

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF ANGLO-JEWISH LITERATURE

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ONE OF THE persistent themes in the discussion of Jewish arts is the definition of the subject. What exactly Jewish creative works are, is, for example, a practical question. When a Jewish novelist writes a non-Jewish story, should it be included in bibliographies or anthologies devoted to Jewish literature? The compilers of such anthologies sometimes acknowledge the problem; they seldom solve it. In a book of short stories and extracts from novels called '*... In England and in English*' (London, 1947) [with the sub-title 'A Collection of Modern Stories by Jewish Writers'] the editor, William Goldman, writes:

As can be seen by a perusal of its contents, the material selected has no shared racial, religious or national basis. While it is true that its authors are the representatives of more than one nation and of more than one religious faith and, possibly, in some cases, of no religious faith at all, the three qualities shared by all the stories are: that their authors are Jewish; they are domiciled in England or are of English birth; and all write in the English language (p. 11).

In fact he begs the question of what a Jewish writer is. Of the sixteen pieces in the book only seven are on Jewish themes, plus one or two others whose Jewishness is implicit. The connexion between some of them, such as an East End story, *Solomon the Scoundrel*, by Max Clapper, and an extract from Marghanita Laski's war-time satire, *Love on the Super-Tax*, is so remote that an anthology of stories by people six feet tall would seem to be just as sensible as this one.

In this essay I shall follow the line of thought of Salo Baron who argues that there is little reason to expect to find 'Jewish' traces in the artistic works of those who are culturally assimilated into the environment of the Diaspora, unless their productions are explicitly Jewish.

'Only here and there', says Baron, 'a connoisseur will detect, or thinks he detects, a certain undefinable ingredient which stamps this or that art as Jewish.'¹ Jewish novelists seldom pose their problems in a theological framework, although religious practices and rituals often feature in their writings. It is true that there may be an element of religious (or social) attitude which is sometimes called 'Jewish': charitableness; humanitarianism; the strength of family life; sentimentality; for example. But it is easy to argue that these attributes are in no way peculiar to Jews.

Thus a Jewish novel is not necessarily a religious novel, or one in which religious attitudes are important themes. More positively, it is Jewish because the characters and situations are Jewish. This is a definition of convenience, in the same way as, in this essay, I mean by Anglo-Jewish literature those novels and plays by Jews which deal with Jewish life in Britain.²

There are, however, two aspects of this definition which need to be mentioned. First, while a Jewish novel or play may often be identified as such by the names of the characters and their speech, and by the situations through which the plot develops, there are some works, ostensibly non-Jewish, which may in fact be basically 'Jewish'. Peter Shaffer's well-received play, *Five Finger Exercise* (London, 1958), deals with an English middle-class family, but to many Jews the situations are typically those of modern Jewish life.

Second, there are those works which, while having identifiable Jewish characters, are only marginally relevant to this essay. In Harold Pinter's play, *The Birthday Party* (London, 1959), there is a main character called Goldberg whose Jewishness is explicit—in name, language, and attitude. But the theme of the play—whatever it is; it is one of those complex symbolic works in which the author provides hardly any clues to the meaning of the symbols—is quite clearly not essentially a Jewish one.³ The character of Goldberg is well-drawn and accurate; but the play does not tell us much about the situation of Anglo-Jewry in the 1950's—or at any other period. And the major purpose of this essay is to discuss the relation between the literature and the social history of Anglo-Jewry.

This is only one of the many topics which could be discussed within the general category of the sociology of literature. Another, which I also want to examine, is the attitude of the various writers to the problems and situations they describe. With the latter is involved a matter which needs to be looked at first—a matter which the creative writers of all minority groups have to face; its direct relevance to this essay will become evident at a later stage.

I

Like the figure of the Negro in American literature, the characterization of the Jew in English literature has attracted a great deal of attention. During the past eighty years there have been numerous articles and essays on the subject, and at least a half-dozen books, the latest being Professor Harold Fisch's *The Dual Image: A Study of the Figure of the Jew in English Literature*, which appeared in 1959. These various works, of different quality, all tell the same dismal story.⁴

George Orwell, in a brief aside, came to this conclusion:

There has been a perceptible anti-Semitic strain in English literature from Chaucer onwards, and without even getting up from this table to consult a book I can think of passages which *if written now* would be stigmatized as anti-Semitism, in the works of Shakespeare, Smollett, Thackeray, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and various others.⁵

He was echoing, perhaps unwittingly, the views of many others. M. J. Landa, in his *The Jew in Drama* (London, 1926), a comprehensive, but unsatisfactory work, was even more insistent:

In no department of human activity has Jew-baiting been more persistent and popular than in the realm of the drama. From time immemorial the Jew has either been grossly libelled or ruthlessly travestied on the stage. The practice has become an almost adamant law. Like an unending serial story, the harrying of the Jew runs through the history of the theatre, from out of the chaos of its beginning unto this very day (p. 9).

