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VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Summer/Fall 2005 no. 63

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## Affirming Life

### **My War: Memoir of a Young Jewish Poet by Edward Stankiewicz. Syracuse University Press.**

A Review Essay by Daniel Grossberg

*My War: Memoir of a Young Jewish Poet* is a personal account of the experiences of Edward Stankiewicz in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust. The remove of almost 60 years allows Stankiewicz, in a period of calm, to recollect and recount in a clear and measured prose, the stormy events of his youthful life. Although, the darkest powers of evil worked to strip him and millions of others — first, of their humanity and secondly, of their life — Stankiewicz did not succumb. We can never know what accounted for his success in withstanding the forces of dehumanization and death. At the end of the memoir, after the Liberation, the author explains a positive turn of events this way: "... in this world of accidents, a lucky break came once more." Despite this expression of the dispiriting notion of happenstance governing life and death issues, *Memoir of A Young Jewish Poet* is a life-affirming document that raises lofty ideas.

Stankiewicz was on the run from the Nazis but managed to meet with Yiddish, Polish and Soviet poets and writers. Even as he sought refuge in Soviet-occupied Lwow, he contrived to join the Lwow Literary Club. The cultivation of his intellect under such grim circumstances was all but obsessive on his part. After the German occupation of Lwow, his artistic gifts made it possible for him to produce believable forgeries of German documents and papers to help people escape. Soon it was necessary for him to flee. Clad in a German uniform, he escaped to Eastern Ukraine and evaded capture for several months. In time, however, he was discovered and shipped to Buchenwald. Even in the hell of this concentration camp, he read whatever books he chanced upon, and managed to write poetry, a play and he even painted — all clandestinely and at great danger to his life, if detected. Furthermore, during these tortured times, he sought out others of a like mind and

spirit and surreptitiously discussed philosophical ideas and books with them.

The reader is struck by the rich natural endowments of this man. During the Holocaust years, Edward Stankiewicz was an intelligent, artistic man with an irrepressible spirit and, to judge by the style of the memoir, he retains these personal traits and qualities to this day. It is difficult not to consider the role his personal traits played in his success at defying the fate that met so many other Polish Jews during the Nazi years.

During the war years, his pursuit of intellectual interests and the engagement of his creative talents never let up. Stankiewicz writes in the chapter of the memoir entitled "The Library": "... I had no earthly possessions. All I carried with me was a book I had borrowed from the Buchenwald library. My discovery of the library was like a new lease on life.... The books were a reminder of a world that, though violated and bruised, was still one of beauty and wonder, and that, should we survive, we would still try to reclaim and enjoy. In reality, I was not thinking much of the future; the books were there and I wanted to read them, just as one wants to eat and sleep." [P. 95]

His compulsive reading is no mere escapist attempt to flee the immediate Nazi horrors by taking refuge in an imaginary world of ideas. The ideas of the intellect were for Stankiewicz very real and compelling. Nevertheless, they did not delude him. He remained throughout, fully cognizant of the "violated and bruised" world surrounding him. The intellectual pursuits did not obliterate the grim external reality, but rather fostered in him the notion of "a world of beauty and wonder" that he might one day reclaim and enjoy. The author cultivated matters of the spirit, not in order to better bear the unbearable — although, indeed, his engagement with ideas made life more tolerable — but rather because *he could not help but* engage his mind this way. As he asserts, "... the books were there and I wanted to read them, just as one wants to eat and sleep." [P. 95]

Elsewhere in the memoir, Stankiewicz recalls finding a book on the history of art that he read hungrily, remembering the various ideas advanced by the author. Later, upon learning that a fellow Buchenwald inmate was a professor of philosophy, Stankiewicz writes: "I turned to him with all sorts of questions generated by my reading...." And: "Under his tutelage I got into a book that stayed with me for some time." The matter-of-fact recounting of this man's activities makes Buchenwald seem, albeit for only some fleeting moments, more a literary salon than the infamous Nazi concentration camp we know it to have been.

The author is quoted as saying at a recent celebration of the publication of this memoir: "A friend of mine once credited my ingenuity for my survival. I said, 'I possessed two abilities — I could write poetry and I could paint — and these certainly helped me at times.' But so many outstanding writers, poets and painters died. Four million Polish Jews died and about 20 million Russians, maybe more. I am alive because of luck — bloody luck." Is his a world of chance and nothing more? Were just accidents and lucky breaks responsible for his withstanding the forces of dehumanization and death? Alas, we will never know. The memoir can offer no satisfying answer to these questions, but it does teach life-lessons of another sort.

The memoir teaches invaluable lessons not about physical existence, but about human values. The account of this man and the life-affirming qualities of art and reason that his life illumines are inspirational. Even as a victim of the darkest machinations of evildoers, the memoirist did not suspend his intellectual and artistic activities nor his craving for engagement of his intellect and artistic talents. The powers of oppression were mighty, but not enough to still this man's inquiring mind and creative imagination. The memoir is not, therefore, a harangue against the Nazi monsters, nor a railing at a nihilistic world. *My War: Memoir of a Young Jewish Poet* is a celebration of the liberating and ennobling power of the mind and spirit.

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## Anti-Semitism, The Holocaust and Christianity

Robert Michael

The Holocaust seems inexplicable. Scholars, especially, understand the inadequacy of historical explanation. And yet, just as historians try to explain the decline and fall of Rome and the causes of the First World War, they struggle to understand why the Holocaust happened. Christianity's precise influence on the Holocaust is impossible to determine and the Christian churches did not themselves perpetrate the Final Solution. But as a historian, I believe that Christian anti-Semitism is not only the source but also the major ideological basis of Nazi anti-Semitism.

This conclusion appears impossible. The churches' moral principles, so antithetical to the genocidal morality of Nazi Germany, should preclude any connection between Christian precepts and the Final Solution. Some Nazis explicitly ridiculed Christian ideals, though many more attacked the Christian churches but not Christianity itself.

