

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