

BOOK REVIEWS

Two books arrived at our Society's offices recently which in some respects complement each other. The first, *ETHNIC WRITINGS IN ENGLISH FROM AUSTRALIA — A BIBLIOGRAPHY*, by the Dutch born Lolo Houbein of Adelaide, and issued by and for Australian Literary Studies, part of the Department of English Language and Literature in the University of Adelaide. The second, *JEWISH WRITING FROM DOWN UNDER — Australia and New Zealand*, edited by R. & R. Kalechofsky, and published by Micah Publications, in Massachusetts, USA. Both books were published in 1984.

The bibliography, *Ethnic Writings in English from Australia*, is the third revised and extended edition, and is a source of wonder — not so much for what it contains, although this is extensive enough, but for what it has achieved, what its potential as an on-going project will further achieve. The author insists it is "not comprehensive", listing 130 entries in its 124 pages, which is a significant increase on that of the first edition of 1976, which listed 26 writers, and of the second, of 1978 with 65 entries. How surely does this work demonstrate the extent and depth of our multi-cultural Society!

The contents of this present edition are especially relevant for the researcher into Australian Jewish literature. One finds works originally written in Yiddish, Russian, German, Hebrew... It will assist ethnic writers themselves to make contact with publishing outlets suitable for their work; it is of interest, too, that about 50% of the authors recorded are from Jewish backgrounds. Not the least fascinating aspect of the book is the information which emerges from the brief biographical sketches accompanying each author's name, usually giving date and place of birth, date of arrival here — where applicable — educational opportunities, and so on. One, a Hungarian born poet, who arrived in Australia in 1949 at the age of 24 years, has given his "race" as *Homo Sapiens*. The term "ethnic writer" does not necessarily mean "born overseas", but the criterion for inclusion in this bibliography is best met by the subject matter of the writings.

The number of works translated from Yiddish original, at once shames the pretensions of those who would be more "integrated" than the indigenous, and arouses a kind of reluctant respect for the genre. For the seeker after the strictly Jewish element, this is nowhere better revealed than in the titles of Serge Liberman — whose assistance the author generously acknowledges: "... let me immediately add that this edition has gained immensely by the steady flow of information kept up by Dr. Serge Liberman, whilst working on a bibliography himself, who wrote a week before entries closed: "... we're at a stage where one has merely to turn over a stone and — lo! — there's another author!" Others are Maria Lewitt, and David Martin. Of yet another author directed to her by our Society, Miss Houbein writes, "One of my staunchest correspondents failed to reply to my last letter. Solomon Stedman died on 17 September, 1979, in Sydney, one month before his 85th birthday, still writing and taking an active interest in literary affairs till the end. He must have been the first ethnic writer whose work appeared in *The Bulletin*."

Miss Houbein modestly concludes her Introduction to the work thus: "In the knowledge that this bibliography cannot ever be complete, is probably in small details not entirely correct and is of necessity a real unacademic effort, I apologise for its shortcomings but express the hope that readers will find enough of interest to make them look beyond what could be provided here..."

She explains that as she will not be undertaking research for a fourth edition, she has handed over the accumulated papers of her nine years' work to the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland, for the benefit of future researchers.

In this review, I have done little more than offer an introduction to a valuable research source. It represents much hidden activity in areas of direct relevance to researchers, particularly into Jewish writers in Australia, today. I strongly recommend it to your attention. There is no indication of the price of this work, but it should be well within the reach of all students of Australian literature.

I would have liked to recommend wholeheartedly an anthology entitled JEWISH WRITING FROM DOWN UNDER, but for such a work to succeed a comfortable reciprocity between authors and editor is essential, and nowhere here is this apparent. Admittedly, three of the authors represented were no longer alive when the book was published.

