the stifling hold of the Gothland
names and ages shifting like silt on the ocean floor
one will meet this dark-haired whipsmart girl
who darts undaunted across a bustling avenue
they will dance the Charleston on a tenement roof
take care to remember:
the body is a strict boss but the spirit doesn't punch the clock

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“Antisemitism directed at oneself was an original Jewish creation. I don’t know of any other nation so flooded with self-criticism. Even after the Holocaust ... harsh comments were made by prominent Jews against the victims.... The Jewish ability to internalize any critical and condemnatory remark and castigate themselves is one of the marvels of human nature.... Day and night ... that feeling produces dread, sensitivity, self-criticism and sometimes self-destruction.”

—Aharon Appelfeld (*New York Times Book Review*, February 28, 1988)

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Introduction

I

The New Apostasy, in Historical Perspective

This book is about the new forms taken by Jewish apostasy in an age when Jewish existence is threatened more starkly and immediately than at any time since the Nazi war against the Jews, waged from 1933 to 1945. The enormity of this apostasy cannot be measured without identifying what and whom its practitioners embrace. In the Middle East, Israel is surrounded by enemies who, both of their own volition and as agents of the genocidal Iranian regime, are not merely bent on Israel's destruction but deem it their own *raison d'être*, being far less interested in building up their own societies than in destroying the society of their neighbor. Appeasement of Iran itself, despite its undisguised, relentless drive to obtain nuclear weapons, and its constant reiteration of the goal of obliterating Israel, is now the order of the day even in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Nor does Europe, which not very long ago destroyed its own civilization in the process of erasing its Jewish population, present a happier scene. Raul Hilberg once encapsulated the history of Europe's treatment of its Jewish minority as follows: "The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live."¹ He also called this "a cyclical trend," meaning a phenomenon that recurs. The "dark continent" of Europe appears to have recommenced the cycle. For several years now, primarily in Germany but also in other European countries, the campaigns against circumcision ("bodily mutilation" or "violation of the rights of children") and kosher slaughter ("cruelty to animals") have been gaining ever-wider support, and this among people who show no concern whatever about tonsillectomy or the way in which lobsters are killed. The banning of circumcision and of kashrut would indeed make it impossible for most Jews (perhaps even those who felt the need to return to a continent whose rivers once flowed with Jewish blood) to live "as Jews" in Poland or Germany or France. As if this were not enough to threaten the continuation of Jewish life in Europe, there is the little matter of the old continent's inability to cope with the Israelophobia and generalized Jew-hatred of its rapidly multiplying and increasingly violent Muslim minority except by blaming its woes on its (peaceful) Jewish minority, especially those Jews who assert Israel's "right to exist," and do so in countries that not so long ago questioned Jews' "right to live."

Almost as menacing as the physical threat to Jewish existence posed by genocidally inclined Persians and Arabs and Muslim sympathizers beyond measure is the new climate of opinion succinctly described by David Nirenberg: "We live in an age in which millions of people are exposed daily to some variant of the argument that the challenges of the world they live in are best explained in terms of 'Israel.'"²

In the summer of 2014, Israel's self-defense against thousands of Hamas bombardments of its cities

from the southern border and north to Haifa brought tens of thousands of violent, often murderous anti-Jewish rioters into the streets of London, Belfast, Paris, Oslo, Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Berlin. This led to desperate warnings from several heads of government that Europeans should remember how their destruction of European Jewish civilization in World War II had also set their own civilization ablaze. During July 2014 there were larger demonstrations in support of Hamas in European cities than in any Arab capital. The European mob that used to chant “*Mort aux Juifs*” and “*Juden Raus*” was now delivering the same message in a different linguistic and cultural medium: “*Khaybar, Khaybar ya-Yahud, jaish Mohammad saya’ud*” (Mohammad is coming back [to slaughter and enslave Jews] as he did in the Battle of Khaybar). Danes were shocked to see the flag of the Islamist version of Nazism flying, with approval of the Bishop of Copenhagen, from the Protestant Stephan’s Church in Copenhagen.

French Jewry, the largest Jewish community in the European Union, is now rapidly shrinking as a result of the country’s intense and frequently violent antisemitism,* emanating not only from Muslim “activists,” but from all parts of the political spectrum in the land of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—or Death.” Michel Gurfinkiel, writing in the *Jewish Chronicle* (June 27, 2014), predicted French Jewry’s rapid decline, by the end of 2014, from half a million to 400,000. French Jewish immigration to Israel now approaches 6,000 to 7,000 annually, and emigration to other countries is also rising rapidly. In recent years French-born jihadists have committed gruesome murders of Jews in Toulouse and Brussels; in the summer of 2014, they organized attacks on synagogues in a French version of *Kristallnacht*. And as always, just as surely as night follows day, France’s appeasement of its resident antisemites threatens its own existence as well as that of its 2000-year old Jewish community. In early December 2014, Roger Cukierman, longtime president of CRIF, French Jewry’s representative body, predicted that “Jews will leave in large numbers and France will fall into the hands of either Sharia Law or the National Front.”

Today’s French mob is made up of two sectors: Muslims who declare that “the struggle against the Jews is a sacred duty, even if they leave Greater Syria, until they leave the planet Earth and the property goes to Muslims”³; and Frenchmen who believe that “If Israel did not exist, peace and justice would reign in the Middle East.” These Frenchmen are the grandchildren of the ones who used to say that “If Jews did not exist, there would be no antisemitism.”