Nevertheless the writers on this subject admit that changes have taken place. The stock character of the Jew, as it developed in works before about 1700, contained, as Professor Fisch shows, a strong element of myth, a myth based partly on the religious conflict between Judaism and Christianity in the middle ages, and partly on the historical reality of the medieval Jew as usurer. Further, before the eighteenth century few Englishmen had ever come across Jews except in legend and fiction. But however strong remained the antagonism towards the Jews, and however fixed was the mythological image in the public's mind, from the eighteenth century onwards more favourable characterizations began to appear. It was the Age of Enlightenment, of the transition to industrialism, of the beginnings of democracy, and of the growth of tolerance. The effect was seen in Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, and in Richard Cumberland's *The Jew*. In the latter play, Sheva the Jew 'is a saint ready to deprive himself of all bodily comforts for the sake of others'.⁶

Tolerance—the removal of civil disabilities, and the movement of notable Jews into the upper reaches of British society after the middle of the nineteenth century—was one factor in the improvement of Jewish characterization in literature. Another was the sympathy extended to

Jews because of their sufferings and persecution in Europe. After 1933 that sympathy grew, and, with the political line-up of the period, 'to put an unsympathetic Jewish character into a novel or a short story came to be regarded as anti-Semitism'.⁷ The result is seen, nowadays, in the recent novels by non-Jews about Jews, such as Hugh Massingham's *The Harp and the Oak* (London, 1945); Samuel Youd's *A Palace of Strangers* (London, 1954); and C. P. Snow's *The Conscience of the Rich* (London, 1958). In Massingham's novel a kindly Jewish doctor meets anti-Semitism in an English village in war-time. Youd's story of a Liverpool-Jewish family (with German connexions) is mainly concerned with inter-marriage. Snow's novel is about a wealthy banking family in the 1930's. In all of these the Jewish characters no longer display any remnants of the earlier mythology.⁸

One important novelty is that opposition to anti-Semitism came to be used to illustrate a character's liberalism. In *The Struggles of Albert Woods* by William Cooper (London, 1952) the hero's ambitions are about to be crowned by the conferment of a knighthood; a minister of state has said: 'Something must be done for Woods.' At a party Woods hears a woman saying that Hitler was right about the Jews: 'I'd load them all in Channel steamers and take the bung out of the bottom.' Woods insults her: 'You stupid ——!' She is the wife of the minister; he does not get the knighthood. (It is important to state that in the late fifties liberalism is more often equated with attitudes towards coloured people than towards Jews.)

But while the emphasis on public attitudes towards them is the predictable preoccupation of the members of a minority group, it cannot be said that the approach of the various studies on the Jew in literature, or the conclusions they reach, are always very helpful. Each study could be criticized in detail; Professor Fisch's is the latest and is worthy of special mention. His essay is distinctive for two reasons. First, he sets his theme in a psychological framework; second, he brings the story up to date. (The previous major work on the subject, Modder's *The Jew in the Literature of England*, peters out at about 1900.)

Fisch's study is, however, unsatisfactory. His psychological approach suffers from the defects of all such interpretations of anti-Semitism—defects which have been lucidly explained by Professor Ginsberg.⁹ Further, his analysis of some novels seems to go far beyond anything the authors intended. Thus he argues that Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (London, 1938) 'is a novel conducted at the level of theological symbolism or allegory', and is a story based on 'the old medieval conjunction of Jew and Devil'. (One of the race-gangs in the novel is a Jewish gang.) In fact the Jewish element in the story is hardly relevant to the major themes; and the killing of Spicer, which Fisch likens to the crucifixion and betrayal of Jesus, is a minor incident (Fisch, pp. 74-5).

But, more generally, what exactly is meant by 'anti-Semitism' in

many of these contexts? What is a favourable or an unfavourable character? One of the difficulties is seen quite clearly in the conflicting lists of so-called anti-Semitic and favourable writers. Orwell included Dickens among those who 'made a definite effort to stick up for the Jews'. Dr. van der Veen, on the other hand, speaks of Dickens's Fagin as 'the malicious and cowardly Jew'.¹⁰ Dickens himself denied he was possessed of any anti-Jewish sentiments when he created Fagin. 'Fagin in *Oliver Twist*', he wrote, 'is a Jew, because it unfortunately was true of the time to which the story refers, that that class of criminal almost invariably *was* a Jew.'¹¹ Whether or not this was in fact the case need not detain us; the point is that even if Fagin was a historical character, Jews would still object to him, for he displays some of the stereotype characteristics that Jews prefer not to see portrayed.

Even when writers have produced demythologized Jewish characters, or protests against intolerance, the characters are often stereotype images or offend Jewish susceptibilities in some way. *The Merchant of Venice* is usually interpreted as a plea for tolerance and charity towards the Jews. But there are many people who regard the play as anti-Semitic; the character of Shylock may be played with humanity and understanding, but few Jews can listen to much of it without irritation. 'Shylock' in common speech is a term of abuse. The Jew in Cumberland's play is used as a protest against the hardship and injustice of the Gentile world, but he is a usurer, as is Moses in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. Anthony Trollope's recent biographer says that Trollope is not anti-Semitic (a description of Bertrand Russell's). 'For apart from Roger Carbury, Brehgert [the Jew] is the only genuinely honest man in the book, and behaves throughout with intelligence and forbearance. Instead of being a symbol of anti-Semitism, Brehgert's disagreeable appearance helps to rehabilitate not only a Jew, but—a much more difficult matter—the popular idea of one.'¹² Galsworthy's play *Loyalties* (1922), about a Jew, De Levis, whose money is stolen at a country-house, is a plea for justice for the Jew. It was hailed by M. J. Landa as being 'in a class by itself as a serious and conscious effort to grapple with a Jewish—and an English—problem' (p. 236). But De Levis is better described as 'a caricature of Jewish characteristics rather than a representation of a Jewish character. He has all the faults with which anti-Semitism credits the Jew.'¹³ The characters are often intentionally unpleasant; the author is saying that despite the unpleasantness it is wrong to be anti-Jewish. It is a noble concept, but the stereotype image remains, and the reader does not come away with any affection for Jews.

