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Dušan Makavejev: Invisible and visible theory

By Nevena Daković

In spite of being a dynamic lecturer, entertaining in public appearances, and proficient in writing about various themes, Dušan Makavejev has left very few essays to be strictly classified as film theory. His theorising of cinema, almost unrecognisable as it is carefully disguised in diverse forms, is scattered across a number of books, reviews, essays, articles, critiques, and interviews. However, this ‘invisible theory’ is made very visible through film practice in *Innocence Unprotected* (*Nevinost bez zaštite*, 1968), which can be understood as specific theory-in-practice or a ‘manifesto’ of Makavejev’s signature style. The editing practice casually and ironically labelled as ‘Serbian Cutting’ marks this theoretical idea. I will briefly introduce Makavejev’s rethinking of film theory in all of its diversity and richness, shaped both as written and film texts.

Invisible theory

Makavejev’s theory in practice, or invisible theory, falls into four thematically and generically differentiated groups of texts, while each proposes distinctive issues not only relating to cinema but also art in general. The first group consists of film criticism (mostly on Yugoslav cinema) and short articles problematising various cinematic topics (screenwriting practice, film reception, etc.). The second group consists of the theory that stems from Makavejev’s films. In writings of an analytical and pragmatic nature, Makavejev refers to his own oeuvre as supplying bits and pieces of personal poetics, fruitfully linking theory and practice. Due to the casual tone and the associative structure, the texts of

the third group – interviews or transcripts of lectures given at Harvard and Columbia – are best described as the way ‘to theory through anecdote’ (Ilić 2008: 11). The miscellaneous works of the fourth group – a collection of essays published as *A Kiss for Comrade Parole/Poljubac za drugaricu parolu* (Beograd: Nolit, 1965) and the 1960 stage drama *New Man on Flower Square/Novi čovek na Cvetnom trgu* (co-written with Raša Popov) – are, finally, indispensable for a thorough understanding of Makavejev’s work and personality.

A number of Makavejev’s critiques in the 1950s reprinted in various anthologies reveal new formal values, world views, and styles brought to the fore by certain outstanding Yugoslav films. The emphasis on formal innovation is concurrent with his thesis stating that the only true and valid critique is the one that moves via formal values to the nexus of ideas and arguments. Dominant film criticism at the time focused superficially on the manifest content of narrative. This contrast further supports the overtly proclaimed disbelief in film criticism as the formative instance in the development of national cinema.

Another remarkably consistent set of articles by Makavejev analyses Yugoslav screenwriting practice. The essay ‘When you write the scenario, look through the window / Kad pišeš scenario pogledaj kroz prozor’ (Makavejev 2002 [orig. in 1956]) recommends that potential screenwriters in search of plausible and ordinary stories should simply look through their window into everyday life. Other essays point out the common problems of the craft of screenwriting. Makavejev further notes that the only way to insure the survival and progress of national cinema is to turn toward local values and pertinent national images and representations. ‘One must move away from the dictatorship of concrete elements into a search for universal truth.’ The appropriation of the national, local, and familiar is an imperative for the right method of communication with the audience. In other articles Makavejev examines stardom, fandom, and the impact of films on young audiences, becoming tangentially

involved in the pseudo-ethical-socialist debate about whether pop cultural heroes are true role models for youths or instead a reason for moral panic.

Beside Makavejev's personal remarks about his innovative editing, the rather eccentric book *Serbian Cutting* written by Mihailo P. Ilić provides further rethinking of cutting/montage/editing in the Serbian Black Wave. These theoretical and critical approaches are interspersed with anecdotes from the events at Ciné-club Belgrade in the 1950s and 1960s and also Ilić's amusing causerie about film montage and the language of cinema, offered in a feverish and fragmentary style not unlike Makavejev's own. The book provides fresh insights into Makavejev's professional development, his formulation of montage principles, and the place he occupied in the ciné-club and Black Wave generation.

Serbian Cutting as defined by Ilić is a phase of editing that establishes associative, symbolic meanings; it supplies the context via (inter)cutting of shots from various sources. In a broader sense it is a label for all manner of manipulations of film material of diverse forms and origins; an obvious departure from standards and norms similar to the *ostrenanie* and *zatrudnenie* of Russian formalism, one rather creating critical commentary or an assault on politics, history, and society. Intercut, hybrid material functions on all levels 'of its technology of representation and its narrative structure' (Rodowick 2007: 5).

Simultaneously, the diversely-acquired shots build a text that distorts and expands the narrative structure, becoming a bizarre and disturbing yet noble supra-narrative form. It is the final articulation that smoothly accommodates all sorts of interactions of text and context, of signs and meanings that produce social and institutional significance (Ilić 2008: 21-30).

Discretely but determinedly, the book claims that Makavejev's creative montage originated more from his precious and detailed analysis of Kurosawa's style and less from his obsession with the Russian montage tradition or its basic technique of collage. According to Makavejev, Kurosawa's extraordinary craftsmanship, labelled as a synthesis of the dynamic, is the outcome of the joint dynamic effects of the camera in movement and montage. Only hasty conclusions claim Makavejev to be the practitioner of Eisensteinian montage (Ilić 2008: 52-58). John Hoberman is one of the rare few who calls Makavejev 'the irresponsible heir to Sergei Eisenstein' due to (mis)uses of his established technique. In his opinion, Makavejev uses 'the montage techniques developed by that great Soviet theoretician to subvert the ideology they were designed to impose' (Hoberman 2009).

A Kiss for Comrade Parole, considered quite a rarity today, as a collection of articles that appeared in 'a number of progressive Yugoslav weeklies and journals' (such as *Student*, *Književne novine*, *Danas*, *Oslobođenje*, *Vidici*, and *Polja*) (Goulding 1994: 212) has proven to be quite valuable for understanding Makavejev's later work. The book testifies to the fact that all of Makavejev's oeuvre is deeply rooted in Yugoslav history, as well as national psychology and mentality. It argues for Makavejev's place as a promising public figure, an engaged and critical intellectual on the Yugoslav cultural scene of the time. His writings reveal an elusive yet strong mixture of different experiences: his studies in psychology; his early involvement with filmmaking (his first 16mm film, *Jatagan mala* (1953) followed by a dozen documentaries); his fascination with Russian cultural heritage; his love-hate relationship with the theory and practice of the European Left, or (Orthodox) Marxism. The book contains autobiographical notes, a rethinking of the relation between children and cinema, and even a presentation from a conference on intellectual development.^a *A Kiss for Comrade Parole* is organised under several allusive and ironic title headings, such as 'Expropriation of the Marbles / Eksproprijacija klikera' and 'The First and Second Removing of the Dogmatic Shirt / Prvo i Drugo skidanje dogmatičke košulje', mimicking the creative montage of cinema. Each of these titles can be understood in a number of ways: the dogmatic shirt may refer to the straightjacket of an insane asylum, the shirt of dogmatism and lunacy, or a simple exposition of Makavejev's body of critical thinking. The kiss from the title might be a lover's kiss, Judah's, or a kiss of death.

One of the articles casting a new light on Makavejev's vehement criticism and dismantling of national myths, as part of the overall attitude of probing and interrogating 'the ideological substratum and political angle' (Goulding 1994: 210), is of particular interest. *Hard Boiled Hearts: Libretto for a Godless Ballet with Pantomime and Kindness after the Motives of the Folk Poem The Death of Mother of Jugovića / Tvrdo kuhana srca: Libreto za bezbožni balet sa pantomimom i miljem prema motivima narodne pesme Smrt majke Jugovića* (1957) is a rewriting of one of the most tragic episodes of the mythology surrounding the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. Mother Jugovića, who learns about the death of her nine sons and husband in the battle, is stoically heroic to the very end. She is a noble suffering mute figure – until the moment when she recognises the arm of her youngest son, which is dropped in her lap by a raven. After that, her heart simply breaks. The story (the embodiment of national grief and martyrdom) is redrawn in a highly ironic, deconstructive tone and given a subversive avant-

garde style and absurd generic form: a libretto for ballet. The title-as-statement gives another clue for the interpretation of the book as a whole. The role of paroles and slogans in the authoritarian regime of the present is the same as the one from the past in medieval Serbia before the decisive battle of 1389 – that is, to support and create national cohesion, to make a group coalesce and firmly stand behind leadership and ideology, regardless of whether it is Yugoslavs or Serbs, communism or feudalism. Positioned halfway between real and oneiric, conscious and subconscious, in an analytical perspective the slogans are a diachronic testimony of politics and psychoanalysis.