But the example of France demonstrates that *Jewish* abandonment of Israel—the subject of this book—is not an inevitable result of antisemitism. Compared with England or Germany, France has relatively few Jews who have turned on Israel and sided with its enemies. Does the daily threat of violence by antisemites help to concentrate the mind? In Germany, relatively free until recently of anti-Jewish violence, the organized Jewish community has seen fit to lavish honors upon Judith Butler, one of the most fanatical Jewish Israel-haters in the world. In September 2012 she was invited by the Berlin Jewish Museum to ride her hobbyhorse—the need to boycott Israel—in public. In 2013 the museum invited Brian Klug, in 2014 Antony Lerman, anti-Zionist Jews whose loathing of Israel rivals Butler’s. The museum’s witless directors have apparently forgotten that the Nazi boycott of Jewish stores in 1933 was conceived in Berlin. (It is also safe to assume that German Jews influenced the selection of Butler for the Theodor Adorno Prize.)

The essays in this book deal with Jewish apostates of a new kind, defined by Cynthia Ozick in her startling essay of 2008 entitled “Apostasy, Then and Now”:

How, then, should we look at this word *apostate* today? That it has mostly fallen into disuse we know; yet its freight has been put to many uses, especially under the noose of successive

creedal tyrannies. Inevitably ... it returns us to the theme of defamation. The apostate is ~~or who defames~~—if not his origins explicitly, then his living counterparts, the people to whom he was born.... The notion of apostasy still holds. But its meaning has been curiously reversed. The Nicholas Donins and Pablo Christianis of ages past ran to abandon their Jewish ties even as they subverted them. The Nicholas Donins and Pablo Christianis of our own time run to embrace their Jewish ties even as they besmirch them. So it is as self-declared Jews, as loyal and honorable Jews, as Jews in the line of the prophets ... that we nowadays hear arguments against the survival, or the necessity, or the legitimacy, of the state of Israel.⁴

Ozick did not, however, think it necessary to explain in detail why this appropriation of the long robes and long faces of biblical prophets is fraudulent. The biblical prophets excoriated Jerusalem not because they hated and wished to destroy it, but because they loved it and wished to preserve it; they did not set themselves apart from Israel's fate or rejoice in its suffering. A true prophet, as the great Israeli scholar Shmaryahu Talmon used to insist, would consider himself successful only if his "predictions" proved wrong.

Customarily, when we use the term "apostasy," we think not of biblical rebels against Mosaic authority like Korach and his sons—who are swallowed up by a selective earthquake as punishment for their mutiny—but of medieval Jews, especially in Spain and France, who converted to Christianity and then outdid the "old" Christians in their zeal to prosecute and persecute their former coreligionists. The Jewish apostate was especially useful to his new church if he was learned and could read Jewish texts, or had himself been a practitioner of what Christians deemed Jewish treachery, and therefore knew it from the inside. Moreover, according to Jewish law (*halacha*) itself, he was *still* a Jew despite having foresworn his old loyalty and identity, and so brought a powerful authenticity and reliability to his slanderous revelations about Jews. (Would a Jew lie, for example, in telling churchmen that unconverted Jewish males menstruated?)

In Ruth Wisse's *Jews and Power* (2007), a short but ambitious book about the Jews' problematic relation to power from 70 CE through the calamitous Oslo accords, the great set piece is a description of the "disputation" of 1263 in Barcelona, sponsored by the king himself, between the Jewish apostate Pablo (Paul) Christiani, who cooked up the scheme, and Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides), the foremost Talmudic scholar of his time. The combatants were to consider the rival claims of Judaism and Christianity to the truth, and to do so exclusively by reference to *Jewish* sources. Not only was Nachmanides prohibited from attacking—as the other side did abundantly—the "lies" of his opponent's religion, and restricted to proving that rabbinic sources did *not* bear witness to Christian truth; he did not, indeed could not, flaunt the political advantage that his opponent did. At the center of their dispute was the reality of power, the contrast between power and powerlessness. The failure of Jews to maintain their sovereignty, argued Christiani, confirmed the failure of their religion. Nachmanides responded by arguing that the "scepter" argument applied only to the tribe of Judah, and not to the entire people of Israel: the scepter, he asserted, had not been removed from Judah, but only suspended—a day might yet come when Jewish power would exceed that of the Christian church.

Nachmanides, it should be noted, did not think Jewish powerlessness a virtue or romanticize and glorify it, as have both humane non-Zionists like Irving Howe (who celebrated Yiddish culture and literature because they embodied "the virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness") and also fierce anti-Zionists like Marc Ellis and Daniel Boyarin. These two devotees of the "sissy" school of contemporary Jewish thinkers believe that the moral center of Jewish history is a celebration of the renunciation of national interest, as if that were the only criterion of a just politics; they believe it

virtue in Jews never to have picked up the gun or the knife, as if a man unable to eat should be praised for his ability to fast.

If anyone doubted Pablo's argument about the existing balance of power, the officers of the Dominican inquisition (Dominicans, of whom Pablo was now one, were generally the most intense anti-Jewish order) were palpably present in the courtroom to reinforce it. Indeed, despite the king's prior assurance of immunity from punishment, Nachmanides was charged with blasphemy and expelled from Spain. In other words, the disputation was as much a trial as a debate. In *Operatic Shylock* (1993) Philip Roth wrote that "In the modern world, the Jew has perpetually been on trial; still *today* the Jew is on trial, in the person of the Israeli—and this modern trial of the Jew, this trial which never ends, begins with the trial of Shylock." But he ought to have begun with these medieval debates.