Probably most writers, Jewish or not, who have used Jewish characters, have been accused by somebody of anti-Semitism. The writer's difficulty arises precisely from the adjustments associated with the move from the ghetto, for with it is involved the desire to avoid the stigma of the stereotype image. Jews, the feeling seems to be, should not be portrayed

as financiers, as rich people, as misers, as having foreign accents, and as humble, fawning monstrosities. Their physical features should not be described in terms of ugliness.¹⁴ An American writer has complained of what he insists is the gratuitous anti-Semitism in Graham Greene's writing. He instances sentiments like: 'They tell you Jews are awfully generous, don't you believe it.' And: 'The sharp acquisitive Jewish faces peered out.'¹⁵

The Jewish writer is clearly in a dilemma in such a situation. 'On the one hand, he is committed to the ideal of imaginatively delineating people and situations with as much honesty as he can command, holding nothing back. On the other hand, as a Jew he is expected to take into consideration the probable effect a book or a situation will have in spreading and intensifying anti-Semitic prejudice.'¹⁶ Nevertheless, there has been no shortage of Jewish writers who have not hesitated to criticize what they saw in Jewish society. In addressing the general public the Jewish writer may well be inhibited; how he reacts may depend on his judgement, experience, and feelings, and on the intimacy of his connexion with the Jewish community.

II

The first works which may properly be described as Anglo-Jewish novels appeared in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; they accompanied, that is to say, the beginnings of the large-scale immigration from Eastern Europe which completely transformed the Anglo-Jewish community. In general it is the history of that new group which is the basic subject matter of the subsequent novels and plays. That history is familiar, and parts of it have been well described in several recent studies.¹⁷ The new foreign immigrants live in the 'East Ends' of towns; they suffer poverty and hardship; but they work hard, become anglicized, and they, or their children or grandchildren, become prosperous and move out to the suburbs.

The works of fiction reflect that history, but there tends to be a time-lag. The first Anglo-Jewish novels were not, in fact, by or about the new immigrants. Such novelists as Julia Frankau ('Mrs. Frank Danby'), and Amy Levy wrote about the anglicized, middle-class, West End Jews, the descendants of earlier immigrations. By 1880 that community was largely English-born and some had taken advantage of the economic and social advances of the preceding generation. The Jewish characters are on the threshold of acceptance into English upper middle-class society; both of these writers protested at the narrow, enclosed, materialist world they saw.¹⁸

That middle-class world was overwhelmed by the post-1881 immigration of poor, Yiddish-speaking Jews, but the middle-class Jewish writers tended to retain their primacy. Thus as late as 1933, when Joseph

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Leftwich's collection of stories, *Yisröel, The First Jewish Omnibus*, was published, most of the pieces in the English section were by descendants of the pre-1881 immigration. Nevertheless, the focus of attention must inevitably be the new immigrants of the last part of the nineteenth century, and of their children.

How many 'East End' novels, written in English, there were is not easy to say. There must have been many which have been forgotten, having made no impact when they were published or since. Even those lists of Anglo-Jewish writers which seem to detail everybody who has ever written seldom mention the names of Noah Elstein, R. Hildebrand, or John Sorsky. The only Jewish writers in Britain who have been accorded serious critical treatment are Disraeli and the poet Isaac Rosenberg. Disraeli is properly regarded as significant for his political rather than his Jewish writings (and it is a matter of opinion whether or not he should be included as a Jewish writer).¹⁹

Obviously much of this literature is not worth treating with the detailed critical apparatus that a study such as this ought to require. Some of the books now make embarrassing reading and it is a matter for wonder that they are still acknowledged with respect.

One general factor in the literature by and about the post-1881 immigration is that there is a time-lag. The first generation were seldom able to acquire fluency in English, and those who described them in fiction were not themselves part of that immigration. The most famous novel of Jewish life in England in the late nineteenth century is undoubtedly Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* (1892); but Zangwill was born in England in 1864. Another contemporary description of London's East End appeared in Samuel Gordon's *Sons of the Covenant* (London, 1900); Gordon was born in Germany in 1871 and his English education was at a public school (the City of London School) and at Cambridge University. (His novel is primarily a work of social conscience, typical of the attitudes of the period. It deals with West End as well as East End Jews.)

The East End was also described by later writers; it appeared in Izak Goller's *The Five Books of Mr. Moses* (London, 1929), and in Simon Blumenfeld's *Phineas Kahn, Portrait of an Immigrant* (London, 1937).