The versatility of styles, topics, and forms systematically complicates a proper reading of the texts. A presumed seriousness is constantly undermined by both the ironic tone and pre-existing knowledge about Makavejev's personality. Combined, these elements allow each of his texts to be read as the re-enactment of his personal conflict of true believer and cynical sceptic, public intellectual and impressionable young man. The texts therefore confirm Arset's notion of ergodic literature – that includes hypertext and cyber text – as one requiring the reader's strenuous effort in order to traverse the text. The reader is obliged to make a set of serious choices and decisions about how to read and navigate through the oeuvre following the given rules as well as the 'calculation in their production of scriptons' (Arset 1997: 75) contained in the text itself. In coping with Makavejev's writings, one should make similar cautious decisions about things like whether the text is manipulated by 'other means' to another end; whether the statements are true or false; how facts rub against fiction; if mainstream Marxist notions are subverted by irony and hilarious assumptions; or how to understand the construction of fiction through irony in the second degree. For example, at the beginning of *Innocence Unprotected* the viewer is informed that they are going to see 'a new edition of a good old movie, prepared, ornamented, and annotated by Dušan Makavejev'.

Visible theory or theory in practice

Makavejev's distinguishable pattern of writing is comparable with the montage principles employed in his films. Cinematic texts are 'put together in much the same way, using the same techniques and mirroring in their subject matter the same preoccupations' (Taylor 1975: 245) as his writings. In *Innocence Unprotected* and later films, Makavejev violently intercuts the main storyline and other elements – borrowed 'readymade' shots, citations from different sources – that dramatically change the meaning and upgrade the text and narrative as a

whole. Regarding reading principles that emerge from the ergodic nature of texts, Makavejev boldly suggests that *Innocence Unprotected* is to be understood as a melodrama with inserted footnotes that do not have to be read. Rather, the creative viewer – the true heir of Barthes' reader/auteur – should decide whether to regard the footnotes and widen the textual meanings to include society, its institutions, or instances of power. The text indicates the choices to be made in reading the film between present/past and fiction/reality. Nevertheless, Makavejev strongly advocates the third path – rotating (i.e. seeing) the film, which is at one moment fiction and in another documentary (Blaževski 1988: 167-178), or switching instantaneously from past to present and vice versa. Various material and inserted shots used for the intertwining of two narratives erase and remove the borders between past/present and fiction/faction. This cohabitation adds to the global ambiguity and helps raise the 'question of the exact value we should place on the constituent elements'. The fusion of 'documentary realism, associational editing and expressive uses of camera angle, composition and lighting with boldly original leaps into surreal' (Goulding 1994: 213) and a subversive past/present model imbues old themes with new relevance and meanings.^b

The combination of diverse materials, with uncanny and problematic hues from its crossbred nature, is partially inspired by Surrealist practice. 'The Surrealists declare that words make love and films do also. Even more, they give birth to children such as a hybrid form of fiction and facts/or factions' (Ilić 2008: 106). The twin preoccupation of Surrealist theory and the art experience surrounding it reaches new peaks and achieves new qualities in the work of Makavejev. Strong love/hate bundles of different images weave multifaceted texts that are allowed to be read in 'at least half a dozen ways: as a political satire..., an essay in applied sexology..., a subjective autobiography, a Pop Art collage, a story, a documentary and so on' (Taylor 1975: 229).

Makavejev's work – aggressive, provocative, challenging, and ahead of its time – is summed up in the very title of his article *Umetnost treba cimnuti / Art should alarm* (Makavejev 2005 [orig. in 1958]). It suggests that art should always be challenged, as well as challenging in itself, in order to engender provocative and – above all – revolutionary possibilities in theory and theory in practice. Due to a truly revolutionary spirit by way of textual innovations and methods of social performance, Dušan Makavejev surrounded himself with the myth of a revolutionist – one who demystified history and power, who violated social myths and taboos, who radically rearticulated editing principles, and who

remains as a visible mythical and challenging figure of the 1960s, the Black Wave, and world cinema – surrounded by the partially (in)visible aura of theory.

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Nevena Daković, PhD is professor of Film Theory/Film Studies at the Dept. of Theory and History at the University of Arts/Belgrade

Whitman and the American Revelation

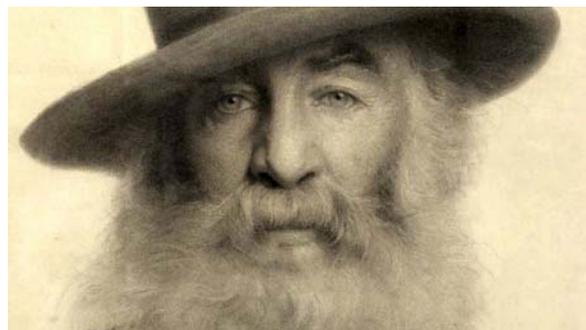
The epiphany that led to a national literature's single greatest achievement: tucked in a prosaic, newly discovered early novel are the seeds of 'Leaves of Grass'

By Paul Berman

October 4, 2017

Tablet celebrates the bicentennial of [Walt Whitman](#)'s birth on May 31, 1819. This article originally appeared in October, 2017.

A literary scholar named Zachary Turpin at the University of Houston has discovered and published two previously unknown books by Walt Whitman during the last couple of years, but, like Columbus, he has been reluctant to recognize the implications of what he has found, and his principal commentators, some of them, have displayed the same reluctance, and, as a result, the full significance has not yet emerged. It is an astonishing discovery, though. It throws a brilliant and revealing light on the culture of the United States at its most beautiful and adorable—or, if my enthusiasm is getting out of hand, I would say, at least, that it halfway solves a large and enduring and central mystery of American literature.



Walt Whitman

Whitman thought of himself as the national poet of the United States, and it is reasonable to conclude that, for a good many people, he is, in fact, the national poet, as shown by an infinity of Walt Whitman High Schools, shopping malls, street names, auditoriums, and housing projects, not to mention what the American poets have felt about him, and the

music composers, and even the political philosophers. The biographers and critics have been studying the man for 150 years by now, which adds up to a lot of thinking and research. And, even so, something at the heart of his literary career—his evolution into a major writer—has always resisted explanation.

In his early years, he worked as a freelance journalist and editor for a large number of newspapers and magazines in Brooklyn and New York, cranking out writings of every sort—local-color reports, political commentaries and polemics, book reviews, music reviews, short stories and commercial novels. And all of it demonstrated a talent. The Democratic Party’s literary and intellectual magazine in the 1840s was the *Democratic Review*, where Hawthorne was the in-house short-story writer, and, when Hawthorne stopped writing stories, the editors replaced him with young Whitman. But no one mistook him for another Hawthorne. His ideas were conventional, his prose sometimes ponderous. His greatest gift was productivity.

And then, without the slightest warning, in 1855, at age 36, he came out with the first, slender edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which he proposed as a new national document, akin to the Declaration of Independence, except in free verse, with hints of a semi-religion. Nothing that he had ever written could have prepared his readers for such a book. Nor did he seem to be treading in some other writer’s footsteps. Nor did he quote anybody else. His book appeared to be original in every aspect—tone, prosody, larger structure, philosophy—quite as if he were, in his own phrase, a “divine literatus,” conveying more-than-human revelations. But then, since he had never given any indication of supernatural abilities in the past, it was natural to wonder what had happened to him. Emerson himself, in a famous letter to Whitman, wondered about “the long foreground” that must have led to the book. “I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion.”