These disputations, it is important to remember, pitted one Jew against another. Conversos were still, according to Jewish law (and also, in many instances, Catholic skepticism about the sincerity of their conversion), Jews; but they were Jews who, at least officially, had seen and embraced the truth, whereas Nachmanides was a Jew still shrouded in darkness.

In that sense, if no other, today's debates, at the Oxford Union or on the BBC, pit Jew against Jew in the medieval scenario. They are designed like those Soviet show-trials that used members of the *Yevseksia*, the "Jew-section," Communists of Jewish descent, to indict other Jews. The astute English writer Paul Bogdanor has observed that "in the UK today, every Jew, no matter how apolitical or assimilated, has to identify himself either as an enemy of Israel (a 'good Jew' to be showered with plaudits) or a defender of Israel (a 'bad Jew' to be vilified and boycotted)."

In America, unlike England, popular (and also congressional) sympathy for Israel is considerable and so the Jewish apostate must pretend to put *himself* on trial, conduct a dialogue of his mind with himself, and, eventually finding himself innocent, defame his fellow Jews for supporting Zionism. Thus the aforementioned Ellis, invited some years ago (when he was professor of American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University) by the Union Theological Seminary to address this Christian group on Yom Kippur—the holiest day of the Jewish year—chose to make "public confession" of the sins of (other) Jews. Standing before an audience of learned Protestants on the day when all Jews are being judged by the Almighty, he attacked them, and especially their rabbis, for confessing their sins in their synagogues throughout the country. And why? Because they neglected to confess their greatest overarching sin, which is: their support of Israel. (How Ellis knows what goes on in synagogues on a day that he spends at a Protestant seminary is not made clear.) Never bashful about hectoring others for *their* sins, Ellis upbraids his Christian audience for not doing more abundantly that which they already do—or so one might have thought when many of them are political progressives and members of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—quite adequately: depicting Israel as blacker than Gai-Hinnom and the pit of hell. He singled out for special blame those rabbis who were "enforcing a silence on Christians who want to speak publicly" about how terrible the state of Israel is. As several of the essays in this book point out, the complaint about "silencing all criticism of Israel" is a standard feature of nearly every single piece of bombast out of the mouths of modern Jewish apostates. (Ellis's allegation that Jews in synagogues may be supportive of Israel is also, of course, the rationale invoked by the Paris mob for setting them ablaze.)

I have not attempted a systematic taxonomy of all the species of Jews arrayed under the general "enemies of Israel," a monumental task that would require an encyclopedia to include the following: Jewish progressives against Israel; Jewish queers against Israel; *Haredim* against Israel; Holocaust survivors against Israel; children of Holocaust survivors against Israel; Jewish Voice for Peace

grandchildren of Holocaust survivors against Israel; survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto against Israel; Street, Jewish postmodernists against Israel; Jewish Berkeley professors against Israel; post-Zionists against Israel; Jewish members of MESA (Middle East Studies Association) against Israel; Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods (JBIG, also called, seasonally, London's Jewish Christmas carolers against Israel); and so on and on, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*. Despite this, there will always be readers who express astonishment that there *are* Jews who question the Jewish right to live as a natural right, hate Israel and are ashamed to have a state. Surely they are as rare as singing mice or card-playing pigs? Alas, no.

There is also the species called "Israelis against themselves." To them I devote an entire chapter written with conviction but also hesitation, regret, and wonderment. Most of them continue to live in Israel; some have lost children in Israel's wars. That is to say, they still belong to a community of faith, which chooses to bear a constant burden of peril out of belief that if the Jewish people does not survive in the land of Israel it has no future. And yet ...

We may conclude, then, that there are important differences between Pablo Christiani or Abner of Burgos of medieval Europe and Marc Ellis or Daniel Boyarin of modern America. Nevertheless we may say of those Jews who have, over the centuries, defamed, abandoned, and harmed their own people: "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*" The broadest definition of their sin, and one that does not even mention conversion to Christianity or Islam, was given back in the Middle Ages, by none other than Maimonides (1135–1204), and it still holds:

One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but only holds aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfill religious precepts common with his people, shows himself indifferent when they are in distress, does not observe their fasts, but goes his own way, as if he were one of the gentiles and did not belong to the Jewish people—such a person has no share in the world to come.

—Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance*, 1:10

II

The order in which the essays of this book appear is not in strict chronological accord with the order in which they were first published, but most of the earliest published ones, dealing more with ideas than with events, come early in the book, and most of the recently published ones, centered on events, come in the latter half. Original dates of publication of the essays are given in parentheses below the titles.

I begin with consideration of the dominant form of apostasy in nineteenth-century Europe, which has come to be called "Jewish self-hatred." I move from that to the perverse ways in which the kind of Jew whom Maimonides accuses of "going his own way" and abandoning his people "when they are in distress" has reacted (or failed to react) to the two events of biblical magnitude that have enveloped modern Jewry: the destruction of European Jewry and the founding of the state of Israel. In the latter segment of the book, I have succumbed to the parochialism of the contemporary by including three essays about the role played by Jews in the BDS movement to expel Israel from the family of nations, and one about the need for American Jews to decide whether they are going to judge Judaism by the standards of the *New York Times* or the *New York Times* by the standards of Judaism.

I have resisted the temptation (offered by the wisdom of hindsight) to update and "correct" the

older essays, hoping instead to get some credit for a bit of prescience by leaving them intact. I might, for example, in my discussion of the intellectual background of the Oslo Accords, have mentioned the one result of those accords, and the relentless emphasis by their Israeli supporters on the irrelevance of land to security, is evident even as I write (summer 2014) in the ability of Hamas to fire its rockets into every corner of Israel. I might also have speculated on what ISIS would now be doing to Israel had Israel withdrawn from the Golan Heights. But I have not.