These novels, whether written contemporaneously or later, share many features in common. The hero and his family live the same life of poverty, in overcrowded, unhealthy slums. They speak Yiddish or broken English, and are often intensely religious. The community is self-contained, and there is hardly any contact with the outside world; except for Christian missions, an important feature of Goller's strange novel. (He deals with a recurrent theme; the non-Jewish person is found to have had a Jewish mother.)²⁰ But the non-Jewish world, in general, remains something strange and fearful, to be avoided.

The immigrant novels are often regarded with distaste nowadays because of the foreignness of the characters and the sentimentality of the

situations and of the writing. But several of the novels of the 1930's, dealing with the second generation, have a different, tougher tone. They include Noah Elstein's *Plight of Peretz* (London, 1930), Simon Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy* (London, 1935), and his *Phineas Kahn*, and Willy Goldman's *East End My Cradle* (London, 1940). The period covered by these novels—say 1910 to 1940—saw what David Daiches has suggested was 'one of the most short-lived languages in the world'—Scots-Yiddish: 'Aye man, ich hob' getrebbelt mit de five o'clock train'; and 'Vot time's yer barmitzvie, laddie?'²¹ Such 'languages' probably existed in most places, producing cockney-Yiddish, Welsh-Yiddish, Lancashire-Yiddish, and so on. One or other was spoken by the parents of the main characters in the novels produced in the 1930's. In the more Jewish areas the children adopted a more English, but still recognizably Jewish accent. The girl in Elstein's novel has the typical 'adenoidal' overtones of the period.

The majority of the second-generation people in these novels are still working-class, but there is a change of emphasis. The East End was always a declining community; the aim of most Jews was to leave it as soon as possible, and to move out of the working-class by becoming a small master or manufacturer, the children going to grammar schools and entering the professions.²² The novels of the thirties do not reflect this theme. The talk is of strikes, unemployment, trade union and political action. The heroes do not speak of becoming manufacturers or doctors, but poets, artists, and writers. Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy* is Jewish only because the main character is a Jew. He leaves the family early in the novel, and the remainder of the story is a typical, if well-written, example of the Proletarian Novel. It has, for Jewish novels, an unusually un sentimental atmosphere, and it includes sex, a subject which Jewish writers until then seem to have forgotten.

In some of the novels, the father is a failure, hopeless at trying to make a living. This accords with the proletarian theme, as well as showing a typical character in Jewish folklore. But it also agrees with the rejection of the middle class which comes into these novels and helps to account for the fact that the family is still poor and in the East End.

In Goldman's *East End My Cradle* the hero describes his father:

My father had every Jewish trait except the one the Gentile world has made into a legend: acquisitiveness. He didn't have the acquisitiveness even of the ordinary breadwinner. . . . To this day he goes round giving bits of his wages to beggars. He has an inconvenient disposition to see the other man's view-point. In a dispute over the rent his heart bleeds for the landlord's difficulties (p. 190).

The father in *Plight of Peretz* is also a failure:

After a life full of odd vicissitudes, trumpery trades and petty businesses, Mr. Israel had recently turned trousers-presser, taking work 'out' from a

number of master-tailors. (As his wife was wont to comment bitterly, he had flown, flown, flown—and alighted on the back of a pig.) . . . He earned very little, even when working full time, for he was a slow worker, or, as his wife would call him, a scratcher (p. 44).

Whereas the non-Jewish world hardly enters the immigrant novel, it has an important place in the novels of the second generation. There is the question of anti-Semitism; there is the problem of inter-marriage. Inter-marriage may act as an escape-route from a narrow, bigoted world, or be, more positively—as in Louis Golding's over-rated *Magnolia Street* (London, 1932)—the answer to the Jewish problem. Opposed to it are family pressure and the folk-myth of Jewish ritual and practices; religious practices are performed by the older generation but seldom by the younger.

Willy Goldman's novel, which appeared in 1940, marked the end of an era, although not of the East End's appearance in fiction. His hero grows up in the Cable Street district of Stepney, a tough area of Jews and non-Jews, and goes to work in the tailoring trade.²³ In 1940 the blitz began the final break-up of the Jewish East End, already weakened by earlier movements out to Hackney, Stamford Hill, and the suburbs.²⁴ Later, the general decline in the population of the East End combined with post-war prosperity to accelerate the suburbanization of London Jewry, a process paralleled in the provincial towns.

Those who, before the war, were brought up in the working and lower middle-class areas outside the East End have made their appearance in novels published since the war. They were written by people whose schooldays and youth were spent in the shadow of Hitlerism, Spain, the Popular Front, Zionism, and the war. The characters may still live largely in a Jewish atmosphere, as in Roland Camberton's *Rain on the Pavements* (London, 1951), a novel of Hackney, but the non-Jewish world is very much in evidence. The heroes usually go to a grammar school, where most of the boys are non-Jews. In Dannie Abse's novel of Cardiff, *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve* (London, 1954), the boys in the family have non-Jewish girl-friends with the parents' knowledge—a new departure. The third important novel is Alexander Baron's *With Hope, Farewell* (London, 1952), based, like Camberton's, on Hackney, although the group dealt with belong to the working-class Dutch Jews who came to Britain in the pre-1881 period. All three novels are in the form of chronicles, beginning with the heroes as children in the 1920's and following their life as children at school and, in Baron's case the hero's career in the R.A.F. during the war, and his experiences after the war in 1948.