Moreover, a small minority of Christians helped the Jews during the Holocaust and a few thousand of them risked their lives to help Jews just as, for two millennia, some Christians had always treated Jews decently. This latter group consisted mostly of authentic Christians acting on Jesus' moral teachings, although some may have had more pragmatic, and less ethical, reasons.

My book, *Holy Hatred* (Mellen 2005), argues that during the Holocaust, people — almost all of them born as Christians, baptized and married in a church, coming from a Christian environment, and absorbing a form of Christian culture that condemned Jews — attempted to murder all the Jews of Europe. Most other Christians either actively collaborated in this murderous endeavor or tacitly permitted it to happen. Most Christians — not just in Germany — seemed to agree to various extents with what Hitler called for, not so much because of the pressures of fear and anxiety, although these were often present, but



because an anti-Jewish Christian ideology had been conditioning them for millennia. Nearly every Nazi administrative order — from yellow stars to ghettos, from defamations to deportations, from round-ups to slaughters — had a precedent in the Christian West. Millions of Jews were murdered before Adolf Hitler was a twinkle in his mother's eye. Jews were condemned as devils from the time of the Church Fathers and massacred from the Middle Ages onward. To traditional anti-Semitism the Nazis added a comprehensive organization and the fanatic willingness and technology to follow through to their horrific end the murderous impulses inherent in anti-Semitism.

In *The Holy Reich*, Richard Steigmann-Gall points out that Nazism was not an anti-Christian pagan movement, that Christianity played a crucial role in most Nazis' lives and in their Nazism, that Christians believed in the Jewishness of Germany's woes and pointed to a final solution of these Jewish-generated problems, that the so-called Nazi pagans — whom many Christian Nazis opposed — were anti-ecclesiastical but not anti-Christian, that Nazi anti-Semitism fit in neatly with Christian anti-Semitism, that leading Nazis strengthened Protestant Christianity, that in their social policies the Nazis were guided by a Christian ethic, and finally that Nazism may have been hostile to the churches but never "uniformly anti-Christian." Many Nazis, both Catholic and Protestant in background, adhered to a "positive Christianity" in which they appropriated a divine Jesus Christ as the leading anti-Semite; they claimed to be authentic Christians above and beyond the artificial division of Catholic and Protestant confessions; "they held that Christianity was a central aspect of their movement [and] shaped its direction, ... a lynchpin of their world view."

Ideology was not the only cause of the Nazi Holocaust. A whole raft of political, economic and psychosocial factors also contributed. But the anti-Jewish aspects of Christian thought and theology, the anti-Jewish Christian mindset and attitudes, and the anti-Jewish precedents provided by the churches' historical relationship to Jews significantly conditioned, and may have determined, the plan, establishment and prosecution of the Holocaust. The churches and their theologians had

formulated compelling religious, social and moral ideas that provided a conceptual framework for the perception of the Jew as less than human or inhuman, devilish, satanic, long before the National-Socialists called Jews traitors, murderers, plague, pollution, filth, devils and insects.

My *Concise History of American Anti-Semitism* (Rowman & Littlefield 2005) discusses Glock and Stark's study that discovered that even at a time of growing ecumenical harmony led by the Catholic Vatican II Council, about half of the Americans interviewed — both Catholic and Protestant, both lay and clergy — believed that all Jews were responsible for crucifying Christ, and they could not be forgiven for this act until they converted; God punishes Jews because they reject Christ; the Jews are responsible for their own suffering; and the interview respondents were the same people who, associating the Jews with materialism, faulted them for being greedy. The researchers concluded that far from being exclusively secular, "the heart and soul of anti-Semitism rested on Christianity." Fully 95 percent of Americans got their secular stereotypes of Jews from the Christian religion. Christianity, as other religions, stands as the focus of prejudice because "it is the pivot of the cultural tradition of a group." This group, Christians, is unlike any other group in Western history; it has been the controlling in-group over the last 1,700 years.

Other studies of prejudice and stereotyping indicate that although the human mind has an inherent tendency to classify, it is not inevitable that people will categorize others by race or ethnicity. Seventy percent of Americans in the late 1990s demonstrated unconscious stereotyping because they were emotionally induced to have false memories. It was learned behavior. Irish Catholics and Protestants, Hutu and Tutsi, Serbs and Albanians hate and fear each other not because of any inherent predisposition to perceive racial differences, but because of learned religious and political motives.

It is almost impossible to find examples of anti-Semitism that are exclusively racial, economic or political, and free of religious configura-

tion. The infamous Nuremberg Laws of 1935, for example, employed the religious affiliation of Jews in order to identify them for discrimination. What else could they do? There was no authentic scientific way to detect the racial nature of a Jew. So the Nazis had to resort to using birth and baptismal records to establish who was a Jew, who was not. Even the most notorious racist of the twentieth century, if not in history, Adolf Hitler, concluded near the end of his life that biological racism was a sham. It was the Jewish mind and values, the "Jewish spirit," that he hated. The only way to rid the world of this viral spirit, Hitler concluded, was to destroy the Jewish bodies that housed it.

*My Dictionary of Anti-Semitism* — Greenwood 2005 — (with Philip Rosen) shows that Christian anti-Semitism in the broad sense prepared Christians not only to perceive Jews in a certain way, but also to accept the anti-Jewish aspects of secular ideas — and to take action on them. The historical continuity of anti-Jewish ideas and imagery is clear testimony that no essential difference exists between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. David Kertzer has outlined a dozen beliefs of modern anti-Semites about Jews: (1) conspiracy, (2) intent to conquer the world, (3) desire to harm Christians, (4) immorality, (5) money-grubbing, (6) control of the press, (7) ruination of Christians economically, (8) creation of godless Communism, (9) murder of Christian children and drinking their blood, (10) destruction of the Christian religion, (11) traitors to their nation, and; (12) Jews must be segregated and their rights curtailed. All these traits — control of the press and creation of Communism can be subsumed under "conspiracy" — are not modern but stem from the writings of the Church Fathers and/or the Christian Middle Ages.