The book, which is priced at \$10, and was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., is the fourth in a series, *The Global Anthology of Contemporary Jewish Writing*. This is why it seems to me that the selected works from the writings of a score or so of Australian and New Zealand writers should have been of the highest possible standard. This is not so. Nor has the selection of authors been fairly inclusive. Such names as Herz Bergner, Serge Liberman, Morris Laurie, Nancy Keesing, Judah Waten, Lilian Barnea, and Maria Lewitt are amply justified, and in most respects satisfy our expectations. But, if the anthology is to do justice to the tradition from which Australian Jewish literature springs, surely Nathan F. Spielvogel and Solomon Stedman should be represented. Who was responsible for the omission of writers like the late Ben Zion Patkin and Spielvogel's kinsman, Newman Rosenthal? Any or all of whom should have been represented, even if it meant restricting to one of each the half a dozen or so who had more than one work included. And the fact that several of the longer items are merely excerpts from larger works of the authors gives them a fragmented effect. The significance of the fact that the cover of the book is an exact reproduction from the cover of the (first) Australian Jewish Almanac of 1937, published by "Kadimah", escapes me, but that may be my lack. That by its title the book presumably is intended to reflect the picture of Australian Jewish writers and literature suggests a large canvas is aimed at. But it leaves one with a feeling that our literary heritage for the most part is sparse.

On a more positive note, though, the three stories chosen from the prolific pen of Serge Liberman enhance the general standard of the book. The historic content is further served by works of Maurice Pitt and Laurie Gluckman, both from New Zealand; and all of the poems are good. Particularly so, *The Nocturnal Citadel* (with footnote annotations), one of the included five composed by Shmuel Gorr, and those of Susan Whiting.

There is still room for another anthology of Jewish Writers in Australia and New Zealand; one which is more representative, which clarifies and purposefully defines and does justice to the talents and particular skills of all of our writers, and their unique qualities.

L. R.

"BY MY OWN AUTHORITY"

by

Marian Pretzel, Kangaroo Press, 1985

What a marvellous tale-full of excitement, danger, tragedy and miraculous lucky breaks. Yet, it is all true.

Marian Pretzel opens his story by saying, "the genesis of this book was to pass on my personal memories to my children." He has done more than that. He has

brought to life the courage of a young man bereft of his family, determined to survive in the hostile world of Nazi Europe. His skill and daring, coupled with a keen intelligence and intuition and supported by the *chutzpah* which bluffed so many would-be petty dictators he met, brought him on the long journey from Lvov to Sydney over nearly ten years in which he must have aged many more.

In 1942 he was 20 years old and found himself alone after the Nazis had taken his parents. He had been an Art student and with the help of his friend, Milek, he became an expert forger of official documents which saved his life and the lives of his friends many times, while he travelled from Poland to Russia to Roumania to escape and find a haven of peace in which to survive the war and avoid the fate of so many of his family and friends. He had also been a sportsman and the discipline and physical fitness he had learnt stood him in good stead in his attempts to pass himself off as Marian Smolinski, a non-Jewish Pole.

He knew the mentality of the Germans and considered that if a document bore enough official-looking stamps, it indicated that it had been passed by others and so would continue to be accepted by more and more officials. When he finally arrived in Palestine he told the British officers that, given the same conditions of work as the German soldiers had, the British soldiers would also have assumed his documents were authentic and would have passed them.

Pretzel tells his story with pride, yet it does not seem over-boastful. The most daring escapade of going into occupied Hungary with his friend Janek, to rescue from the ghetto Helen Sobel, a girl unknown to them, is told briefly and simply.

"Going straight" after the War, was a question which came to him time and again in Europe and Israel. However, he resisted the temptation to live a life of crime based on the skill and ease with which he could forge documents and instead took pride in his ability to do well in his chosen artistic field.

Technically, the book is easy to read and hard to put down. It is liberally sprinkled with maps of Europe depicting political conditions over the war years (Both these and the book's jacket were designed by the author). There are photographs of family and friends and reproductions of the documents he forged. Unfortunately for me the proof reading of the book has not been done well enough and the typing mistakes rankled as I read.

There have been many stories told of suffering during the Holocaust, both in ghetto and concentration camp, and although these need to be told and retold so we may never forget, it is refreshing to read of someone who survived by his wits; who escaped the terrible fate of so many European Jews; who was able to thumb his nose at the Nazis. People ask why didn't the Jews fight back? Marian Pretzel said "I had been trained to be a fighter not a quitter." He fought back in his own unique way; he deserved the short-lived luxuries he was able to gain for himself and for the friends his activities enabled him to save.