Abse's novel reflects the leftish politics of the period, as does Camberton's; the latter also introduces the reader to Zionism, but only in a brief episode. There is hardly any anti-Semitism referred to in Abse, and it is played down in Camberton—incidents at the grammar school are

described ironically. In Baron's book it takes first place. Like so many other Jewish novels the hero rejects the Jewish community for its narrowness and squalor; later, after the war, he returns to it under the impact of anti-Semitism. The final episode describes the post-war Fascist activity in Hackney, and the attacks on synagogues in Britain which accompanied the terrorist activity during the close of the Palestinian mandate. There is an anti-Jewish riot during which the hero's wife is injured and has a miscarriage.

Baron's novel describes, in sensitive detail, how it feels to be a Jew in a hostile or possibly hostile world. The tone is set in the first chapter when the family is on holiday at a non-Jewish hotel. They are anxious to avoid slighting remarks and to seek out other Jews. The mother at lunch says to her husband:

'That couple over there.' She spoke softly and urgently. 'I bet you they're ours.' The boys listened; they knew what she meant. 'Him, the husband; look at him.' She was excited at her discovery.

He looked. 'Nah. You're imagining. Anyway, you can't tell. Can't ask them either. They'd take a fit if you was wrong.'

'You can hint,' she said. There was a special technique for hinting; a host of private, innocent words and phrases to trail here and there in the midst of conversation, in the hope of a response (p. 15).

The Jews in the East End novels of the 1930's had no time to be touchy in this way; they were aggressive. Abse's hero is neither sensitive nor aggressive. The hero as a young boy asks:

'Uncle, what's it like to be Jewish all your life?'

"S all right," he said (p. 27).

This is the tone of relationships with the immediate Gentile world, but the author introduces echoes of anti-Semitism from the wider world.

The post-war period has been written about in other novels. In some of Wolf Mankowitz's stories, such as *Make me an Offer* (London, 1952), a story of antique dealers, the setting is the present day; the Jewish businessman is well described. Some of his other stories are firmly based on the East End and the East End, too, was the setting for two plays produced in 1958, which aroused a great deal of interest: Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* and Bernard Kops's *The Hamlet of Stepney Green*.²⁵ Kops's play is set in a lower middle-class home at the present day, and describes the attempt of the son to become a crooner. The theme of Wesker's play is disillusionment with the Communist Party, ending with the Hungarian Rising of 1956. It begins with a Jewish family living in Stepney in 1936. They take part in the demonstration to prevent the Fascists marching through the East End; it is a continuation, in other words, of the theme of Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy*.

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After the war the family is living in a council flat in Hackney and is still working-class. As in so many East End stories, the mother is dominant, the father is a failure, and the son wants to be a writer. The fact that they are Jewish is hardly relevant to the story. There is little awareness of contemporary Jewish events; the mother becomes a Communist because of the state of the economic system, not—as was probably more typical—as a reaction to Hitlerism and anti-Semitism. There is nothing about Zionism.²⁹

In only one novel has Zionism played a major role, in David Marcus's *To Next Year in Jerusalem* (London, 1954). It is set in Ireland during 1947 and 1948 in a remote town where there is only the remnant of a Jewish community. The events in Palestine provide the background to the story. Part of the material is familiar—the religious, foreign, older generation, for example—but the novel's strangeness lies in the hero's being one of the only ten males in the town. He is attracted to Palestine, but he hesitates to go because he is essential for the *minyán* (a poor excuse) and he is in love with an Irish girl. The hero is Jewish both in terms of his adherence to religious practices—another new departure—and to Zionism; he is also integrated in the Irish community. Unlike novels written by English Jews, this one was not afraid to speak up for the terrorists—indeed the Irish background is a suitable setting for such an attitude.

III

All the Jewish writers, from Zangwill to Wesker, focus their attention on the East End and its extension, and on working and lower middle-class life. The East End, however, as the major centre of the Jewish population and the source of the community's strength is vanishing. It is a commonplace to observe that Anglo-Jewry is becoming middle-class and professional. This is known from the few available statistics and from ordinary experience. The decline of the East End, and the growth of Jewish communities in north-west London and the outer suburbs (there is a similar spread in the provinces), also imply the same process. It is a commonplace too to be critical of the new Jewish middle-class. *The Jewish Observer and Middle East Review* used the opportunity of the tercentenary of the resettlement of the Jews in England to make a stock-taking of the present Anglo-Jewish situation (13 January 1956). Zionism is now conventional and no longer dynamic; there is a vast mass of religious indifference; inter-marriage and assimilation are increasing. At the same time an orthodox minority is becoming increasingly intolerant in religious matters. There is no source of persons or ideas in the now vanished intensely-Jewish Eastern European countries, and what so many people have been saying for generations about decay in Anglo-Jewish life now has a greater chance than ever of success. Jews nowadays

adhere to religion as a social necessity, but the highest offices go to those with money. 'Our community is overwhelmingly middle class and one of its characteristics is that it thinks of success in terms of money; its heroes are those who attain success on the financial plane.'