Anti-Semitism refers to the irrational dislike or hatred of Jews, the attempt to demoralize or satanize them, the rejection of the validity of the Jewish religion, the Jewish way of life, the Jewish spirit, the Jewish character, and, ultimately, the Jewish right to live.

Of the approximately twenty-five percent of pagan writers who disliked the Jews, almost all of them felt Jews were an annoying people who

ate differently, wasted time on the Sabbath, believed in a ridiculous invisible God and so forth. But the Christian charge against the Jews leaped quantitatively and qualitatively into "Christ-killer."

Christians cited holy writ: "Let his blood be on our heads and the heads of our children." Saint Augustine called all Jews "Cains," Saint Jerome saw all Jews as "Judases," Saint John Chrysostom regarded all Jews as useless animals fit for slaughter. Christian ideas such as these are not the kind that exist in a detached Platonic realm, but *idées forces*, ideas with emotional punch affecting minds and attitudes, and as a result the bodies and behaviors of Christians and Jews over the last two millennia. Eugen Weber has commented that "ideas, endlessly repeated, furnished justification for the vilest acts."

Christian anti-Semitism was not inevitable. Christians need not have been hostile and contemptuous toward Jews. Some Christians have appreciated Jewish contributions to civilization and have welcomed, befriended and supported Jews over the last two millennia. The historical record does not demonstrate an unremitting Christian attack against the Jews. If the Church had attempted to eradicate all the Jews, as it did the heretics, Jews would have disappeared by the fourth or fifth century, when Christianity came to dominate the Roman Empire, or certainly by the High Middle Ages, when the Church's influence was almost totalitarian. Some Christians in every generation have genuinely respected Jews. The Roman Catholic Church's historical prohibitions against Christian-Jewish fraternization presumed the existence of social relationships between Christians and Jews. Christian theologians continually complained about the faithful who grew too close to Jews or treated them as human beings rather than as theological types. In every era, some Christians steadfastly taught their children to respect other human beings, Jews included. In *The Altruistic Personality*, the Oliners concluded: "For most rescuers [of Jews during the Holocaust,] helping Jews was an expression of ethical principles that extended to all of humanity..."

This kind of ethical Christian treatment of human beings has been

termed the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*); it justifies humane behavior toward Jews. This belief required the Christian faithful to follow the moral teachings of Jesus concerning all human beings even at the risk of their own lives. Emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, his fears and anxieties as well as his courage and faith, the theology of the cross underscores the solidarity of suffering among all human beings, Gentile and Jew. Analysis of Christians who helped Jews during the Holocaust reveals many different motivations for their behavior, but most of these motives derive from the model of human behavior found in the Judeo-Christian morality of Jesus of Nazareth.

Most Christian writers, thinkers, theologians, politicians and prelates, however, have felt a profound ambivalence toward Jews, and their attitudes have incontestably influenced average Christians. In the earliest centuries of the Christian era, pre-existing pagan antagonism toward Jews was replaced by historical and theological beliefs that the Jewish people were abhorrent and that any injustice done to them, short of murder, was justified. Jews became the archetypal evildoers in Christian societies. This anti-Jewish attitude is a permanent element in the fundamental identity of Western Christian civilization. Christians who took this antagonistic position toward Jews — and most did — adhered to Christian triumphalism, what Martin Luther called the “theology of glory” (*theologia gloriae*). The theology of glory “recognized God only in his glory and majesty” and attributed these characteristics to the Church. This glorious and majestic Church gave birth to writers who in turn transformed Jewish virtues into vices, and transvalued Jewish values into sins. Whereas the theology of the cross emphasized human beings over doctrine, the theology of glory focused on Christian faith and practice at the expense of human beings. The triumphalistic theologians, wrote Martin Luther, called “evil good and good evil ... everything has been completely turned upside-down.” This theology assumed that the Christian Church, the “new Israel” — ordained and sanctioned by God — succeeded the cursed and rejected old Israel morally, historically and metaphysically. This ideology considered Jews an inherently evil people who, long before the birth of Jesus of Naz-

areth, slaughtered their prophets, then betrayed and murdered their true messiah. These Jews merited God's punishment; they deserved all the suffering they got. Although Christians should not massacre Jews, Jews must be punished for their sins. These ideas dominated Christianity's theological position on Judaism and Jews for 2,000 years.

These religious antagonisms, elaborated by the theological and popular writings and preachings of the Church's great theologians and popes, exploited by Christian authorities, enhanced by the liturgy, art and literature of the Church, created in most of the faithful an automatic hostility toward Jewishness. This diabolizing of the Jews has continued into the modern period with only minor deviations. Put another way, Christianity has maintained the same anti-Jewish themes over most of its history and introduced new variations. Traditional Christian anti-Semitism has persisted over the centuries, and served as the ideological and emotional etiology and partner of modern anti-Semitism.

Just as Christian theology denied Jews salvation in the next life, so it disqualified Jews from legitimate citizenship in Christendom. In a sense, Jews were ostracized from full human status. Some protective Roman legal traditions, some Christian feelings of charity and the Jews' ambivalent role as suffering examples of the consequences of offending God provided Jews with a precarious place within Christian society. But until their emancipation in the 18th and 19th centuries — and to this day, for some — Jews had only very tenuous legal and moral rights to exist. The Jews had to plead with Christian authorities — kings, princes, bishops and popes — to protect them.

Sometimes this worked. Other times the authorities turned their backs on the Jews or collaborated with those Christians who were intent on cursing, expropriating, expelling or murdering them.