Preserving the essays in their original form means that certain nodal points or touchstones will be repeated, in the same way that Matthew Arnold keeps returning, in his essays, like a patient schoolmaster, to certain familiar landmarks like “sweetness and light,” “doing as one likes,” “the best that is known and thought and felt in the world.” If verbal recurrence sometimes annoys, it more frequently serves to drive home a crucial point.

III

About the Author (by the Author)

My most vivid and satisfying memory of growing up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn dates from May 1948, when I was eleven and a half years old. Jackie Robinson, who then lived adjacent to my high school, was beginning the second year of his brilliant career with the Dodgers, and for me and most of my friends, he was the greatest man in the world. Coming a close second to Robinson in esteem was David Ben-Gurion, whose declaration that month that the Jews, like other peoples, now had a state of their own, ignited dancing in the streets. These two heroic figures came together for me almost magically when I heard Robinson address a block party (either on Amboy Street or the adjacent Hopkinson Avenue) to celebrate Israel’s independence. I consider myself lucky never to have been disillusioned about what my parents taught me: that both men symbolized the belated righting of ancient historical wrongs, that Robinson was indeed a uniquely courageous figure and that the birth of Israel just a few years after the destruction of European Jewry was one of the greatest affirmations of life ever made by a martyred people, indeed what Ruth Wisse would later call the most hopeful sign for humanity since the dove came back to Noah with an olive leaf after the primeval flood.

Elsewhere in this book the reader will come upon Jewish memoirists who regret that their 1940s interest in baseball was a distraction from Jewish concerns, but my experience was the opposite. The linkage between Jewish and Negro rebirth was reinforced in my Hebrew school (providentially located on 500 Herzl Street) by Principal Rabbi Z. Harry Gutstein’s system of rewards for boys who could recite the Shema from memory or show mastery of Hebrew conjugations: good work was rewarded with “points” that could lead to tickets to Dodger games. Some years later I also came to understand that one reason why Brooklyn (and not Boston or Philadelphia or St. Louis) became the site for this experiment in integrating baseball was precisely its large Jewish population and its sense of brotherhood with the Negro. “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, and to be young was very heaven.”

But, like Wordsworth, I was to be disillusioned—not by Israel, which has had to mobilize for, and survive, sixty-six years of relentless military and ideological onslaught, such as no other nation has endured (or could endure)—but by Jews of the “progressive” persuasion. They have not only failed to mobilize their intellectual resources on behalf of a constantly besieged country, but have abandoned it, where they have not actually joined, its enemies, and become “Jews against themselves.” What among us could have imagined that liberalism, which so many modern Jews have adopted as their *raison d’être*, would itself become dogmatic, would acquire a craving for forbidden fruit (and in

legalization), and—this above all—would abandon the Jews, and turn against Zionism and the state of Israel? Ian Buruma did not exaggerate when he wrote, over a decade ago, in the *New York Times Magazine*, that “the Palestinian cause has become the universal litmus of liberal credentials.” (To readers of that newspaper, of course, this must have seemed the most banal of commonplaces.) Which of us youngsters was even aware of Zionism’s emphasis upon “negation of the Diaspora” lest the Diaspora negate Zionism? Indeed, how many *adult* Jews in 1948 could have imagined that the Holocaust would cast its specter of blood and shame over the Jews well into the next century, that its “lesson” would be not “Never again,” but—for the victims—“It happened once, it can happen again,” and for the perpetrators—“We did it once, we can do it again.”

Notes

* I use the spelling “antisemitism” (not “anti-Semitism”) because there is no such thing as a “Semitism” to which Jew-haters are opposed.

The term was coined in the 1870s in Europe by people looking for a euphemistic, pseudo-scientific term for the old-fashioned “Jew-hatred,” which had begun to sound nasty. Antisemites do not hate Semites; they hate Jews. Getting rid of the hyphen (and the capital letter) doesn’t entirely solve the problem, but it helps to prevent obfuscation.

1. *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 3–4.
2. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 471.
3. Pierre-Andre Taguieff, *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 27.
4. Cynthia Ozick, “Apostasy, Then and Now,” in *Israel’s Jewish Defamers* (Boston: Camera, 2008). As recently as 1987 Todd Endelman published a collection of essays by various scholars entitled *Modern Jewish Apostasy* (New York: Holmes and Meier). None of them mentions the anti-Zionists discussed in this book.

Jewish Self-Hatred

(1986)

Rare is the critique of Israel's Jewish defamers that does not disparage them as "self-haters" or reject that time-dishonored label as grotesquely unsuited to people who seem rather to suffer from a self-love of prodigious proportions. Both schools of criticism might benefit from reconsidering the origins of this peculiarly Jewish phenomenon.

It is often alleged that Jews expend too much time, energy, and ingenuity on the subject of antisemitism, which is a Gentile problem or "sickness," not a Jewish one. Yet it is undeniable that "self-hating" Jews have made such large contributions to the ideology and politics of antisemitism that it may fairly be called a product (perhaps the only genuine one) of the "Judeo-Christian tradition." Before Pope Gregory IX ordered the Talmud to be seized, examined, and publicly burnt in Paris and Rome, he was presented in 1239 with a detailed analysis of the manifold evils of the Jewish religious books from the Dominican brother Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert possessed of the "special" knowledge of these poisonous books that only a Jew could have. In the sixteenth century Martin Luther's seemingly innovative program of burning synagogues, destroying Jewish homes, and confiscating the Talmud and all other Hebrew books was in fact derived from the proposals of Johannes (formerly Josef) Pfefferkorn, the Jewish convert who, years earlier, had exhorted his German countrymen to "drive the old Jews out like dirty dogs and baptize the young children" and "take the goods and give them to those to whom they belong." Christians appear to have invented, all on their own, the belief in Jewish male menstruation, but doubters among them received assurance from Jewish converts such as Franco de Piacenza, who in 1630 revealed to the world the shameful secret that Jewish males of the lost tribe of Simeon menstruated four days a year. The belief of Martin Luther and his acolytes that Yiddish was the language of thieves and constituted a sin against the German tongue was actively supported by many Jews from his own time through that of Moses Mendelssohn, who warned that Yiddish degraded culture.