The discoveries that Zachary Turpin has made are newspaper serials from Whitman’s hack-writer days, beginning with a men’s health manual. The manual, called *Manly Health and Training*, ran under a pen name in a forgotten newspaper called the *New York Atlas* in 1858—which shows that, even after he had brought into print the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he did need to make a living, and he went on cranking out copy for the commercial press. *Manly Health and Training* [has its charms](#)—it is exuberantly nutty in certain passages—but his purpose in writing it was to fill a maximum number of column-inches and get paid. And his further purpose was to ensure that, afterward, the manual would disappear from memory,

which it did. Turpin has deployed the tools of digital research to ferret out its existence, and this is wonderful. We Whitman fans are delighted. But the health manual is not going to change our view of Whitman or of anything else.

Turpin’s more recent discovery, though, is an earlier piece of writing—something from the “long foreground,” and not from after. It is a serialized novel called *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Auto-Biography*, which ran, unsigned, in six issues of a different forgotten newspaper, the *Sunday Dispatch*, in 1852, three years before *Leaves of Grass*. The University of Iowa Press has [brought it out as a short book](#), this time under Whitman’s name with an introduction by Turpin. It has to be conceded that, for most of its pages, *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* offers still more evidence that Whitman went about his commercial writings with gusto, relentless in his clichés and pompous good cheer, unerringly melodramatic, sentimental, and predictable.

The virtuous young narrator, Jack, discovers a dark family secret, and a virtuous young Quakeress of his acquaintance discovers a related secret in her own family, which endows her with a fortune. And Jack and the Quakeress get married, although not before Jack takes up for a while with the fiery Inez, the Spanish dancing girl—“Inez, a Spanish dancing girl” is her legal name—and even kisses her. The kissing scene isn’t bad. Villainous lawyers with frightening names conspire to do ill. The prose style is ridiculous. “Even Mr. J. Fitzmore Smytthe came in for his share of the high-strung girl’s displeasure. And, at his next visit, Inez saluted him with such a voluble and fiery tongue, that this genteel and taciturn individual was fain to put his fingers in his ears and beat a retreat in double quick time.”

Still, tucked within the plot are 12 pages that appear to have been inserted almost by mistake—a dozen pages that make it seem as if Whitman, in toiling over his composition, had lost control of the literary discipline that hack-writing requires, and the incubus of authentic inspiration had gotten hold of him, and he did not know what to do, except to go on scribbling demonically, sheaf after sheaf. Here is Turpin’s true discovery—the major find, at least in my interpretation. *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* is a New York novel, and the plot requires Jack and the Quakeress and a couple of friends to row a boat across the Hudson River to Hoboken, where Inez the Spanish dancing girl lives. The oars dip into the water, and the rhythms of the prose slow down, and the preposterous diction disappears. “The fresh south breeze came pleasantly up from the Narrows; the water dashed in ripples against our boat.” Sound itself comes to a stop:

Out in the middle of the river, we lay on our oars a few minutes, and enjoyed the scene still more. The long stretch of the city's shore was silent and hushed; two or three sloops, at various distances on the river, moved along, their white sails showing like great river ghosts; and not a harsh sound was to be heard.

The Hoboken shore, too, was solitary and still. As we neared it, the just-risen moon shone out from a cloud, and scattered a flood of light on the wooded banks, the water, and every thing else.

Jack returns to Manhattan and attends a funeral of someone he knew at Trinity Church on Lower Broadway. He lingers after the ceremony.

I spent the rest of that pleasant, golden forenoon, one of the finest days in our American autumn, wandering slowly through the Trinity grave-yard. I felt in the humor, serious without deep sadness, and I went from spot to spot, and sometimes copied the inscriptions. Long, rank grass covered my face. Over me was the verdure, touched with brown, of trees nourished from the decay of the bodies of men.

Turpin in his introduction refrains from remarking on the phrase about grass covering Jack's face, but other people, in commenting on the novel, have pointed to it, as is only natural. The phrase anticipates the central image in Whitman's supreme poem, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass*, not to mention the book-title itself. But there is more to those dozen pages than a single haunting image. Jack comes upon the grave of a sailor from the War of 1812. He sits on the grave and thinks about death, and, then again, he thinks about how happy he is with his circle of friends and the people he loves. "I was happy that I lived in this glorious New York, where, if one goes without activity and enjoyment, it must be his own fault in the main."

His happiness increases:

Truly, life is sweet to the young man.—Such bounding and swelling capacities for joy reside within him, and such ambitious yearnings. Health and unfettered spirits are his staff and mantle. He learns unthinkingly to love—that glorious privilege of youth!

The reverie is physical, and it is easy to imagine that, whatever has prompted Jack to sit on the gravestone, he has continued sitting there in order to prevent his bounding and swelling capacities for joy and love from becoming visible.

He inspects other gravestones and the inscriptions lead him to reflect that people who were born in New York have ended up returning to Trinity Church to be buried. This observation sends his prose into still

another register, and out surges a tone whose inspiration is the Bible, with a bird as theme.

Human souls are as the dove, which went forth from the ark, and wandered far, and would repose herself at last on no spot save that whence she started. To what purpose has nature given men this instinct to die where they were born? Exists there some subtle sympathy between the thousand mental and physical essences which make up a human being, and the sources where from they are derived?

A date from long ago on one of the tombstones leads him to contemplate America's history. "What great events have happened too, since that time! A nation of freemen has arisen, outstripping all ever before known in happiness, good government, and real grandeur." He reflects that not everything has been marvelous in America's development. He comes upon the gravestone of Alexander Hamilton—"who, in his time, was the sower of seeds that have brought forth good and evil." Whitman was a solid Jacksonian and a radical democrat, and he means that Hamilton, who brought forth good by helping to establish the United States, also tried to saddle a moneyed aristocracy on the new republic. Another gravestone from the War of 1812 draws his attention. His thoughts return to the heroic young men of the American military.

The time comes to leave the cemetery.

I put my pencil and the slip of paper on which I had been copying, in my pocket, and took one slow and last look around, ere I went forth again into the city, and to resume my interest in affairs that lately so crowded upon me.

Out there in the fashionable thoroughfare, how bustling was life, and how jauntily it wandered close along the side of those warnings of its inevitable end. How gay that throng along the walk! Light laughs come from them, and jolly talk—those groups of well-dressed young men—those merry boys returning from school—clerks going home from their labors—and many a form, too, of female grace and elegance.

Could it be that coffins, six feet below where I stood, enclosed the ashes of like young men, whose vestments, during life, had engrossed the same anxious care—and schoolboys and beautiful women; for they too were buried here, as well as the aged and infirm.

But onward rolled the broad, bright current, and troubled themselves not yet with gloomy thoughts; and that showed more philosophy in them perhaps than such sentimental meditations as any the reader has been perusing.

That last phrase—about sentimental meditations and the reader—leads me to suppose that, having scribbled his several pages, Whitman found himself suddenly recalling that, at the *Sunday Dispatch*, the editors did want to please the public, and he ought to pull himself together and attend to his plot. Or perhaps he was embarrassed at the unexpectedly cavernous sound of his own voice.