An attack on materialism in modern Jewish life was the major theme of a novel by Brian Glanville, *The Bankrupts*, published in 1958. The author has no direct knowledge of the East End, and went to a public school; for those reasons alone the novel would merit some attention. It was written by a competent writer, and it aroused a great deal of controversy within the Jewish community. There was a long correspondence in *The Jewish Chronicle*, the main Anglo-Jewish periodical; ministers of religion spoke about it; Glanville received the accolade of 'Angry Young Man'. A series of interviews with other young Jewish writers, published in *The Jewish Chronicle* in December 1958 and January 1959, showed quite clearly that they had little faith in the Anglo-Jewish community or its future. The external forces making for cohesiveness—anti-Semitism and Zionism—were no longer of pressing importance; but there was nothing in Judaism or Jewish life positive enough to attract and hold people. All that remained were lockshen pudding and charity dances.

This is the mood of Glanville's novel. There were aspects of the book that caught on and it is worthy of detailed examination. In *The Bankrupts* the grandparents came from Eastern Europe and the family business was built up in the East End. The parents moved out of the East End and now live somewhere 'between Hampstead and Hendon'. The family retain links with the Jewish religion, but their attachment to ritual is minimal—they eat bacon, for example. The story hinges on the daughter, who has had a typical English upper middle-class education; she has no job, but dabbles in art. The parents want her to marry a rich young Jew—any rich young Jew—and much of the novel concerns her rejection of a string of suitors. She meets a Jewish postgraduate student, and, after parental opposition, she goes off to live with him. He obtains a post at the Hebrew University, and gets killed by Arabs. She finds she is pregnant and decides to go to Israel to have her baby in a kibbutz. The point is that this wealthy society is hopelessly and corruptly materialist. Bernard Carter, the student, is not suitable for her because he can only become a teacher or a lecturer and will not earn much. The society is interested only in money, fashion, charity dances, and business.

The novel describes and attacks the closely-knit family whose Jewishness is vestigial, but which exists largely within its own Jewish world. Its members attend Jewish functions, belong to Jewish organizations (e.g. a golf club), and spend their holidays at Jewish hotels.

There is much that is worthwhile in the novel. It is an excellent illustration of the fact that even anglicized Jews can and do live almost

entirely Jewish lives, in which their contacts, business as well as social and familial, are Jewish. What can be the stiflingly oppressive atmosphere of a Jewish family, with meticulous control of the children by the parents, is dissected with repetitive precision. The detailed investigation of materialism is salutary; it is a useful corrective to the widely-held impression—among non-Jews as well as Jews—that Jews are necessarily sensitive, artistic, musical, and intellectual.

And yet the novel does not come off. Even apart from the melodrama of the ending, there are faults of style and characterization. The writing is strident, and the discussion is carried on at the top of everyone's voice, involving an over-use of exclamation marks and adjectives. Almost everybody and everything is painted in lurid colours. Sometimes this leads to peculiar images; a fresco on the wall of a Jewish restaurant contains 'policemen *frozen* into strange, stiff attitudes and grimaces, as though by the *lava* of some invisible volcano' (p. 20; my italics). There is little development of character and little attempt to probe beneath superficialities. It is as though the author has made a rapid tour and amplified the snatches of conversation he heard. Furthermore, the author overstates his case. It is a commonplace in Jewish fiction to attack the Jewish religion; he gives the usual reasons of a meaningless and irrelevant ritual, but he also blames it for the heroine's refusal to sleep with the hero.

To describe the novel as anti-Semitic, as many people did (I heard it spoken of as 'disloyal'), is not very helpful. The author has written that those who protested at the book were objecting to any criticism of the Jewish community; the society he attacks 'denies the justice or validity of any hostile statement'. It is true that most people object to criticism—the author not least among them—but he is wrong to impute defence mechanisms to the motives of those who have objected to the book.²⁷

For it is clear that he has written an indictment of the whole of London Jewry, and possibly of all Anglo-Jewry. This is plain from his authorial comments: for example, the story of the family from the grandparents' immigration in the late nineteenth century 'was straightforward and familiar, in all but detail, the story of a thousand other Jewish immigrants' (p. 16). It is this wholesale generalization which has caused much of the irritation to his readers. The characters and situations he describes are based on Hampstead Garden Suburb; it would be very easy to produce evidence from elsewhere to dispute much of what he says.²⁸ For example, the situation he describes—a student of English literature being turned down as a prospective son-in-law—can, and no doubt does, arise. It is the contrary of the myth of the Jewish attachment to disinterested learning. But it would have made more sense, and been more typical, if the arguments had been about a poor working-man, or a non-Jew. A more usual solution would have been for the student to have been offered a post in the family business.

One particular objection needs to be stated; his descriptions of Jewish physical features. Sentences such as 'The voice was glutinous, its owner swarthy, huge-nosed, Asiatic' (p. 135) give the right impression of repugnance. But the author must make allowances for those to whom such writing is reminiscent of Fascist journalism. Compared with this, the objections to Graham Greene's descriptions seem trivial and absurd.

Finally, while an attack on materialism is an important and necessary theme, this book does not arouse sympathy. The humourless method of using the petulant grumblings of some spoilt children induces boredom rather than understanding.

IV

The Anglo-Jewish novelists and playwrights have undoubtedly produced works which reflect the recent social history of the Jews of Britain. Their fiction is a useful commentary on, and provides interesting supplementary material for, any discussion of the main trends of that history. But it would be hopelessly wrong to assume that what has interested these writers are necessarily the main problems that have agitated Anglo-Jewry.