The fruitful interaction between Christian antisemites and Jewish self-haters, a process in which it is difficult to disentangle cause from effect, continued after the Enlightenment and is as real and living today as ever it was. The German antisemites who said that Heine smelled—devilish Jews have not only the horns, tail, beard, and sexuality, but also the smell, of the goat—found confirmation of their views in Heine's own depiction of the Polish Jew with "his lousy beard, with his garlic breath, and his bad German." Socialist antisemites heard from the converted Jew Karl Marx the assertion that capitalism is nothing other than the Talmud written in the real language of the Jews, which is neither Hebrew nor Yiddish, but "haggling." Feminist antisemites could find in the same "Jewish" source the insistence that "in the Jewish religion ... woman is bartered." Perhaps the ultimate example of the "German-Jewish symbiosis" is the relation between attacks by such Jewish self-haters as Karl Kraus upon Jewish perversions of the pure German tongue and Hitler's demand that works written by Jews in German be labeled translations.

This pattern whereby "in inexorable dialectic, each self-hating text generates new anti-Jewish text

is the subject of Sander Gilman's *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jew*. Gilman set himself to examine "how Jews see the dominant society seeing them and how they project their anxiety about this manner of being seen onto other Jews as a means of externalizing their own status anxiety."¹ Gilman claims that the form of self-abnegation called self-hatred has existed throughout Jewish history, and that it is a term interchangeable with "Jewish anti-Semitism." His working definition of the Jew is "one perceived and treated as a Jew," and, following Sartre, he views the Jews' sense of their identity as always and only "reactive" to groups labeling them as "Other." His work works from the assumption, for which he provides much evidence, that "Otherness" and self-hatred are best examined in language because the dominant or "reference" groups in societies where Jews have lived have always alleged that Jews cannot possess the language of their environment because they have a hidden language of their own. For this reason he has undertaken to analyze the work of Jews, from the Middle Ages to the present day, who have relied upon writing and language for their status in society. The texts he selects for study, at least prior to the Holocaust, are mainly German, and he takes for granted the German-centered view of Jewish history that has been called into question by such Jewish historians as Todd Endelman.

The centrality of fulminations against the Jews' hidden language in the forms of self-hatred makes for a continuity that is uncanny in its lunatic persistence in Jewish intellectual history. In the Middle Ages, Gilman notes, Hebrew was the magical language *par excellence*, and one reason why a charlatan like Pfefferkorn could hypnotize audiences for hours "while he expounded on topics about which he knew nothing" was that he knew some of that mysterious tongue. But since Hebrew was the language of the Scripture, a Jew could not really command it until he became a Christian. Some Jew-haters therefore claimed that the hidden language of the Jews was not Hebrew at all, but the lie. Luther denied to all Jews, including converts, any "true" knowledge of Hebrew beyond the alphabet. Even the great nineteenth-century scholar Ernest Renan argued that Hebrew was only natural to the Jews who they used it to express the "monotheism of the desert."

When accusations against the hidden language of the Jews made Yiddish rather than Hebrew the target, Jewish self-haters responded by saying that not they but their backward cousins from the east were inarticulate, barbarous, corrupt. Like the converts of earlier centuries, the German-Jewish intellectuals of the Enlightenment tried to deal with their own self-doubt and insecurity by deflecting the charges made against Jews in general onto other Jews: Yiddish speakers. Thus Mendelssohn referred to Yiddish translations of the Bible as written in "a language of stammerers, corrupt and deformed, repulsive to those who are able to speak in correct and orderly manner" (102).

Jewish intellectual self-hatred often prompted flight as well as denunciation, but since the flight was from oneself, it could be an arduous, frustrating journey. Gilman is at his best in describing the struggle for a truly German linguistic identity by such talented self-haters as Borne, Heine, and Marx. Ludwig Borne (Judah Low Baruch before he became a Lutheran) flees from his religion, from his native Yiddish language, and then finds, to his discomfiture, that he is still seen as a Jew because "he bears the stigma of the new language of the Jews, not Yiddish but irony" (162). He then espouses the antisemitic views of the 1819 "HepHep" rioters and re-creates himself as the liberal journalist excoriating the bad, moneyed Jews—only to find that "liberal journalist" has now become synonymous with "Jew" (154, 166).