It is unquestionable, in any case, that over the course of those dozen pages, and not just in the single phrase about grass, he had somehow sketched out whole portions of what would become, three years later, the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, together with hints of later editions. Here, in the passage about traversing the river, together with the cemetery passages, is an early hint of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” about traversing a river into Manhattan (though in *Leaves of Grass* it is a different river) and thinking about the dead. The grass brushing against his face brings us into the reflections on death and life in “Song of Myself.” The sexual sensation in the cemetery is “Song of Myself” precisely, with its cosmic blow-job, or what appears to be a blow-job, at the mystical and ecstatic highpoint of the poem. The bounding and swelling hint of the “Calamus” poems. The meditations on dead soldiers and sailors: this is the grand theme of any number of additional poems, notably in the editions of *Leaves of Grass* from the Civil War years and afterward. The reflections on America and its democratic achievements and the retrograde role played by people like Alexander Hamilton: this is nearly the entire political content of *Leaves of Grass*. The veering into Biblical exaltation: this is the main principle of his astounding prosody. The invocation of a dove hints of the seagulls in “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” or the caroling thrush in the poem about President Lincoln. The vista of cheerful crowds on the Manhattan thoroughfare and of coffins underneath: this hints of “Broadway Pageant” and any number of poems of city life, with their metaphysical contrasts, the present and the eternal.

Why did he gather those many poetic hints and suggestions into the dozen pages and plunk them into the middle of his silly novel? I can only offer a writer’s intuition on this point. I think he wrote those pages because everything he describes happened to him in real life, in one fashion or another, during the period in 1852 when he was working on the novel. I think he crossed one of the rivers surrounding Manhattan, and found himself in a thoughtful mood. I think he wandered around the Trinity cemetery and bent down to read an inscription, and grass brushed against his face, which led him to reflect that he had come into physical contact with life and death at the

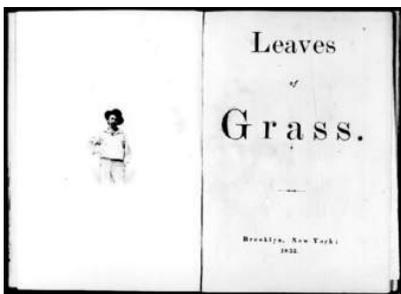
same time. The physicality of his thoughts led him to reflect on the joys of life, and not just on the sorrows, and he was unafraid to recognize that, however inappropriate it might be, a sexual sensation was among his responses. His patriotic heart pounded at the grandeur of American history and of democracy. And he wandered from the cemetery out to Broadway and pursued his thoughts about death and life, and meanwhile noticed how smartly everyone was dressed. The detail about putting away the pencil and slip of paper catches my eye. Jack, the narrator of the novel, has no reason to be carrying a pencil and paper wherever he goes, but Whitman, the real-life scribbler for the newspapers and magazines, would naturally have kept his pockets fully stocked.

I think he wrote those dozen those pages because his day’s experience struck him forcefully and he wanted to record them. He inserted the pages into *Jack Engle*, even if they did nothing to advance his plot, because the *Sunday Dispatch* paid him by the column inch, probably. And he had not yet realized how valuable, how sacred, how spectacular, were those few pages—how significant they would be for his own development. Or he halfway realized, but not entirely. I wonder how he felt when he finally got his hands on the printed newspaper. The shift into a Biblical tone for a line or two—did that strike him as a mistake, when his eye fell across it? Or did the cavernous sound strike him, on second thought, as altogether thrilling? He had never considered himself a poet in the past—or, at least, he is not known to have done so. Did he recognize, glancing at the *Sunday Dispatch*, that Biblical inspirations could bring him into the a zone of poetry unlike anything that other poets were writing? Did he realize that, in those dozen pages, he had come up with themes for a lifetime, and his many themes added up to a single theme, which had to do with life and death and America and eternity and a limited number of strangely-related images, the river, Manhattan, the dead beneath the soil, the grass, the bird, the dead soldiers? I think that in some dim fashion he did realize it.

I do not mean to suggest that, in those dozen pages, the whole of the inspiration for *Leaves of Grass* suddenly appeared. A principal element was still missing, and this was the concept of the author. The narrator of *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* is Jack at age 22—a simple young man with a knock-about past in the New York streets. To transform those dozen pages into *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman had to get rid of Jack. He had to replace him with “Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son”—which is to say, had to come up with a concept of himself as someone like Jack, except with supernatural aspects, a mortal with qualities of an immortal. His ego had to

expand accordingly. He needed to undergo a further moment of inspiration, then—a moment when he came up with the cosmic sense of himself and began to feel comfortable with it. When did this other moment occur? I deduce a possibility. The second moment took place when he contemplated the written image of the grass brushing against his face, and he realized, as he probably did not when he first scribbled the image on a sheet of paper, that his unitary experience of life and death conferred on him a more than mortal quality. He needed only the courage to announce his own capacity to speak for the eternal, which meant death, and the voice that would allow him to do so. But he was already speaking in the voice of eternity, audible in the sentence about the dove and the ark.

The reviewer of *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* in *The New York Times Book Review* a few weeks ago was Ted Genoways, who has written a book about Whitman in the Civil War. Genoways [takes the position](#) that Whitman's intellectual evolution was gradual. "Whitman did not one day set aside the hack journalism and cheap fictions of his journeyman years in favor of a brand new idiom for our American literature." *Leaves of Grass*, in Genoways' view, was "not the result of a single flash of revelation." He writes: "There are no grand epiphanies, no sudden transformations in American literature, any more than there are in American life." But I think that, in those dozen pages in *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle*, we see the opposite. I think there was, in fact, a grand and sudden epiphany. I think the epiphany came to Whitman on a day when he happened to cross one of the rivers and visited the cemetery and wandered out to Broadway. Or, half of the epiphany came to him on that day, and later would come the rest of it, which led him to declare himself a kosmos. I cannot imagine anything else, when I read those pages.



I think that *Leaves of Grass* is American literature's single greatest achievement, the greatest expression of the American idea and the democratic idea ever written—an immense achievement, which, if it did not exist, would have left America and the democratic idea thinner and weaker. And the achievement flowed from the epiphany. It was not an evolution. Moments

of epiphany do, in fact, occur in American life. That is the discovery. It is true that Whitman had prepared himself over the years to experience his epiphany. He had attended Quaker services (and Methodist services, too, as is suggested in *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle*), he had studied literature and political philosophy, he had read Emerson, he had listened to Italian opera, he had experimented with writing all kinds of things, as his freelance assignments permitted. In those ways he acquired his education gradually, as everybody does. But the vision that led to *Leaves of Grass* did not come to him gradually. His transformation was sudden, and the record of it is the 12 pages that contain a significant portion of his poetic inspiration, if only in hints. But the hints are remarkably dense and concentrated.

One other aspect of *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* merits an observation—something minuscule, not at all comparable to those dozen pages. I am embarrassed almost to bring it up in the context of his epiphany, but it is worthy of mention at least here, in the electronic pages of *Tablet*. This has to do with the Jews. New York's population and economy and geography expanded enormously in the mid-19th century, and a substantial Jewish immigration figured in the expansion—a flood of political refugees from Germany after the failure of the republican revolution of 1848, and from the Slavic countries and elsewhere. Today we can look back and notice that here was the beginning of the mass and historic Jewish flight from almost everywhere in the Old World, which wended at first principally to the United States, and later to Palestine. But none of this attracted Whitman's attention. Somewhere in his newspaper sketches of Broadway life he mentions in passing a German Jew with a funny accent, perhaps Yiddish, on the sidewalk. One of the poems in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, from 1856, is "Salut au Monde!," which begins, "O take my hand Walt Whitman!" and goes on to tour the world, with the cosmic Walt celebrating and saluting every conceivable variation of mankind. "You whoever you are!"—which is Whitman at his most lovable. A "Hebrew reading his records and psalms" figures among the whoevers. "You Jew journeying in your old age through every risk to stand once on Syrian ground!/ You other Jews waiting in all your lands for your messiah!" Everybody gets the same salute. But that was all he had to say on Jewish themes, so far as I can recall.