Helen Bersten

"On Being a German-Jewish Refugee in Australia: Experiences and Studies," editors Konrad Kwiet and John A. Moses (special issue of the Australian Journal of Politics and History. University of Queensland Press. Vol. 31, No. 1, 1985).

This complete Journal consists of some of the papers delivered at an Interdisciplinary German Studies Conference (held in Sydney in July 1984), organised largely by Associate Professor Kwiet of the School of German Studies, University of New South Wales, and run in conjunction with the Goethe Institute, Sydney. Eminent guest speakers from overseas and Australian Universities delivered papers which formed the basis for two publications; this comprehensive, fascinating Journal is the first of these.

The audience at the Conference consisted of both academics and independent interested observers. This blend of personalities made for a relaxed atmosphere, where it was most interesting to hear the interchange of ideas and to observe how the passing of time has mellowed the attitudes of some of the participants.

Those academics whose papers contained unqualified derogatory statements accusing Australian Jewry of indifference, apathy and even hostility towards the refugees, were perhaps chastened by the more mellow and affirmative views of others at the Conference who were themselves part of the German-Jewish migration of the late thirties. Australia was a numerically small, isolated country which was steeped in British tradition and shocked by a sizeable influx of European, non-Christian migrants. Its small Jewish community was by no means uniformly ultra-conservative and many Jewish citizens made highly commendable efforts to help the newcomers.

Perhaps it was more than fortuitous that the Conference took place some forty years after the actual events, as this would appear to be an ideal time lapse for mature reflection. Could one stretch the imagination to picture the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years until Moses led them to the promised land?

The Journal under review deals exclusively with the situation in Australia, as it was affected by German-Jewish influences. The second volume, which will be published by the University of New South Wales (Kensington Series in Humanities) at the end of 1985 or early 1986, concentrates on German-Jewish literature and history in much broader terms.

The main criticism of the present Journal is not about its contents, which with only a few exceptions, are excellent, but rather of the title itself. Would it not have been more appropriate to emphasise the Jewish component of the German-Jewish experience by transposing the words German and Jewish? The German refugees who found themselves in Australia in the thirties were propelled here by dint of their Jewishness, after all. Furthermore, the title does not embrace all the articles contained in the Journal, and even if its interpretation is widened to include general conditions in Australia at the time under consideration, one or two papers are still lacking in relevance.

However, this Journal is a classic case of not judging a book by its cover (or in this instance, its title) — Here is first-class reading for everyone. Just as the Conference appealed to a cross-section of interested people, so do the published papers vary from those which have been intensely researched to those which are conversational and amusing. One can find, for example, three different approaches to autobiographical accounts and there is merit in each of them.

Eugene Kamenka, whilst writing in a very personal way in "A Childhood in the 1930's and 1940's: the making of a Russian-German-Australian", conveys important sociological aspects of the times as well as presenting some interesting philosophical analyses.

When Herbert Liffman uses the title "In search of my identity", he approaches the subject on a more superficial level but his essay is informative and an excellent personal record, notwithstanding.

Klaus Loewald, in the chapter "The Eighth Australian Employment Company", gives an account of that period of his life after he was released from the internment camps at Hay, then Tatura. He had been assigned to these camps after his arrival in Australia (in September 1940) on the infamous "Dunera". This account of his volunteer service in the Australian Army Labour Corps, has all the humour reminiscent of the "Good Soldier Schweik", and more again.

Konrad Kwiet's article "Be patient and reasonable! The internment of German-

Jewish refugees in Australia", apart from its splendid scholarship, includes the most comprehensive source material which is available at this time, some of it very recent indeed. No doubt, the spirit of enquiry in which the paper was written will ensure that the whole subject continues to be updated.

It is noted with considerable pride that six extremely good articles were written by members of the Australian Jewish Historical Society. The members and their subjects are:

Paul R. BARTROP — "Hitler would've known how to deal with the Asian Invasion: the Holocaust and Australian Education After the Holocaust."

In this study the author puts forward a very sound case for the inclusion of the Holocaust phenomenon as an elective subject at high school level in Australian schools.

Sophie CAPLAN — "Psychological and Spiritual Resistance in Nazi Concentration Camps: The Example of Rabbi Benjamin Gottshall."

This essay is perhaps the highlight of the Journal and has been well acclaimed in the wider press because of the universality of its subject matter. It provides an excellent example for those historians who would like to integrate oral accounts without losing historical accuracy in the process.