Despite the close theological relationship between Judaism and Christianity, despite Jesus' commandment about love of neighbor, despite the modern Roman Catholic Church's insistence on "justice and charity" in the treatment of Jews, despite the Church's emphasis on agape and

caritas, most Christians found it impossible to respect Jews. Racism holds that (1) different groups of human beings (races) are permanently, genetically different; (2) each individual within a group always manifest the same traits as all other members of their group; and (3) inevitable consequences (intellectual, moral, social and physical) follow from the differences between groups. From the first centuries of the Christian era onward, many Christian writers found an inherent theological repulsiveness as well as "a horrible and fascinating physical otherness" in Jews. In 1941 K. E. Robinson, an official of the British Colonial Office, considered the Jews "entirely alien in every sense of the word." The Church Fathers claimed, despite the obvious and intimate connections between Judaism and Christianity, that each and every single Jew was fundamentally and repugnantly un-Christian and that Jews transmitted indelibly and permanently evil characteristics to their offspring. These beliefs followed the definition of racism described above to a "T." Because Jews were permanently evil, or so these Christians believed, the sacrament of Christian baptism would not work to wash away the stink of Jewish unbelief. Associating the Jews with heresy, the second-century Christian apologist, Justin Martyr (d. 165), for instance, argued that God had given Moses' Law to the Jews because God wanted to keep the inherently sinful Jews' evil in check. St. Augustine (d. 430) observed that no Jew could ever lose the stigma of his forebears' denial and murder of Christ. He wrote that the evil of the Jews, "in their parents, led to death." His contemporary, St. Jerome (d. 420) claimed that all Jews were Judas and were innately evil creatures who betrayed the Lord for money. St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) also approached racist thinking in regard to the Jews when he called them deicides with no chance for "atonement, excuse, or defense." Citing Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" St. Isidore of Seville (d. 636) declared that the Jews' evil character never changes.

These early forms of Christian racism persisted for two millennia. Through sermons, theological writings, laws, art and literature, Christian anti-Semitism has concentrated on the Jews' enduring "sins"

and “crimes” — their stiff-necked persistence in their *perfidia*, their greed, their treason, their servitude, their murderous rage at Christ and Christians. On some occasions, Christian racism resulted in mass murder of Jews. The Crusaders and other medieval Christians often massacred Jews, whom they felt were hopelessly unconvertible, without offering them the choice of baptism. These murderers, like St. John Chrysostom and Martin Luther, perceived the Jews as irreparably Jewish and worthy of slaughter. The National-Socialists felt the same way and, *mutatis mutandis*, chose the same solution to the “Jewish Problem.”

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## Beginnings Departures Endings

**'Our Place in al-Andalus': Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature in Arab Jewish Letters by Gil Anidjar. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.**

A Review Essay by Kristin Swenson

Intriguing and provocative, Gil Anidjar's book is at once both difficult to read and difficult to stop reading; "fascinated" seemed the best term to describe my reaction to reading *'Our Place in al-Andalus.'* I was fascinated by Anidjar's ability to sustain, with clarity and precision, a highly sophisticated intellectual inquiry of language and place. I do not know if I "got it," but then again, I don't know if there is an "it" to "get" except insofar as "getting it" is somehow bound up in both the not knowing, as a once seemingly singular "it" reveals itself as many. I invite you to read this review as an experiment of experience, the experience itself as translation of text and idea — Anidjar's book, *'Our Place in al-Andalus.'*

How to begin to review a book of ending — and of beginnings — that grow out of such ends? What does it mean to begin, what to end? At this writing, Rosh Hashanah is underway — a new year — and I am still without electrical power, over a week after a hurricane pummeled Richmond and surrounding areas in Virginia and North Carolina. Novelty and chaos, disorder and simplicity. Anidjar observes of beginnings that there is "no one point of departure" (179) and of endings (quoting Derrida): "If the end is near, it's nearing ... has already become an indication of 'something else,' a future, 'the event of a coming or of a future advent,' ..." (3). In other words, words reflecting Anidjar's interest in the place and the translations of language, "The ends are ... not only rhetorical, they are also the beginnings of rhetoric and its enabling conditions" (5).

Perhaps I should begin, then, where Anidjar does, with a sentence describing the book in general. This first sentence begins simply enough

before complicating assumptions that his readers may have had about history, context and even reading. Anidjar writes, "This book offers a reading of texts that raise a historical question, namely, how to read when contexts disappear, when the notion of context itself becomes historical" (1). Intriguing as it is, and appropriate for the beginning of a review of the book, it may be argued, however, that this first sentence is not actually the beginning of the book. Rather, the book's first section begins with epigraphs — one from Jacques Derrida questioning boundaries of time and space, and one from Avital Ronell telling the inclination of people to seek a finality.

So, start there. But the first section really begins with its title: "Introduction: Declinations of Context in Arab Jewish Letters," a title that begs commentary and indeed introduces key terms and ideas for the book. Then again, the book as a whole begins with a quote from Emmanuel Levinas, "Le langage se définit peut-être comme le pouvoir même de rompre la continuité de l'être ou de l'histoire," which Anidjar translates, "Language is perhaps defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history." Surely this introduces well Anidjar's inquiry of disappearing context as a condition that gives rise to the place, al-Andalus. But to claim that Levinas' quote is the beginning of the book is to deny that it is preceded by Anidjar's acknowledgments (which suggest beginnings before the book was even written), and that by the Table of Contents, dedication page, copyright, title page, a page of Mahmoud Darwish's poem "On the Last Evening on This Earth" printed in Arabic (and translated at the "end" of the book, at the beginning of the Notes), a page noting the series and editors and, finally (or really the first page "itself"), the page that simply tells the title.