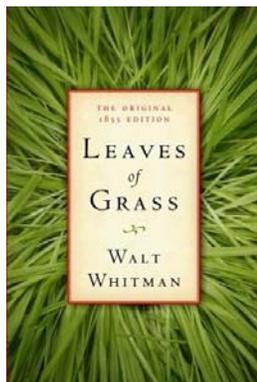
In *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle*, though, he came up with a wealthy lady, the hook-nosed Madame Seligny, and her black-eyed daughter, Rachel, "a pretty good specimen of Israelitish beauty" with a "national fondness for jewelry." Madame Seligny is in cahoots with a dastardly lawyer, and, together with

her daughter, she runs a house of questionable repute, which sounds bad, in regard to the beautiful Rachel. But not to worry: the house turns out to be merely a place for gambling, and Rachel's virtue is intact and, indeed, Rachel turns out to be a nice girl, after all. One of Jack's friends begins to court her. We live in a witch-hunting era, and sooner or later some professor is going to unmask poor Whitman as a terrible anti-Semite because of those scenes and Madame Seligny's nose. But Whitman has merely scooped up a variety of stock images and characters from French novels and has set them in New York for the purpose of adding flashy allures to his cheap novel, and for no other purpose.

Really *Jack Engle* is nothing much, apart from the dozen pages. The Iowa edition is handsomely designed, but it is almost a mistake to have presented the book under the majestic byline "Walt Whitman." It might have been better to publish the novel under the byline that Whitman himself used in those days, when he was in the mood to ascribe something to his own pen, which was "Walter Whitman"—the actual name of an actual journalist, who was less than a kosmos. But then, the cheap and commercial quality of *Jack Engle* only makes more dramatic, by force of contrast, the dozen pages about the river and the cemetery and Broadway—the pages that appear to record the central moment in the history of American literature, when Walter, the unremarkable journalist, began to undergo the metamorphosis into Walt, a genius.

Read more of Paul Berman's political and cultural analyses for *Tablet* magazine [here](#).

Tablet



Paul Berman is *Tablet's* critic-at-large. He is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias, Terror and Liberalism, Power and the Idealists, and The Flight of the Intellectuals*.

Jewish cemeteries in Belgrade

A brief history

Barbara Panić

There are several different and paradoxical terms for cemetery in the Hebrew language: the house of tombs (Hebr. *Bet kevarot*)⁴⁰, the house of eternity (Hebr. *Bet olam*)⁴¹ and the house of life (Hebr. *Bet chaim*)⁴². Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson⁴³ explains that these three expressions reflect three ways in which life and death can be interpreted. If life is defined only as a physical experience, an opportunity to maintain, nurture and satisfy the material and the physical, then death is a tragic cessation of existence. In that case, life reaches its final chapter in death, and cemeteries are no more than burial sites, that is – the house of tombs. If, however, life is seen as a spiritual experience, and not just physical, then death is not the absolute interruption of life. The moment of death is indeed tragic and painful for the family, but it is not the end of existence for the deceased. The soul never dies, it goes on living, loving and feeling in another dimension, on a spiritual level that eludes our senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. The body is buried, but the soul remains eternal. Cemetery thus becomes the house of eternity. Yet another, higher level is attained when the values of the deceased continue to have an impact on the everyday lives and conduct of the living. Then, the cemetery becomes the house of life. The deceased persons' dreams and ideas continue to live in a very tangible way, through the earthly existence of their loved ones.⁴⁴

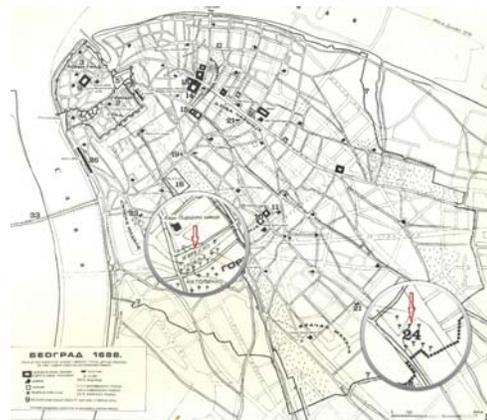


Fig. 1 City plan of Belgrade by J. B. Gumpp, 1688.

In ancient times, the Jewish cemeteries were not only burial grounds but also tidy lawns with plenty of trees. It is not surprising that the Romans called them hortus

Judaeorum – Jewish garden. It is written in the Talmud that the Jewish cemeteries were famous for their beauty as far back as in the times of Nebuchadnezzar, and that they were often more finely kept than his royal palace.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, it remains unknown whether this was true for the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Belgrade. The historic sources reveal that the Belgrade Jews had their own quarter with synagogues on the slope of the Sava River already in the second half of the 16th century. This neighborhood, located at the site of the present-day Obilićev Venac, had a cemetery. This is evident not only from archaeological findings but also from a 1688 city plan made by cartographer Johann Baptista Gump (fig. 1).⁴⁶ This plan, as well as the one made by cartographer Gabriel Bodenehr, shows that at the end of the 17th century another Jewish cemetery existed at the location of today's Dalmatinska and Đušina streets, in the municipality of Palilula (fig. 2). Since the late 16th century, travelers' diaries mention the presence of Jews on the banks of the Danube as well, in the neighborhood known as Jaliija.⁴⁷ Although on the 1735 map by M. Seutter the area across the Old Synagogue (Ladino *Il kal viježu*)⁴⁸ is labelled Freyt Hof (cemetery), there is no solid proof that the „Jaliija” cemetery indeed existed (fig. 3). However, historiographer Dr. Divna Đurić Zamolo maintains that this is where the Jewish cemetery, previously in the Sava neighborhood, was relocated.⁴⁹



Fig. 2 City plan of Belgrade by Bodenehr, 1688. The letter R denotes the Jewish cemetery –*Der Iuden Begrabnisse*

Unlike in the case of the cemeteries that may have existed on the slope of the Sava River and in the Jewish quarter by the Danube, the evidence about the Palilula cemetery is a lot more convincing. The date of the foundation of the cemetery appears in several historic documents. In a 1923 document, the then chief rabbi of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Dr. Isak Alkalaj is quoted as saying that the examination of the cemetery grounds and tombstone engravings had revealed that the earliest monuments dated from 1730 and that “no earlier date than this was ever established

until now”.⁵⁰ In a speech delivered on the occasion of the consecration of the cemetery chapel in 1935, Dr. David Albala⁵¹ offers more specific data based on the average annual mortality figures. He says that the Old Jewish Cemetery, covering an area of 16,000 square meters, was actively used from the second half of the 16th century, with funerals taking place until 1890.⁵²



Fig. 3 City plan of Belgrade by M. Seutter, 1735.

In November 1888, the Sephardic Community purchased land in 73 Grobljanska Street⁵³ specifically for a new cemetery (fig 4).⁵⁴ This was likely prompted, among other things, by the 1887 regulation of the Ministry of Religion of the Kingdom of Serbia stipulating the closure of all old city cemeteries because they were “obstacles to the city’s development”. The plan was to allocate a piece of land outside the city to be used for burials by all congregations.⁵⁵



Fig. 4 Deed on the purchase of land for the New cemetery, 1888.

Petar Palić, a locksmith, was commissioned to do the design of the gate and fence of the New Cemetery.

Footnotes

⁴⁰“But I said to the king, ‘May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been

destroyed by fire?’ The king said to me, ‘What is it you want? ‘Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.’” Nehemiah 2:3-5.

⁴¹“Also, they are afraid of heights and dangers on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper loses its spring, and the caper berry has no effect; for the mere mortal is headed to his eternal home, and mourners will walk around in the street”, Ecclesiastes 12:5.

⁴²“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” Isaiah 26:19.

⁴³Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson (b. 1972 -) is one of the leading present-day American orthodox Jewish scholars.

⁴⁴<http://www.chabadnj.org/page.asp?pageID=%7BA38C0053-7795-4F75-A1BB-4719699AF120%7D&displayAll=1>

⁴⁵The Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 96b.

⁴⁶V. Nedomački, *A 1641 Jewish tombstone in Belgrade*, Jewish Almanac 1961-1962, Belgrade; M. Rajner, *Jewish Cemeteries in Belgrade*, Compendium 6, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 1992.