The time-lag operates in the later works of fiction. It is obvious that most Anglo-Jewish works have a strong autobiographical flavour—not many of the writers have produced more than one or two Jewish stories, and they are invariably about young people or the stories are told from the viewpoint of young people. Moreover, Jewish writers in England seem to have few contacts with general Jewish life; their knowledge of Jewish matters is, apparently, based on a remembrance of their childhood, and they protest at that childhood.

Further, it is normal for any writer of quality to assume the primacy of the arts and to reject and despise many aspects of contemporary life. The writer's concentration on the significance of becoming a writer or artist is not, therefore, completely unexpected. Again, there are gaps in this literature. The post-1933 German immigration is hardly represented²⁹ nor is there much mention of Zionism, a movement which, in the 1930's and 1940's, tended to become the major force in Jewish life, for many people superseding the synagogue as its focal point. The establishment of the State of Israel has removed much of the *raison d'être* of Zionism, leaving a void which many anxious minds are seeking to fill.

This is clearly one of the major problems in modern Jewish life, associated with the desire to establish a Jewish identity, the desire of those who wish to become as English as possible, to remove all traces of stereotype images, and yet who want to remain attached to the Jewish community, or to identify themselves in some way as Jews.³⁰ There is material, for example, in the experiences of Robert Henriques, a mem-

ber of a Jewish family settled in England since at least the eighteenth century, a Regular Army officer, and a farmer. He was an Englishman who happened to practise the Jewish religion, and an anti-Zionist. 'Israel was not much more than an item of news to me until the late autumn of 1955. It was then that something clicked through some cause which, even to-day, I cannot locate. Perhaps it was the Centurion tank which Britain was giving to Egypt but withholding from Israel. Or perhaps it was some remote stirring in a Jew's blood. Whatever it was, I had a sudden, inexplicable, undefined and still indefinable feeling of identity with Israel, a place that I had never visited and for which I had even felt, hitherto, a kind of apprehensive repugnance.'³¹

Dr. Talmon also has some pertinent comments:

It seems impossible to lay a finger on anything tangible and measurable in the Jew's Jewishness; yet an ailing, all-devouring self-consciousness comes like a film between him and the world. Not bothered with when things are normal and prosper, he is seen as ubiquitous, all-powerful, sinister when blame is to be laid upon someone. I believe the links holding Jews together are—to use words of Edmund Burke—as invisible as the air and as strong as the heaviest chains, and the Jewish ingredient to be as imperceptible to the senses, yet as effective in results, as vital energy itself.

But these things are too subtle for the historian's techniques and such crude instruments as quantitative measurements of Jewish participation in trades and professions, or data on attendance at synagogue and contributions to charities. Jewish impulses and reactions, attitudes and sensitiveness, Jewish patterns of thought and feeling, and Jewish modes of behaviour call for the intuition of the artist, and can indeed be only intimated by symbols, conjured up by poetic incantation, and conveyed by the art of the novelist.³²

Not everyone will agree with those sentiments. There is a crying need for factual information of the most basic kind; for example, the only research on inter-marriage in Britain is based on fifty cases. It would do no harm, either, to have systematic information about Jewish participation in the arts, as consumers as well as producers. There is, however, a great deal in what he says. Whether the present generation of Anglo-Jewish novelists can tackle it is debatable. There are several who have the equipment to do so, but to judge by the recent utterances of some of them, while they may be aware of the ambiguities in Jewish life, they maintain a self-imposed social distance between themselves and the Jewish community. Their attack on materialism is not a criticism of industrial society in the grand manner, but rather a long-winded grumble at the Jewish community for not buying their books. At that level of discussion we cannot hope for much.³³

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NOTES

¹ Salo W. Baron, 'The Modern Age', in *Great Ideas and Ages of the Jewish People* (ed. Leo W. Schwarz) (New York, 1956), p. 390.

² In 'Anglo-Jewish Literature' I include also works relating to the Jews of Ireland and Wales (produced by Lily Tobias, Dannie Abse, and David Marcus). There is no other suitable phrase; 'British-Jewish' would be wrong because Commonwealth writers would have to be included, and the Irish would have to be excluded.

³ For some comments on Pinter see: *The Times*, 16 November 1959; *New Statesman*, 12 December 1959; *The Observer*, 13 December 1959.

⁴ For a bibliography of publications between 1877 and 1935 see C. Roth, *Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica* (London, 1937), pp. 172-6. Since 1935 the major works have been: M. F. Modder, *The Jew in the Literature of England* (Philadelphia, 1939); E. D. Coleman, *The Jew in English Drama. An Annotated Bibliography* (New York, 1943) (this includes American works).

⁵ George Orwell, 'Anti-Semitism in Britain', in *England Your England, and other essays* (1953), p. 76. The article first appeared in the *Contemporary Jewish Record* in 1945.

⁶ Fisch, op. cit., p. 46. For a general discussion of the period see: H. R. S. van der Veen, *Jewish Characters in Eighteenth Century English Fiction and Drama* (Groningen, 1935).

⁷ Orwell, op. cit., p. 73.