Should I, then, begin here by noting that the title of Anidjar's book, *'Our Place in al-Andalus'* comes from Maimonides, who actually spent much of his productive life outside of the Spain that comes to be called al-Andalus? Perhaps, because the implications of "place" (as site and/or context, geographical and/or linguistic), ours, "in al-Andalus" (a term that implies a particular period in Spanish history) together lie at

the heart of Anidjar's book, or at least at the heart of what begins his inquiry. He writes, "Our Place in al-Andalus' leads me to a reconsideration of what is meant today by al-Andalus as a literary and cultural object of Arab Jewish letters, and to a reconceptualization of its limits and divisions" (3). In the process of this reconsideration, which takes into account philosophical, mystical and literary texts, Anidjar proposes that "al-Andalus is a rhetorical event to be read, a language that maintains but also negotiates and disrupts the localizations and divisions established by the end" (7). Asking how to read an event, then, may be a good place ("place" as inquiry) to start the review.

But what does it mean, "to read an event"? Is this not to mix categories? After all, "to read" requires text, and "an event" is a historical occurrence. But this is precisely Anidjar's point, or some aspect of one among others: that text "itself" may be event *and* inscribe place/one's space. Despite the fact that the texts he considers closely (Maimonides', Ibn al-Astarkuwi's, Kabbalah and the *Zohar*) came out of and/or reflect a common time and place, Anidjar explains, "they are hardly locatable in a common space of some nature. The only feature they share, rather, is that al-Andalus — the general set of circumstances from which they are thus said to 'emerge,' in other words, their context — disappears or has already disappeared" (2). So perhaps I should begin by describing the manner in which Anidjar discusses matters of context, language, movement and place. Indeed, just as Anidjar tends to beginnings late in his book, within his discussion of the *Zohar's* several possible beginnings, we find that accounting for a variety of beginnings could actually take us to an end ... before we have even begun.

If there is no one place to begin (and "one," "place," and "begin" each sustain multiple and disparate possible interpretations), how to get into the book itself, past the point of a beginning? Perhaps a simple list of key terms that Anidjar translates and uses might move us through the book. In no particular order, partly because many appear in many places, they include: *Mashal* and *matal*, al-Andalus, *dalala*, context, our place, end, Spain, *Zohar*, unity and dissemination/disrup-

tion, Scholem, cultures, Benjamin, silent voice, midrash, conversations and arguments and dialogues, declination, *ein-sof Zohar peshat*, loss, rhetoric of sadness, ordinary events and crises, Aramaic, rose, *maqamat*, poetry and prose, departure, justice. But to cite such a list is of course to say little except as the terms may evoke for review readers a sense of what Anidjar carefully describes and discusses; on the other hand, the terms may lead readers to think something quite other than what Anidjar "means." Observing this danger, in general, and hinting at what's to come, the book begins (that is, at the beginning of Chapter 1) with Maimonides' observation in *The Guide of the Perplexed* that when communicating with someone whose language is unfamiliar it sometimes happens that one recognizes a word as similar or even the same as a word in one's own language "and by accident ... that word indicates ... in the language of the hearer, the contrary of what the speaker intended" (10).

So perhaps to get past beginnings and represent the whole of the book, I should (re)cite the "Contents" page: *Acknowledgments* xi; Introduction: Declinations of Context in Arab Jewish Letters 1; 1 Maimonides, *dalala*, Midrash 10; 2 "Our Place in al-Andalus" (also written in Arabic) 57; 3 The Silent Voice of the Friend: Andalusi Topographies of Scholem's Conversations (Mourning Mysticism) 102; 4 Reading, Out of Context: *Zohar* and/as *maqama* 166; (subsets): Part I (written with an X over the I): *Zohar* (with subset): Ibn al-Astarkuwi's *maqama* "On Poetry and Prose" 219; Part 2: Parting Words 229; *Notes* 249; *Bibliography* 307.

But there is a certain nonsense to my writing the contents here. Take the numbers, for example: some refer to pages, some to chapters; and the Roman numeral "I" before the title *Zohar* is crossed out. Perhaps more problematic is the unfamiliarity of terms and phrases to readers and this unfamiliarity is of more than one kind. Terms such as "declinations" seductively proffer themselves in English, the language necessarily familiar to this book's readers, while disorienting readers with unfamiliarity. Ironically the term as Anidjar uses it refers to a dissolution-that-gives-rise-to-solution, the "end" of a particular his-

torical/cultural place and period (al-Andalus) and the beginning/foundation of a literary condition (al-Andalus). Other terms in the Table of Contents, such as *dalala*, are foreign and may be utterly unfamiliar to readers. Again ironically, this term concerns “signification,” and about it Anidjar writes, “the *dalala* ... marks and affects the very knowledge of one’s own language. It is that language ‘itself’ — assuming such self-identity is still, was ever, possible — which gets in the way and interferes in the gravest manner, leading one to believe that one knows what one has said, or what one has heard” (36-37). Still other Contents items are written in a script that may be unfamiliar, such as the Arabic to the right of (though not after, if one reads the Arabic in the correct direction, from right to left) “Our Place in al-Andalus.” Finally, references to people, texts, even places that readers may “know,” but discover in reading further that they cannot anticipate Anidjar’s use of them such as Maimonides, Andalusian Topographies, *Zohar* and Poetry and Prose.

In ‘*Our Place in al-Andalus*,’ Gil Anidjar demonstrates what he observes. That is, Anidjar draws his readers in to the space of a text, his text, which quickly becomes at once familiar and disorienting. It is a fascinating book that explores the meaning/nature of place and time (history) in relation to the literary and cultural world of language. ‘*Our Place in al-Andalus*’ is a difficult book that does not revel in difficulty for difficulty’s sake; but neatly demonstrates complexity where it may be least expected — in the discourse of place, “the force of rupture that is always at work in words and contexts” (243). In Anidjar’s “final” paragraph, the last paragraph of the last chapter, that is, he notes how a particular story, an Andalusian *maqama*, illustrates lack of finality insofar as “this language that defies identify and keeps eluding its localization, occurs as translation. Language displaced onto its place, declinations of contexts, ‘our place in al-Andalus’” (245).