⁴⁷Jalija (pronounced yaleeyah) is a Turkish word for seashore or river bank.

⁴⁸Il kal viježu (The Old Temple) is the Sephardic synagogue built in the late 17th century in the Jewish quarter of Dorćol. It was torn down after the Second World War.

⁴⁹D. Đurić Zamolo, *The Old Jewish Quarter and Jewish Street in Belgrade*, Jewish Almanac 1965-1967, Belgrade

⁵⁰M. Mihailović, *Archival materials about the Jews of Belgrade in the First World War from the Lavov Archives*, Compendium 10, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 2015.

⁵¹Dr. Albala was a prominent physician, politician and chairman of the Sephardic Community of Belgrade in the period 1938-1942. More about Dr. Albala see in: P. Lebl Albala, *The Life of Vid: A Biography of Dr. David Albala*, Belgrade, 2008; Dr. David Albala, *Special delegate to the Royal Yugoslav Legation in Washington 1939-1942*, Đ. Lopičić Ed., Belgrade, 2010; M. Koljanin, *The Second Tenure of Dr. David Albala in the United States of America -1942*, Compendium 8, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 2003.

⁵²*Consecration of the new chapel at the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade*, The Jew, Vol. 1, January 1935, p. 7

⁵³Mije Kovačevića Street, where the Jewish cemetery is located today, was known as Grobljanska (Cemetery Street) in the period 1896-1930.

⁵⁴A title deed from November 1888 shows that the land for the New Jewish Cemetery was purchased from Đorđe Kurtović from Šabac. The original is kept in the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.

⁵⁵Ž. Lebl, op. cit., p. 252.

Barbara Panic is a curator at the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.

Kafka's Last Trial by Benjamin Balint review – long battle over a literary legacy

A scrupulous study of the squabble between Germany and Israel over Kafka's papers, and the two women caught in the middle

By John Banville

5 Jan 2019. Last modified on 8 Jan 2019

The world was Kafkaesque before Franz Kafka; all he did was contribute the adjective. He was certainly not the first literary artist to identify the essential uncanniness of quotidian reality. From Catullus through Jonathan Swift and on to Heinrich von Kleist, ETA Hoffmann and Dostoevsky, the fictions we spin in order that life might be sustainable have been questioned, derided and upended, over and over. All the same, Kafka remains a special case. As George Steiner pointed out, no other great writer, not even Shakespeare, managed to arrogate to himself and make uniquely his own a letter of the alphabet. In the darker realm of literature, at least, K is king. The adjective “[Kafkaesque](#)” has, of course, become a cliché. Kafka's name, according to Philip Roth, “is plastered indiscriminately on almost any baffling or unusually opaque event that is not easily translatable into the going simplifications”. Even [Max Brod](#), his friend and the man we must thank for disregarding Kafka's specific, written instructions that all his unpublished work should be destroyed, protested against the “repulsive expression ‘Kafkaesque’”, adding that “Kafkaesque is that which Kafka was not!” But neither was he what Brod claimed him to be, a “saint of our time”.

And Theodor Adorno was right to insist that he was not “a poet of the Judaic homeland”. Indeed, one of the themes running throughout Benjamin Balint's fascinating and forensically scrupulous account of the history of Kafka's papers is the writer's deeply ambiguous relationship – if it can even be called that – with Israel, or, as it still was in his time, Palestine. While Brod, a typical Mitteleuropean man of letters, “came,” according to the journalist and Zionist Robert Weltsch, “to complete identification with the Jewish people”, Kafka maintained a sceptical attitude on the “Jewish question”, both in the personal and the public

spheres. “What have I in common with the Jews?” he asks in his diary, adding with typically lugubrious humour, “I have hardly anything in common with myself.”

It was not until he discovered what Balint describes as “an unlikely source of vitality” in the performances of a Yiddish theatre troupe in Prague’s Cafe Savoy that he began to appreciate his Jewish inheritance. “The café was tawdry,” Balint writes, “its doorman a part-time pimp,” yet the burlesque performances had the peculiar effect of making Kafka’s “cheeks tremble”. Kafka filled more than a 100 pages of his diary, Balint tells us, with accounts of the Yiddish players and their plays. “He was impressed by their authenticity and ‘vigour’ (*Urwüchsigkeit*), and by the ironic idiom itself – in which high and low, biblical and vernacular rattled against each other.” Samuel Beckett must have undergone the same kind of Damascene moment when he first began to look seriously at the miniature tragicomic epics of Buster Keaton.

Whether his glimpse of a shared Jewish past turned Kafka into a “Jewish” writer is doubtful. True, he did teach himself Hebrew, as his friend Georg Langer, a scholar of the Kabbalah, attested: “He, who always insisted that he was not a Zionist, learned our language at an advanced age and with great diligence.” Yet as Kafka himself wrote not long before his death: “What is Hebrew, but news from far away?” As to Palestine itself, it seems to have been for Kafka not so much the promised as the improbable land. As he scathingly remarked: “Many people prowl around Mt Sinai.” Perhaps the matter is best expressed by the Swiss critic Jean Starobinski: “In the face of Judaism, Kafka is an exile, albeit one who ceaselessly asks for news of the land he has left.”

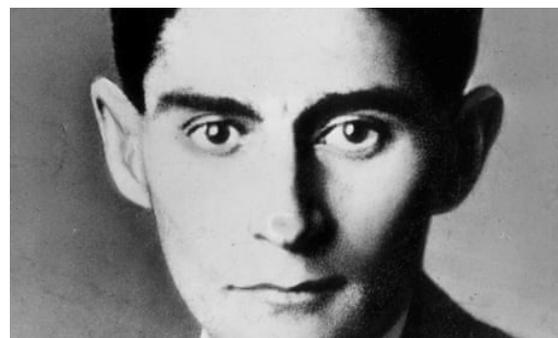
All these aspects of the extremely vexed Jewish question are pertinent to Balint’s subject, which is the battle between Germany and Israel for possession of Kafka’s literary remains, and the plight of the two women caught in the crossfire – although it must be acknowledged that Esther Hoffe and her daughter Eva exploded quite a few bombs themselves.

The Israeli case was succinctly stated by Meir Heller, the hard-nosed lawyer who through eight years of intricate, sometimes bitter, and – yes, alas – Kafkaesque litigation represented the National Library of Israel: “Like many other Jews who contributed to western civilisation, we think, his legacy ... [and] his manuscripts should be placed here in the Jewish state.”

The other interested party was the German Literature Archive at Marbach, under the direction of Ulrich Raulff, which, as Balint writes, “wished to add Kafka’s manuscripts to the estates of more than 1,400 writers ... held in storage facilities kept at a constant

18C–19C (about 66F) and a relative humidity of 50 percent–55 percent”. So far, so German; one of the less temperate comments came from the publisher and Kafka scholar Klaus Wagenbach: “The Israelis seem to have become crazed.”

The squabble – and it was a squabble, despite the many high-minded pronouncements that the affair called forth – centred not on Kafka himself, or his wishes as to the fate of his papers, running to tens of thousands of pages, but to the ambiguities of the will left behind by Brod, the original keeper of the archive. A tireless, prolific and for the most part mediocre writer and journalist, Brod was Kafka’s closest friend and confidant, and regarded him with, as he confessed, “fanatical veneration”, finding even his chronic hypochondria “inventive and entertaining”. After the second world war, Brod settled in Palestine, not without doubts and difficulties, and with less of an enthusiastic reception than he might justifiably have expected. In Israel’s defence, the new state was more in need of people of action than of another central European intellectual, even one carrying a bulging suitcase of papers left behind by one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, indeed of all the centuries. Kafka had entrusted his archive to Brod with instructions to destroy it, instructions that Brod insisted he assured Kafka he had no intention of carrying out. In Tel Aviv, Brod became friends with another German exile, Otto Hoffe, and his much younger wife, Esther. Brod, whose own wife had recently died and whose lover had left him, latched on to the Hoffes, and in time took on Esther as his secretary, and perhaps more – although Esther’s daughter Eva insisted that Esther’s relation to Brod “wasn’t carnal, it was spiritual”.