⁸ Perhaps the most important Jewish character in modern English literature is Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. For a recent discussion see: David Daiches, 'James Joyce's Jew' in *The Jewish Chronicle Quarterly Supplement: A Review of Literature and the Arts*, 25 December 1959.

⁹ Morris Ginsberg, 'Anti-Semitism', in his *Reason and Unreason in Society* (London, 1947), pp. 208-11.

¹⁰ Orwell, op. cit., p. 76; van der Veen, op. cit., p. 31.

¹¹ This was in a letter of 1863 to Eliza Davis. Printed in Modder, op. cit., p. 220.

¹² A. O. J. Cockshut, *Anthony Trollope. A Critical Study* (1955), p. 211. The reference is to *The Way We Live Now* published in 1875.

¹³ Helen Bentwich, in a notice of the play. *The Jewish Review*, no. 2 (1932), p. 110. One writer even goes so far as to include *Loyalties* with the other anti-Semitic novels and plays: Ludwig Feuchtwanger, 'Reflections on Anglo-Jewish History', *Historia Judaica*, Vol. 9, no. 2 (1947), p. 126.

¹⁴ In Goller's *The Five Books of Mr. Moses* the author addresses the reader: 'The writer apologizes. His tale is villainous. He tried to find a villain to entertain his readers and to wipe off old scores. To hit back at the Gentile novelists. Ninety-nine per cent of the Ikeys and Moseses in Gentile novels have hooked noses, sensual lips, wicked, scheming brains, and lips. And they are ever lying in wait to overreach the simple, honest, manly innocent Gentiles' (p. 159).

¹⁵ H. U. Ribalow, 'Of Jews and Graham Greene', *The Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1955), p. 13.

¹⁶ C. I. Glicksberg, 'Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Novelist', *Mid-Century* (ed. H. U. Ribalow) (New York, 1955), p. 341. He is speaking of American-Jewish writers, but the sentiment is appropriate to other countries besides America.

¹⁷ V. D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950* (London, 1954); *A Minority in Britain, Social Studies of the Anglo-Jewish Community* (ed. M. Freedman) (London, 1955); Israel Finestein, *A Short History of Anglo-Jewry* (London, 1957), especially chapters 12 and 13; Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914* (London, in press 1960).

¹⁸ Victor Gollancz, in *My dear Timothy* (London, 1952), describes the same world in non-fictional terms. For Amy Levy, see: Beth Zion Lask, 'Amy Levy', *Transactions Jewish Historical Society of England*, Vol. XI (1924-7), pp. 168-89.

¹⁹ For Rosenberg see: *Poems*, by Isaac Rosenberg, selected and edited by Gordon Bottomley (London, 1922); D. W. Harding, 'Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg', *Scrutiny*, Vol. 3, no. 4, (1934-5); *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (eds. Gordon Bottomley and Denys Harding) (London, 1937); *Isaac Rosenberg. A Catalogue of an Exhibition held at Leeds University, May-June 1959* (Leeds, 1959).

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²⁰ Goller's book deals with the East End, but the characters are of the Dutch-Jewish community.

²¹ David Daiches, *Two Worlds. An Edinburgh Jewish Childhood* (London, 1957), p. 119.

²² 'The more striving and ambitious Jewish parents (and many of them fell into this category) were quick to perceive the advantages to be gained by sending their children, either as scholarship winners or fee-payers, to the expanding grammar schools. Professor David Glass points out that high prestige was given among the Jewish community to "leaving the ghetto", and this leaving process was facilitated by winning a place in a grammar school.' Flann Campbell, 'East London Grammar Schools', *East London Papers*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1958), p. 3n.

²³ See K. G. T. McDonnell's discussion of the book in *East London Papers*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (1959), pp. 109-114.

²⁴ The move to the suburbs appears in novels such as Goller's, and Blumenfeld's *Phineas Kahn*.

²⁵ These two plays were printed in *New English Dramatists* (ed. E. Martin Browne) (Harmondsworth, 1959).

²⁶ For some views on Wesker's writings see: *Manchester Guardian*, 6 August 1959; *The Times*, 21 September 1959.

²⁷ Brian Glanville, 'The Bankrupts:

Some Defence Reactions', *The Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (1958), pp. 34-5.

²⁸ I heard someone who lives in Stamford Hill comment, after reading the novel: 'So that's how they live in north-west London.'

²⁹ Victor Ross, *Basic British* (London, 1956) is one example, although not explicitly Jewish. This is similar to those 'aren't the English peculiar' books, but is saved from banality by the occasional bitter tone, as in the description of the internment of refugees at the beginning of the Second World War.

³⁰ American-Jewish writers seem to have had some success in tackling this theme. See: Leslie A. Fiedler, *The Jew in the American Novel* (New York, 1959); 'A Vocal Group. The Jewish Part in American Letters', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 November 1959 (special edition on 'The American Imagination'), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

³¹ Robert Henriques, *One Hundred Hours to Suez* (London, 1957), p. 13.

³² J. L. Talmon, *The Nature of Jewish History—Its Universal Significance* (London, 1957), p. 13.

³³ I should like to acknowledge the assistance and advice of Mr. John Trim, Lecturer in Phonetics, the University of Cambridge, with whom I have discussed many of the points in this article.