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## Christians and Israel

**Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel by Paul Charles Merkley. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.**

A Review Essay by Steven Windmueller

This comprehensive and insightful text is a compendium to Paul Merkley's other significant research, including two earlier publications, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948* (1998) and *Christian Understanding of the Beginnings, the Process and the Outcome of World History: Via Univeralis* (Toronto Studies in Theology, Vol. 83). The work of Merkley, a professor emeritus of history at Carleton University, may reflect his commitment to historical inquiry and clearly his capacity to unravel theological texts along with his personal engagement with Christianity.

When the United Nations debated the future of the Mandate of Palestine in 1947, world opinion was powerfully affected by news of the Holocaust and the plight of Jewish refugees. This momentary humanitarian advantage aided Christian Zionists in mobilizing public opinion on behalf of Israel. Almost as soon as it became clear that the Jews had won their war for independence, however, anti-Zionist elements within Christianity reasserted themselves. At the World Council of Churches — established only a few weeks after the State of Israel was formed — a pro-Arab bloc of Western missionaries echoed the anti-Zionism that has always characterized Eastern churches and the Roman Catholic Church, which had never been friendly to Zionism, championed the cause of "internationalization" of the city of Jerusalem in order to diminish Jewish presence in the heart of the Holy Land.

In this work, Merkley draws on the published literature of the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian organizations that have an interest in the question of Israel's past, present and future, as well as on interviews with numerous key figures within the government of Israel,

spokespersons for the Palestine Authority and leaders of all the major pro- and anti-Zionist Christian organizations in order to demonstrate that Christian attitudes toward Israel remain remarkably polarized.

Merkley explores his topic by dividing his task into three primary areas. Initially, he sets out to frame this discussion by exploring the historical elements that frame Christian theology toward Jews and Judaism. In the second and central part of his research, he introduces his readership to the various Christian voices one finds both in the Middle East and elsewhere. In a series of separate chapters, we are introduced to the diversity of Christian institutional elements and their particular historic, theological and political connection to the Jewish state and to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

To most evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, loyalty to Israel is a kind of second patriotism, nurtured by the conviction that Israel's restoration is a part of God's plan for history. However mainstream Protestantism champions "Palestinian nationalism" and, drawing on the rhetoric of the Middle East Council of Churches, groups associated with this perspective do not hesitate to portray Israel as an oppressor.

Among Merkley's core principles is his belief that Christian attitudes toward Israel reflect fundamental theological attitudes that must be examined against the backdrop of Christian history toward Judaism and Islam. But absent from this text is the essential background that a reader would require to more fully appreciate these attitudes and organizational programs. In particular, the author's focus on Christian Zionism (Chapter 7) provided on the one hand a thorough treatment of the various institutional "voices" representing this movement but failed on the other to incorporate the key historical and theological streams of thinking that shaped this ideology. In this case, a review of nineteenth century "Christian Zionist" thought would have been especially beneficial.

Five elements define the excellence of this research and of Merkley's writings. The quality of the research pertaining to the multiple streams



of Christian thought and institutional politics represents an essential strength of this volume. A second factor is associated with the author's capacity to effectively and persuasively articulate the Zionist/Government of Israel "case." Correspondingly, the third component involves Merkley's analytical skills in providing context and continuity to the historical developments both surrounding the emergence of the State of Israel and the countervailing reactions offered by the diverse voices found within the Christian world. One is struck by the thoughtful attention to detailed scholarship and supporting evidence introduced by the author in developing his arguments. Finally, the reader must be impressed with Merkley's assertive and forthright personal engagement with the complex issues as represented by his understanding of the respective policy positions and personal passions held by the numerous players in this scenario. In the end, it becomes evident that as a Christian and as a responsible historian, Merkley portrays a special compassion and commitment to the case for Israel and in turn, challenges the Christian world to once again weigh in on a core theological question, "how the destiny of the Jews is related to the destiny of the Church." For the author, this remains an open-ended concern, when we writes: "It is simply too soon to know whether the work done by forces dedicated to Jewish-Christian reconciliation — a work that involves the repudiation of 'replacement theology' — will stand against the flanking effort of the neo-Marcionists (a philosophy that rejects all of Jewish law and tradition), whose heart is in the different work of accommodating the secular liberals, the Churches of the East and the Muslims."

I was so intrigued and impressed with this volume that I felt compelled to examine others who have had occasion to review this text as well. Similar to my own reflections, Yaakov Ariel, a member of the Department of Religious Studies at UNC, offered the following assessment:

"This book is a remarkable achievement. I am most impressed with the scope of Merkley's research. He is a diligent and thorough scholar who seems to have gathered all conceivable information on the topic and is very fluent with the literature on the different aspects of the



subject ... the first comprehensive work on the subject.”

*Steven Windmueller directs and teaches in Hebrew Union College’s School of Jewish Communal Service. Dr. Windmueller’s most recent work on Latino-Jewish relations appears as a chapter in California Jews published this year by Brandeis University Press.*

## Judaism and Superstitions

**Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists and Early Modern Judaism**  
by J.H. Chajes. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

A Review Essay by Frederic Krome

In 16th- and early 17th- century Safed, Kabbalistic masters often wrote about the possession of a living body by a disembodied soul or ghoulish spirit (referred to as a *dybbuk* by later generations). Such narratives about demonic possession, and related stories about ecstatic prophecy, were relatively rare in medieval Jewish history. At the heart of Chajes' study is, therefore, a simple question: why did stories about possession become a prominent concern in early modern Jewish life? In order to set the stage for answering this question, Chajes marshals an impressive array of documentation, from classical and Talmudic sources relating to magic, demons (*shedim*) and spirit possession, to medieval commentaries on *Gilgul* (the doctrine of reincarnation). At the epicenter of this study are the Kabbalistic texts produced at Safed, and their subsequent redactions and re-redactions, which provide the narratives of demonic and spirit possession that would spread to other parts of the Jewish world. It is one of the paradoxes of early modern European history that the same era that witnessed the advent of the scientific revolution also produced the worst excesses of the witch craze (1550-1650). Indeed, the same technology that helped spread the works of Copernicus — the printing press — insured that the fear of *maleficia* (evil magic) and demonic possession would also be widely disseminated among European elites whose obsession with rooting out "Servants of Satan" would terrorize the continent for over a century.