Looking for Kafka – archive, 1964

Whatever the nature of the connection between the two, on his death in 1968 Brod left Esther in possession of the great bulk of Kafka’s papers, including original manuscripts of novels and stories, and a wealth of correspondence. Balint, who is a library fellow at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, emphasises that for decades the Israeli state showed no interest in securing the papers, and did not even

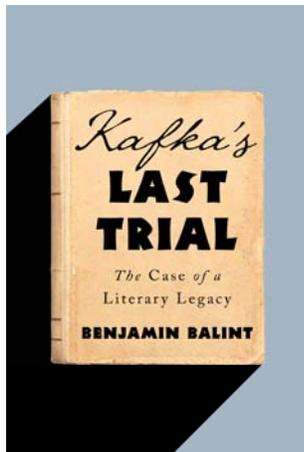
react when Esther put some manuscripts up for auction.

In time, Esther left what remained of them – a substantial haul, despite those auctions – to Eva, still living in Tel Aviv. At once Israel, in the form of its National Library, moved to contest Esther’s will, provoking the Marbach Literature Archive to weigh in with its own case. Since it had already been in negotiation with Esther to buy Brod’s estate, including the Kafka papers, the archive’s director held that it had the right at least to make a bid against the Israeli claim. There followed no fewer than three trials in Israel, which ended with the supreme court’s decision that Eva must hand over, without recompense, the entire Brod papers, including Kafka’s legacy, to the library.

Who was in the right, or could there even be a “right” decision in such a case, involving the claims of the Jewish state against a nation that had permitted the murder of 6 million Jews? The real loser was not the Marbach archive, for all the affront it suffered, but Eva, [who died in August 2018](#). Balint, in a passage that Kafka would surely have admired, sums up the matter eloquently and movingly when he writes: “Like the man from the country in Kafka’s parable ‘Before the Law’, Eva Hoffe remained stranded and confounded outside the door of the law ... Her inheritance was the trial itself. Paradoxically, she had inherited her disinheritance, inherited the impossibility of carrying out her mother’s will. She possessed only her dispossession.”

Kafka’s Last Trial is published by Picador.

The Guardian



About the Author

Benjamin Balint is a library fellow at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. He has written for The Wall Street Journal, The Weekly Standard, and Die Zeit, and his translations from the Hebrew have appeared in The New Yorker.

Israeli Candidate Calls to Build Temple Now

By Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz

April 4, 2019

“See a man skilled at his work— He shall attend upon kings; He shall not attend upon obscure men.”
Proverbs 22:29 (The Israel Bible™)



Moshe Feiglin in front of the altar (Photo by Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz/Breaking Israel News)

For the first time ever, an Israeli politician has had the temerity to publicly declare what, for more than 2,000 years, the Jewish people have prayed for: build the Temple now.

Moshe Feiglin, head of the Zehut party, shocked participants at a Maariv/Jerusalem Post conference in Tel Aviv on Wednesday night.

“I don’t want to build a [\(Third\) Temple](#) in one or two years, I want to build it **now**,” Feiglin said to the crowd. “To build the Temple I need support, I can’t do it alone,” he said in concluding his speech.

The maverick Zehut party is steadily gaining traction in the polls under the banner of Jewish rights in the Holy Land, much to the chagrin of their left-wing opponents. A Temple Mount agenda is built into his party’s platform which calls to move government facilities to the Temple Mount and give the Chief Rabbinate authority over the site. Many have said that this is an extremist position which will lead to war, but Shmuel Sackett, co-founder of the party and one of its candidates for the Knesset, refuted these claims.

“Building the 3rd and final temple in Jerusalem has been the dream of Jews for more than 2,000 years. The goal of the State of Israel is to bring about the fulfillment of the Jewish dream and not the destruction of it,” Sackett told *Breaking Israel News*.

“We must educate the world as to the beauty of that dream and to the wonderful peace it will bring. Not every dream can be realized immediately but we must do what we can to move closer to that reality.”

Sackett said that his party’s name, which means ‘identity,’ had a special meaning in Israeli politics. He referred to the title of Benjamin Netanyahu’s book, *A Durable Peace: A Place Among the Nations*.

“Israel is not like every nation,” Sackett emphasized citing Exodus.



An illustration of the Muslim Dome of the Rock (left) pictured next to the rebuilt Holy Temple on the Temple Mount. (Wikimedia Commons/Johnpreacher)

But you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. [Exodus 19:6](#)

“In Hebrew, קדוש (holy) actually means ‘separate,’” Sackett explained. “Israel has a special role to play and when we do, there will be peace for everyone.”

[Rabbi Chaim Amsalem, number two in the Zehut list](#), responded to those concerns simply.

“Who does not want Moshiach (Messiah)? That is what we are saying” he said to *Breaking Israel News*. He noted that the same concern was expressed when President Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Amsalem paraphrased the president by saying, “We have tried it their way for a very long time and it has only brought more conflict. It is time to try this way.”

“We do not want war,” Rabbi Amsalem explained. “The time to build the Temple is when the entire world wants it and that time is very close indeed.”

Amsalem’s vision of unity is based on his personal experience. He is a former Knesset member for Shas, an ultra-Orthodox Sephardi party, but which draws from all aspects of Israeli society, unifying them all under one common theme; the Jewish state.

“This is what brought me to join with Feiglin and everyone identifies with this,” Amsalem said. The Zehut party is composed of veteran political iconoclasts. Its founder, Moshe Feiglin, established

the Manhigut Yehudit (*Jewish Leadership*) movement within the Likud party in 1995. In the 2012 Likud leadership election, his faction won 23 percent of the vote. In the 2013 elections, Feiglin was elected to the Knesset and served as its Deputy Speaker.

In 2015, Netanyahu blocked Feiglin’s growing popularity among the electorate by placing him 36th in the party list, a position that made it extremely unlikely he would sit in the Knesset even if the party was successful in the elections. Feiglin chose not to appeal the move and left to form the Zehut party. Until recently, most media refused to list Zehut in polling results despite estimates they could win nine seats. Even the most conservative estimates are now sure they will pass the 3-seat threshold to sit in the Knesset. Considered quasi-libertarian, Feiglin is a strong advocate for increasing the availability of medical cannabis and approving its export. The party has been lambasted in the press for its pro-medical marijuana platform, a position the left-wing media usually promotes.

The real animus from the left is due to an issue that Feiglin explicitly stated he will always place foremost in his politics: the Land of Israel. Unlike other political parties which make this claim, Feiglin has a long history of fighting against abandoning land that gives strength to this campaign promise. His personal attachment to Jerusalem is undeniable, as he frequently ascends to the Temple Mount and has [attended](#) every Temple reenactment.

Feiglin has fought for this belief. In 1995 he led mass protests against the government signing agreements with Yasser Arafat. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment for sedition against the state by an Israeli court.

The party’s manifesto includes canceling signed agreements with the Palestinians, making Arab-Israeli citizens pass a loyalty test and offering financial incentives to them to emigrate elsewhere if they refuse to accept Jewish sovereignty over the land. He has also called for Israel to annex the West Bank as a solution to the conflict.

Feiglin stated that he does not have a preference between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main election rival Benny Gantz. Since the prime minister is the candidate who can consolidate a majority coalition, this fluidity gives the Zehut party a powerful influence and Feiglin has been dubbed “kingmaker” by political pundits.

This willingness to align with either side of the political spectrum does not come from ambiguity, but rather from a strong adherence to his highest ideal.

Feiglin has stated that he will not join a government that is willing to sell out the Land of Israel.

Unfortunately, in the current atmosphere of Israeli politics, that limits his options for political partners.