Baruch-Borne served as a model for Johann Christian Heinrich Heine, who before his baptism was Harry Heine. No sooner had he converted than he condemned his friend Eduard Gans for committing the "unforgivable felony"—namely, converting. Subsequently, he too found that no matter where he fled, he was confronted by himself. His Lutheran "ticket of admission" to European culture proved

worthless: he was “now hated by Christian and Jew alike,” “sorry that I permitted myself to be baptized,” and condemned to endless suffering by “that never removable Jew” that he would be no matter what discourse he used (176–81). Whereas Borne and Heine projected all their own faults on their Jewish identity, Karl Marx, converted at age six, found himself perceived as a Jew although his Jewish identity was virtually nonexistent, although he tried to make his life into the antithesis of the image of the Jew, and although he outdid most of his contemporaries in pouring scorn and hatred on the Jews. The worst thing Marx could think to say of the German-Christian state was that it was “Jewish” in its corrupt art and language. In a curious throwback to the medieval view of apostate Jews, Marx held that the only good Jew was the exJew (200). But since the Jews lacked free will, they could never alter their essence and so inevitably poisoned their environment. With surgical precision and insight, Gilman reveals how Marx, in the tradition of Jewish antisemites since the Middle Ages, imputes to Jews other than himself false language, bad manners, and sexual aggressiveness. Of the “Jewish nigger” Ferdinand Lassalle (himself a Jewish antisemite of formidable derangement), Marx writes, “Always this constant babble with the falsely excited voice, the unaesthetic, demonstrative gestures, ... and also the uncultivated eating and the horny lust of this ‘idealist.’ ... As his skull shape and hair prove, he is a descendant of those Blacks who accompanied Moses on the exodus from Egypt ... Now this combination of Jewishness and Germanness upon the Black basic substance must bring forth a strange product. The pushiness of this fellow is also nigger-like” (206). Of course it came as a shattering disappointment to Marx when his new, “non-Jewish” language of revolution was labeled as Jewish. As Gilman shrewdly says of the Viennese Jewish antisemite Arthur Trebitsch, who believed himself to be pierced by electromagnetic rays beamed by the Jewish conspiracy, “Since the Jews that he feared were hidden within him, everywhere that he fled he felt himself pursued” (249).

Having established, with a thoroughness of scholarship and cogency of argument that cannot fail to evoke admiration, the dominant pattern of Jewish self-hatred since the Middle Ages, Gilman is reluctant to part with it. That is one reason why, when he comes to deal with western Jews who, from the late nineteenth century onward, appear to be reversing the old pattern of self-hatred by aspiring toward a positive image of the unassimilated, unenlightened eastern Jew, Gilman insists that the “positive stereotype” of the *Ostjude* is itself—whether expressed by Buber or Kafka or Hans Kohn—as an expression of selfdoubt and self-hatred (285–86). Thus the critics of self-hatred are themselves held to be guilty of self-hatred. They are merely assigning a positive value to the antisemites’ old images of Jewish uniqueness by rejecting self-hatred as “sick” (a term Gilman does not allow) and inventing a “healthy” Jew who exists only “in the never-never land of myth” (300), a term Gilman uses in the crude sense of denial of “reality”). Having devoted three hundred pages to a frightful nosology of the varieties of self-hatred, he turns with ferocity upon those who indulge in “the polemics attached to the idea of selfhatred as the pathological underpinning of the ‘bad’ Jew,” and says *quoque*.

The last quarter of this book, despite many fine things in it, is vitiated by a philosophic agnosticism that will not distinguish between the contending claims to Jewishness of Karl Kraus and Theodor Herzl, or Haskalah and Hasidism, or Cynthia Ozick and Anne Roiphe, or a German-style *Gymnasium* and “‘Jewish’ structures such as the *heder*.” For Gilman the inner world of the Jews is a vast hall of mirrors, nothing in itself, everything by reflection and reaction. Sometimes, indeed, he writes as if the outer world of the Jews was only “images.” He quotes Kafka’s vivid description of the Belzer *rebbe* as both dirty and clean, and immediately “translates” this into the “traditional antisemitic image of the bad Jew and its inverted romanticization in Buber’s good Jew. Meanwhile, Kafka’s insight into the paradox, that precisely those Jews who are fit to see God may be unfit to be

seen or touched or smelled by anybody else, is lost.

Gilman's hostility toward those who presume to distinguish between good and bad Jews leads him to resolve the controversy over the true meaning of Anne Frank's diary in favor of Lillian Hellman rather than Meyer Levin. In the *Diary* Anne Frank wrote, "If we bear all this suffering and if there are still Jews left, when it is over, then Jews ... will be held up as an example.... We can never become just Netherlanders ... or just representatives of any other country ... we will always remain Jews." In the Hackett-Hellmann stage version, this was reduced to: "We are not the only people that've had to suffer ... sometimes one race, sometimes another." The stage version is, not to put too fine a point upon it, a lie; but Gilman's determination to present Levin as a self-hating Jew obliges him to turn Levin's excoriation of that lie into a mere device for abusing German Jews (such as Hellmann) as corrupt and degenerate.

Gilman concludes his book with a subtle argument about the "closure" on the concept of the self-hating Jew that has been achieved by Philip Roth and other writers mindful of the difference between European and American antisemitism. But he does not suggest that self-hatred is dead, and notes that "one of the most recent forms of Jewish self-hatred is the virulent Jewish opposition to the existence of the State of Israel" (391). In one sense, Gilman's demonstration of the permanence of Jewish self-hatred in the Diaspora converges with a major premise of Zionism. Amos Oz once wrote that "I am a Zionist because I cannot live and have no desire to live like the reflected image of a symbol imprinted in other peoples' imaginations, neither as the symbol of a crafty and diabolic vampire nor as the symbol of a piteous victim to whom one must offer compassion and compensation. That is why there is no place in the world for me other than the country of the Jews."²

But it is now becoming clear that self-hatred, like other afflictions of the Jews in exile, has taken up residence in the country of the Jews itself. Ever since the passage in 1975 of the Zionism-racism resolution by the UN (under the stewardship of Kurt Waldheim), countless Israeli intellectuals have doggedly devoted themselves to ferreting out and theatrically deploring evidences of the "racism" of their less western, less enlightened, less progressive countrymen. During the 1982 (Lebanon) war, a whole range of Israelis whom nobody outside of Israel had ever heard of before, from professors and publishers of pornographic newspapers, became instant European celebrities by applying the epithet "Judeo-Nazi" to other Israelis, in precisely the style of "projection" that antisemitic Jews have been practicing since the Middle Ages.