Godfrey S. LEE — "The Battle of the Scholars — the debate between Sir Isaac Isaacs and Julius Stone over Zionism during World War II."

Through no fault of the writer, this study does not fit comfortably into the format of the Journal; although it is well researched and a very important issue.

Herbert LIFFMAN — "In search of my identity" — already discussed.

Suzanne D. RUTLAND — "Australian responses to Jewish refugee migration before and after World War II."

and;

"A Changing Community — the Impact on the Refugees on Australian Jewry: New South Wales — a case study."

The above two articles are well written, erudite and a significant contribution to Australian Jewish history, perhaps the most authoritative in their field.

The only dissonant note in the Journal comes from Tony Barta — "Consciousness of Genocide in Australia". The story of genocide with reference to the Australian Aborigine is undeniably tragic. However, the attempt to link this shame with some kind of responsibility or guilt on the part of Australian Jewry is extending the range of ideas for publication too far.

Unfortunately, lack of space precludes the review of other topics in the Journal.

In the article by Eugene Kamenka, one sentence on page 8 captures the spirit underlying the 8th Interdisciplinary German Studies Conference which gave birth to this Journal and the one to follow: it says

"But the six million dead mean that there is no loyalty higher than the one to their memory and to those who have survived."

The Journal, "On Being a German-Jewish Refugee in Australia: Experiences and Studies", is available from:

Konrad Kwiet, School of German Studies, University of New South Wales.

\$10 plus \$2 postage.

Anne Andgel

THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1985

The Bnai Brith in Australia has from its inception in 1944 given high priority to its cultural programme, Jewish and general, promoting many a valuable project. Now, to mark the 40th anniversary of its foundation, the Bnai Brith District 21, at the suggestion of its President, Kurt Lippmann, has embarked upon a striking venture: The publication of the first Jewish Year Book in Australasia. Let us hope that this publication will become an annual event, and that it will find many readers. The present issue was made possible by the support of more than 50 patrons and sponsors, mainly from Melbourne.

This Year Book differs in character from the older ones in England and the United States. Whilst the latter well-established Year Books deal mainly with the calendar of the current year and with information on the events of the past year, as well as news on institutions and personalities of the Community, this Year Book puts greater weight on the wider contemporary, historical and literary aspects of Jewish life in Australasia.

The editor is Yehudah Svoray, manager of the Ethnic Radio Station in Victoria 3EA, and the editorial committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Louis Waller, who wrote the Introduction, consists of Kurt Lippmann, Joe Kaufmann, Lisbeth Minz and Hans Ziffer — all residents of Melbourne. Moreover, of the 26 contributions there are 20 from Melbourne and only 4 from Sydney. Is it a coincidence that 5 of the 6 Committee members are "newcomers"?

The articles, divided into 8 categories, deal with education, politics, art and literature, Israel, and the integration of Jews into Australian society. Also included are "Portraits" of — the Feiglins, Rachel Holzer, and Julius Stone — and a collection of 32 typical photos depicting Jewish life in Melbourne, from an open-air Chuppah to Acland Street, and from Mount Scopus to the Mitzva Van of Lubavitch. Some of the articles would be of interest to the general community, such as Prof. Colin Rubinstein's evaluation of the Hawke Government (1983-85) from the Jewish point of view.

The first article by Walter Lippmann deals with the demographic situation of Australian Jewry. He estimates that there are 75-80,000 Jews in Australia, whilst other statisticians speak of 90,000 plus. He reminds us that Australian Jewry is an aged community, having less than 20% of under-twenties and 32% of over fifty-fives. About 75% of all Jews in Melbourne live in the six suburbs of St. Kilda, Caulfield, Brighton, Moorabbin, Malvern and Prahran. Australia has 6148 residents who were born in Israel, viz. 2592 Christians, 2071 Jews and 285 Moslems. Of course, many Israelis were not born in Israel.

Some of the articles are autobiographical and 3 short stories are included. The article on Jewish artists contains several prints in colour, and Rabbi Apple tells us about the Ministry of the Great Synagogue.

It is a worthwhile publication which could become a true and fascinating mirror of Jewish life "down under".

I. Porush