As a graduate student in a class on the witch craze I was struck by the similarities between the so-called "witches' Sabbath" — in which Satan's minions gathered to eat the flesh of Christian children and drink the blood of the innocent — with the Blood Libel against the Jews, already 400 years old by the 16th century. It was also striking how few historians even speculated on the relationship between an anti-Semitic

canard and the fear of a satanic conspiracy involving women. On the obverse side, a comparative approach to the relationship between Jewish and Christian approaches to magic and beliefs about witches and demons did not appear on the agenda of historians of early modern Jewish history. Those who have investigated Jewish-Christian interaction have tended to focus on the Jewish contribution to scientific developments, a symptom of modernity, rather than on questions about magic and demonic possessions, wildly perceived as medieval holdover.

Rather than operate on the assumption that Jewish society was simply influenced by Christian and Islamic trends, Chajes' work is part of a relatively recent movement in Jewish historiography, which operates under the assumption that Jewish society interacted, to some degree, with the wider European cultural milieu. This is an important trend as previous work often served the cause of *filiopietism* — what I call the “look who is Jewish school” — which often sought to edit out the less desirable aspects of Jewish society on the eve of modernity by charting such things as Jewish participation in the scientific revolution. It is not too surprising that the general European witch craze has a Jewish equivalent, although it was fortunately not as violent as its Christian counterpart; what scholars have needed is a study that recognizes the wider historiographic issues. It is a pleasure, therefore, to see that Chajes introduces himself as “an avid reader of the historiography of the early modern European witch-hunt” (4): a comparative analysis of the other, perhaps less admirable, trend in early modern history; the proliferation of belief in magic and possession upon Jewish society is vastly overdue.

In more than 20 years of research, historians of the European witch craze have come to realize that one causal explanation of the phenomenon was increased religious tension, which exploded into the open with the European Reformation of the 16th century. The most intense witch panics occurred on the borderlands of the Reformation, where religious passions were elevated. Chajes adroitly points out that it is also not too surprising that Safed would be the focal point of Jewish

obsessions with magic, demons and possession, for in the 16th century Safed sat at the borderlands of the Jewish world. The community was a nexus in which Ottoman Jews, refugees from the expulsion from Spain and Ashkenazi pietists met. The cultural and intellectual ferment produced Isaac Luria, perhaps one of the greatest Kabbalists in Jewish history. Luria and his disciples would influence the development of Jewish life to the present. In addition to the heterodoxy of the population, Chajes argues that the physical setting was conducive to the development of spirit possession. The hilltop town of Safed is situated in such a way that its ancient cemetery literally interacts with the population, providing a physical metaphor for the interaction of the living and spirit worlds.

A major theme in Chajes' book is the social function that spirit possession plays in the community, whether it was by evil spirits — *ibbur* — or the souls of the deceased — *nefesh*. To this end he spends a great deal of time throughout the book dissecting the narratives of demonic and spirit possession. The student of the history of magic and related subjects will particularly enjoy Chajes' examination of the rites of exorcism. Indeed, an examination of these rituals provides a window not just into magical incantation, but into communal relationships as well. Over 50 years ago Gershom Scholem proclaimed that women neither generated Kabbalistic texts nor participated in mystical association. While it is true that women may not have generated such writings, an examination of the diaries of men such as R. Hayyim Vital (a disciple of Luria's), reveals that women played an active part in mystical life by being the victims of possession. In particular, when analyzing (in Chapter 4) the famous case of the possession of a young girl, the daughter of a prominent rabbi, in Damascus at the beginning of the 17th century, a startling picture of the Jewish community emerges. According to the narrative from Vital's diary, while possessed by the spirit of a deceased Jew, the young girl proceeded to reveal the seamier underside of communal life. In addition to illicit sexual relations, the breaking of *kashrut* and the sanctity of *Shabbat*, the possessed girl revealed a growing level of unbelief among some members of the

community. Superficially such revelations might make little sense, or be interpreted as an example of women's expression of power in a world where they are disenfranchised. Yet if we consider again the cultural milieu not only of Safed, but of the early modern world that produced the witch panics, a different interpretation emerges. Safed was a community struggling to achieve an intense level of piety. Such intensity meant a concomitant increase of temptation, as even the smallest infraction of the commandments is regarded as a potential major sin. Chajes argues that such revelations serve as a means of social control. One example is the case of a widow who was a victim of possession. The narrator of the story revealed that the widow engaged in an illicit sexual relationship, which made her susceptible to possession. The sins committed by the *nefesh* when alive were also recounted. The widow's death — whether from the effects of possession or the attempted exorcism is not clear — play out as a kind of morality play providing the narrator of the story with a chance to ruminate on the multiple transgressions of the entire community. Such stories, Chajes argues, "cast in bold relief the values and aspiration of the rabbinic writers who crafted the account, if not broader sectors of the cultural environment. Sexual licentiousness and popular skepticism emerge in the account, as in others we have examined, as fundamental threats to communal leadership struggling to establish a community on the basis of pietistic ideals." (54-55)

Thus, the narratives of demonic possession and exorcism serve, at least in part, as a reminder of one's proper path by revealing what happens to those who follow the evil path. Such conclusions again demonstrate Chajes' debt to the general historiography of European beliefs, which interprets one of the causal triggers for witch panics as being the advent of new social, intellectual and scientific developments. The discovery of the new world, which biblical scholars sought to reconcile with sacred texts, and the Copernican theory, which removed the earth from the center of the universe, prompted doubt regarding the veracity of revealed truths. In both the Christian and Jewish worlds scholars sought to re-assert the primacy of revealed

religion; they did this in part by describing the threat possessed by the spirit world and *Maleficia*. After all, if the devil exists, then so must the divine. Therefore, stories of possession — demonic and other — cannot be understood as paradoxically occurring at the same time as the scientific revolution, but as the obverse side of the coin of the advent of modernity.