Notes

1. *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 11, 15, 47, 67. Subsequent references to this book are given in parentheses in the text.
2. Amos Oz, "Homeland," in *Under the Blazing Light* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1979), 73.

Disraeli and Marx: *Stammgenosse*? (1994, 1996)

Although Karl Marx wrote many thousands of words (nearly all vituperative, and many salacious) about Jews, he seems to have mentioned his own Jewish origins only once. In a letter to Lion Philips, Dutch uncle who founded the Philips Electronics dynasty and was a major source of (capitalist) income to young Marx, he remarks that Benjamin Disraeli is their *Stammgenosse*, that is, of the same stock.¹ Why, one wonders, should the fierce Promethean rebel against established society and Western imperialism claim kinship with the quintessential insider—the traditionalist (and imperialist) Tory politician Disraeli? Although he was willing to grant that Young England, the political movement and parliamentary faction headed by Disraeli, occasionally struck the bourgeoisie “in the very heart of its core” by its witty and incisive criticisms, Marx nevertheless dismissed it as a fantastic sentimentalism, with a “total incapacity to comprehend the march of history.”²

Of course Marx would have known, if not in particular detail, that Disraeli, like himself, came from a Jewish family that had formally abandoned its religious traditions, and might have felt some affinity with him on that account. Their experiences of separation from Judaism have a broad similarity, but are by no means identical.

Although born to Jewish parents, Marx was baptized at age six into the Lutheran faith in the Rhineland city of Trier, whose rabbi was his uncle. Although his Voltairean father had joined the Lutheran church a year earlier (1817), Karl’s mother held out against conversion until age thirty-eight when her father, a rabbi of Nigmejen, Holland, died. For this tardiness as well as other “despised remnants of Judaic practice,” Marx remained permanently resentful of her. She was also guilty of remarking, “If only Karell had made Capital instead of writing about it.”³ He openly expressed Engels his wish that his mother would drop dead, and she complied within a year of his entreaty.

Indeed, Marx wished the same for any relative likely to bequeath money to him and his wife, Jenny, the daughter of a German baron. Marx’s treatment of his family and his willingness to sacrifice his wife and children to “the revolution” are likely to remind us of the English novelist George Eliot’s advice that “it is sometimes better not to follow great reformers of abuses beyond the threshold of their homes.”⁴

Given the fact that, for thousands of admirers as well as detractors, “the Jew Marx” has the fixity of a Homeric epithet, it is worth recalling that Marx’s Lutheran education was stringent, not perfunctory, and that it had deep and lasting effects upon him. Despite the incessant labeling, from that day to this, of Marx as a Jew, his extant papers contain not so much as a scribble of a Hebrew letter, whereas his style is permeated by the language and even worldview of the Lutheran Bible. “Luther,” Marx’s biographer Frank Manuel observes, “is one of the few religious leaders Marx ever cited with approval,”⁵ and in *Das Kapital* he is invoked as an authority on the economic transformations of sixteenth-century Germany.

Disraeli remarked that “I was not bred among my race and was nourished in great prejudice against them.”⁶ His grandmother, Sarah Shiprut de Gabay, was a Jewish antisemite so venomous that

Disraeli's biographer Stanley Weintraub speculates that she may have provided (via Disraeli's memoir of his father) the germ for George Eliot's feminist antisemite in her "Jewish" novel *Daniel Deronda*, Princess Alcharisi. Disraeli's father, Isaac D'Israeli, was, in Cynthia Ozick's words, "the perfect English man of letters, easily comparable to, in America now [she wrote in 1970], Lionel Trilling."⁷ He did have his son circumcised—an occasion Weintraub describes as "the only Judaic rite in which [Ben] would be a central figure"⁸—but thereafter showed himself to be, just as Heinrich Marx was, the loyal disciple of his beloved Voltaire in matters concerning Judaism. In 1813 he was selected to be a warden of his congregation (Bevis Marks); he rejected the honor, but refused to pay the fine of forty pounds imposed on someone who declined such an office. In March 1817, as young Ben was approaching bar mitzvah age, his father responded with alacrity to a Christian friend's suggestion that he have his children baptized into the Church of England, so that they could have the opportunities available to other English children. On July 11, younger brothers Raphael and Jacob were duly baptized (and transformed into Ralph and James). Ben was reluctant but succumbed on July 31, with his sister Sarah following shortly after. Thus Benjamin Disraeli was a Jew for seven years longer than Karl Marx, who became a little Lutheran at age six. But Disraeli's parents, unlike Marx's, remained unbaptized.

Hannah Arendt once asserted that assimilated (which in the nineteenth century generally meant converted) Jews often became more obsessed with "Jewishness" than Jews who remained loyal to their religion and their people: "The more the fact of Jewish birth lost its religious, national, and social-economic significance, the more obsessive Jewishness became; Jews were obsessed by it as one may be by a physical defect or advantage, and addicted to it as one may be to a vice."⁹ There is some evidence for this claim in the parallel careers of Marx and Disraeli.

Marx, perhaps with the help of his revered Martin Luther, became a ferocious Jew-hater. Throughout his career he mocked the "Jewish" character of his rivals for revolutionary leadership in the Communist and working-class movements. Moses Hess was "Moysi the communist rabbi," and Eduard Bernstein "the little Jew Bernstein." His choicest epithets, however, were reserved for Ferdinand Lassalle. "It is now completely clear to me," wrote Marx to Engels, "that, as his cranial formation and hair show, he is a descendant of the Negroes who attached themselves to the march of Moses out of Egypt (assuming his mother or grandmother on the paternal side had not crossed with a nigger). Now this union of Judaism and Germanism with a basic negroid substance must yield a strange product. The pushiness of the fellow is also Nigger-like." Moses Mendelssohn was a "shameless windbag"; Polish Jews were said by Marx to multiply like lice and to be the "filthiest of all races." On a holiday in Ramsgate, he complained that the place "is full of Jews and fleas." Despite the loneliness of that single reference to Disraeli as his Jewish kin, Frank Manuel argues that Marx was at some subconscious level always aware of the profound effects that Jewish antisemitism can have upon Jews. "Self-contempt," Marx wrote in a youthful essay prefiguring his own psychic fate, "is a serpent constantly gnawing at one's breast; it sucks the life-blood out of the heart and mixes it with the venom of the hatred of man and of despair."¹⁰

Frank Manuel's central idea about Marx, in fact, is that his selfhatred was transformed into universal rage against the existing order of society and bred a utopian fantasy of redemption. "If Marx Jews were dirty morally and physically and he was a Jew, his denied origins gnawed at his gut on some level of consciousness throughout his life."¹¹ If the carbuncles that plagued him were the bodily sign of his self-loathing, his utopian hatred of existing society and uncontrollable rages and vendettas against Jewish rivals were its intellectual and political expressions.

Although this idea seems too broadly stated—it is easier to see Marx's self-deception about his

Jewish origin at work in his fatuous dismissal of nationalism and ethnicity as forces in political consciousness than in, say, his theory of surplus value—Manuel makes it seem plausible. He is less convincing in his insistence that Marx, despite his exclusively Lutheran education, his Jewish illiteracy (“there is no evidence that he could spell a Hebrew word”), and his Jew-hatred was, after a “rabbinic,” just like his repudiated ancestors. Apparently, not even the shrewdest and best-informed observers can resist the widespread temptation to draft Marx onto the team of Diaspora All-Stars (whose starting lineup also includes, of course, Freud and Einstein). “For anyone who has read Luther’s *The Jews and Their Lies*,” says Manuel, “a Jewish Lutheran must appear a monstrous oxymoron. But Western culture has shown a penchant for the most outlandish syncretisms, and your Marx’s [graduation] essay bears traces of both religious strains ... a mixed Judeo-Lutheran rhetoric. But from whence did the Judaic strain come? Did Marx inherit in his genes what Manuel calls “the messianic hope ... passed on through generations of rabbis among both his father’s and his mother’s forebears”?¹²

One person who might have thought so was Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli, despite his youthful conversion to Church of England Christianity, was thought of by friends, colleagues, enemies, and himself as a Jew. The philosemitic Matthew Arnold observed that Lord Beaconsfield [Disraeli] “treat[s] Hellenic things with the scornful negligence natural to a Hebrew.” The relentlessly antisemitic, radical magazine *Punch* depicted the Disraeli of 1867 as Fagin, stealing the opposition bill from its back pocket. Carlyle ranted against Disraeli as “a cursed old Jew, not worth his weight in cold bacon.” Balliol’s famous classical scholar Benjamin Jowett complained about the nation being run by “a wandering Jew.” The poet Coventry Patmore bemoaned 1867 as “The year of the great crime, / When the false English nobles, and their Jew, / By God demented, slew / The trust they stood twice pledged to keep from wrong.” The former prime minister Palmerston declared, “We are dreadfully disgusted at the prospect of having a Jew for our Prime Minister.” The future liberal prime minister W. E. Gladstone (who had once been Disraeli’s rival in the Tory Party) would allege that Disraeli’s long-standing pro-Ottoman sympathies and Russophobia were a function of his Jewish sympathies for coreligionists under Russian rule: “Though he has been baptized, his Jew feelings are the most radical & the most real ... portion of his profoundly falsified nature.”¹³

But was Disraeli in fact a Jew? For some time, his inner world, like his outer, showed little sign of his Jewish “background.” When he traveled to the Holy Land as a young man, “of Jewish places of worship he saw nothing,” and his glowing description of Jerusalem makes no mention of Jews whatever. Such facts would not surprise those of his critics who have alleged that Disraeli’s ideas of Jewishness were never disturbed by any actual knowledge of the subject. Nevertheless, in *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833), he seemed to propose restoring Jerusalem to the Jews. In 1834 he described *Alroy* as a “celebration of a gorgeous incident in that sacred and romantic people from whom I derive my blood and name.” Why, his biographer asks, would Disraeli, at the very beginning of a parliamentary career (and frequently thereafter) in a country that still banned real, unconverted Jews from Parliament, glorify his Jewish origins?¹⁴

Although the answer given by Disraeli’s preeminent modern biographer Weintraub is essentially that, however dishonorable Disraeli’s behavior may have been with women (in youth he contemned that fraud called “Love”) and finance and the grime of political maneuver, he always behaved honorably and “proudly” toward the Jewish background from which he had been severed by his father, the full explanation remains buried deep within the bizarre mixture of sense and (mostly) nonsense that is Disraeli’s theory of “racial Judaism.” Starting with the plausible notion that, as a character in *Tancred* says, Jesus “was born a Jew, lived a Jew, and died a Jew” (a statement cautiously trimmed

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