Chajes' final chapter, "Skeptics and Storytellers," takes the story from Safed to Amsterdam and focuses on Menasseh ben Israel's *Nishmat Hayyim* (Soul of Life), which is a collection of stories about dybbuks; indeed Chajes maintains it is the largest anthology of such stories until the late 20th century. Chajes argues that this book must be understood in the context of the mid-17th-century intellectual ferment that was unique to Menasseh's community of former conversos, as well as the general pan-European surge in unbelief. One of the most hotly contested debates in the Amsterdam community, and other parts of the Christian world, was on the question of the immortality of the soul. In this context, stories about possession were utilized by religious authorities — such as Menasseh ben Israel — to prove that there was, in fact, life after death. After all, spirit possession and ecstatic visions required the presence of the soul of someone who had departed this earth. The existence of possession was a proof-text for life after death. The *Nishmat* was therefore "a 'native' Hebrew version of a variety of treatise that was becoming increasingly significant in the mid-seventeenth century — an attack on 'atheism' grounded in a demonstration of the existence of the demonic." (125)

There are a number of reasons to recommend this book. The author's mining of both Jewish and general European historiography enables it to be read profitably by specialists in both fields. On another level, it is nice to read a book that an author found fun to write. Throughout the text Chajes reveals a keen sense of humor, as when analyzing the nature of spells used in exorcisms: "Like the mysteries revealed when spinning a vinyl Beatles album in reverse, reciting a sacred text backward was bound to unleash its fullest energies." (69). Through the use of such humor, Chajes reminds us that even our own scientific age has

its superstitions.

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## Noteworthy Books

*Editor's Note: The following is a list of books received from publishers but, as of this printing, have not been reviewed for Menorah Review.*

***The Origins of Nazi Violence*** by Enzo Traverso. New York: The New Press.

***Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture*** by Rachel Feldhay Brenner. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

***The Curtain: Witness and Memory in Wartime Holland*** by Henry G. Schogt. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

***Identity Theft: The Jew in Imperial Russia and the Case of Avraam Uri Kovner*** by Harriet Murav. Stanford University Press.

***The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy*** by Gil Anidjar. Stanford University Press.

***Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement*** by S. Ilan Troen. Yale University Press.

***Hide And Seek: A Wartime Childhood*** by Theresa Cahn-Tober. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

***Safe among the Germans: Liberated Jews after World War II*** by Ruth Gay. Yale University Press.

***Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century***, edited by Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

***In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France*** by Maud S. Mandel. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

***Jews in Berlin***, edited by Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps and



Herman Simon. Berlin: Henschel Verlag.

***Scenes from Hitler's "1000-Year Reich": Twelve Years of Nazi Terror and the Aftermath*** by Kerry Weinberg. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

***How Israel Was Won: A Concise History of the Arab-Israel Conflict*** by Aylis Thomas. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

***After the Rescue: Jewish Identity and Community in Contemporary Denmark*** by Andrew Buckser. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

***Nathan and His Wives: A Novel*** by Miron C. Izakson. Syracuse University Press.

***Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists and Early Modern Judaism*** by J.H. Chajes. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

***Exodus to Berlin: The Return of the Jews to Germany*** by Peter Laufer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher.

***Marc Chagall on Art and Culture***, edited by Benjamin Harshav. Stanford University Press.

***The Vanishing Ring: A Novel*** by S.Y. Abramovitsh. Syracuse University Press.

***Wedding Song: Memoirs of an Iranian Jewish Woman*** by Farideh Goldin. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press.

***A People Who Live Apart: Jewish Identity and the Future of Israel*** by Els van Diggele. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

***The Origins of the Messianic Ideal*** by Robert Wolfe. Jamaica, NY: J-REP.

***The Book of Tahkemoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain*** by Judah Alharizi, translated and explicated by David Simha Segal. Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

***The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*** by John Howard Yoder, edited by Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

***The Labor of Life: Selected Plays*** by Hanoch Levin. Stanford University Press.

***Jews and Christians: People of God*** edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

***"Loosen the Fetters of Thy Tongue, Woman": The Poetry And Poetics Of Yona Wallach*** by Zafrira Lidovsky Cohen. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press.

***Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative*** by Benjamin Harshav. Stanford University Press.

***Gender, Place and Memory in the Modern Jewish Experience: Re-Placing Ourselves***, edited by Judith Tydor Baumel and Tova Cohen. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell.

***Five Cities of Refuge*** by Lawrence Kushner and David Mamet. New York: Schocken Books.

***Understanding Judaism through History*** by S. Daniel Breslauer. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group.

***Inside a Class Action: The Holocaust and the Swiss Banks*** by Jane Schapiro. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

***And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank*** by Steve Oney. New York: Pantheon Books.

***The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World*** by Bathaniel Deutsch. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

***Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life*** by Harvey E. Goldberg. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

***The Fate of Zionism: A Secular Future for Israel & Palestine*** by

Arthur Hertzberg. Harper San Francisco.

***A Rumor about the Jews: Anti-semitism, Conspiracy and the Protocols of Zion*** by Stephen Eric Bronner. New York: Oxford University Press.

***Levinas, Judaism and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*** by Claire Elise Katz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

***Secular Judaism: Faith, Values and Spirituality*** by Yaakov Malkin. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell.

***The Zohar (Pritzker Edition)***, Volume 1, Translation and Commentary by Daniel C. Matt. Stanford University Press.

***Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present***, edited by Matt Goldish. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