BIN

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Journalist and award-winning author Matti Friedman's tale of Israel's first spies reads like an espionage novel—but it's all true. The four agents at the center of this story were part of a ragtag unit known as the "Arab Section," conceived during WWII by British spies and Jewish militia leaders in Palestine. Intended to gather intelligence and carry out sabotage and assassinations, the unit consisted of Jews who were native to the Arab world and could thus easily assume Arab identities.

In 1948, with Israel's existence in the balance, these men went undercover in Beirut, where they spent the next two years operating out of a newsstand, collecting intelligence and sending messages back to Israel via a radio whose antenna was disguised as a clothesline. Of the dozen spies in the Arab Section at the war's outbreak, five were caught and executed. But in the end, the Arab Section would emerge as the nucleus of the Mossad, Israel's vaunted intelligence agency.

Spies of No Country

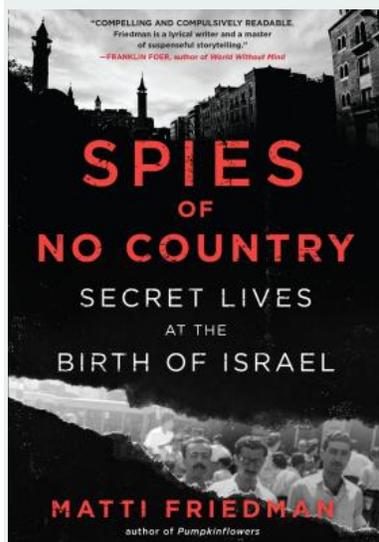
Secret Lives at the Birth of Israel

Algonquin Books, 9781616207229, 272pp.

By Matti Friedman

Spies of No Country is about the slippery identities of these young spies, but it's also about the complicated identity of Israel itself, a country that presents itself as Western but in fact has more citizens with Middle Eastern roots and traditions, like the spies of this narrative.

Meticulously researched and masterfully told, *Spies of No Country* is an eye-opening look at the paradoxes of the Middle East.



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Description

“Wondrous . . . Compelling . . . Piercing.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

Award-winning writer Matti Friedman’s tale of Israel’s first spies has all the tropes of an espionage novel, including duplicity, betrayal, disguise, clandestine meetings, the bluff, and the double bluff—but it’s all true.

The four spies at the center of this story were part of a ragtag unit known as the Arab Section, conceived during World War II by British spies and Jewish militia leaders in Palestine. Intended to gather intelligence and carry out sabotage and assassinations, the unit consisted of Jews who were native to the Arab world and could thus easily assume Arab identities. In 1948, with Israel’s existence in the balance during the War of Independence, our spies went undercover in Beirut, where they spent the next two years operating out of a kiosk, collecting intelligence, and sending messages back to Israel via a radio whose antenna was disguised as a clothesline. While performing their dangerous work these men were often unsure to whom they were reporting, and sometimes even who they’d become. Of the dozen spies in the Arab Section at the war’s outbreak, five were caught and executed. But in the end the Arab Section would emerge, improbably, as the nucleus of the Mossad, Israel’s vaunted intelligence agency. *Spies of No Country* is about the slippery identities of these young spies, but it’s also about Israel’s own complicated and fascinating identity. Israel sees itself and presents itself as a Western nation, when in fact more than half the country has Middle Eastern roots and traditions, like the spies of this story. And, according to Friedman, that goes a long way toward explaining the life and politics of the country, and why it often baffles the West. For anyone interested in real-life spies and the paradoxes of the Middle East, *Spies of No Country* is an intimate story with global significance.

About the Author

Matti Friedman’s 2016 book *Pumpkinflowers* was chosen as a *New York Times* Notable Book and as one of Amazon’s 10 Best Books of the Year. It was selected as one of the year’s best by *Booklist*, *Mother Jones*, *Foreign Affairs*, the *National Post*, and the *Globe and Mail*. His first book, *The Aleppo Codex*, won the 2014 Sami Rohr Prize, the ALA’s Sophie Brody Medal, and the Canadian Jewish Book Award for history. A former AssociatedPress correspondent, Friedman has reported from Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Moscow, the Caucasus, and Washington, DC, and his writing has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, and elsewhere. Friedman grew up in Toronto and now lives with his family in Jerusalem.

Praise For *Spies of No Country: Secret Lives at the Birth of Israel...*

“Wondrous . . . compelling . . . In unadorned yet piercing prose, Friedman captures what it was like to be part of the Arab Section . . . Friedman succeeds in portraying the ‘stories beneath the stories’ that acted as a bedrock to the rise of the Mossad and serve still as a window into Israel’s troubled soul.”

—*New York Times Book Review*

“*Spies of No Country* is an important book . . . Americans are not accustomed to hearing about Israel’s complexity, or its diversity. We are rarely asked to consider Israel as a country that is, as Friedman says, ‘more than one thing.’ Any serious defender or critic of Israeli politics should consider this a serious problem. Meaningful opinions require nuanced understanding, and *Spies of No Country* offers that.”

—*NPR Books*

“In *Spies of No Country*, Matti Friedman, a Canadian-Israeli journalist, resurrects early operations of the intelligence service of the Palmach, the nascent military that ultimately grew into the mighty Israel Defense Forces. The book is a slim but intriguing string of anecdotes in which members of the unit risk their lives under cover in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq as Jewish settlers and refugees fought to preserve their foothold in Palestine.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“One of the most compelling, compulsively readable histories I’ve read in a long while. Matti Friedman is a lyrical writer and a master of suspenseful storytelling. His gripping spy story doesn’t just narrate Israel’s heroic founding—it illuminates its tortured present.”

—**Franklin Foer, author of *World Without Mind***

“*Spies of No Country* is thrilling, moving, and, like everything that Matti Friedman writes, deeply humane.”

—**Nicole Krauss, author of *Forest Dark***

“A thrilling Israeli spy story . . . Matti Friedman tells this story with great style. Not only is *Spies of No Country* good on such sophisticated, tangled questions of identity; it also just tells a fun story. As a literary document, *Spies of No Country* is exquisite . . . beautiful and exciting.”

—*The Forward*

“Matti Friedman’s enthralling new book, *Spies of No Country*, tells the story of a Palmach unit called the Arab Section. The Palmach was the underground Jewish army that fought in British Palestine.”

—*Commentary Magazine*

“On the surface, it’s an engaging spy saga. Beneath that, though, lies an examination of identity and the humanity behind both sides of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. Ultimately, Gamliel, Isaac, Havakuk, and Yakuba were unknown until now because they were not caught and thus

escaped greater renown. Matti Friedman does us, his readers, a great service not just in bringing their exploits to light, but in sharing with us insights into how they impacted history and the region.”

—*Washington Independent Review of Books*

“Excellent . . . compelling . . . [the spies’] stories are an unjustly forgotten—and fascinating—aspect of Israel’s founding. [Friedman’s] deeply researched book is not only enjoyable but groundbreaking.”

—*Jewish Review of Books*

“A noteworthy and authentic spy story. *Spies of No Country* tells the story of the birth of the State of Israel in 1948 through the accounts of a small group of Jewish heroes, the Arab Section, who spied for the new state in surrounding Arab countries . . . filled with riveting vignettes. This is rather a splendid retelling of one small part of the effort to create a Jewish homeland. Friedman’s account of the Arab Section is an eye-opening narrative of the early days of the State of Israel. It is not an optimistic story, but a genuine and sorrowful one.”

—*The New York Journal of Books*

“*Spies of No Country*, the third book by the Israeli journalist, shares the gripping and previously untold stories of four Mizrahi Jews who took part in a spy unit called the Arab Section. Friedman’s approach to this often untold history of Israel is a refreshing one – and has been taboo for many writers. The rich history of Eastern Jews, including the critical role they played in establishing the State of Israel, should not be minimized or erased by the superficial biases of Western scholars. Thankfully, Friedman’s groundbreaking book provides a vital example of how to avoid just that.”

—*Jerusalem Post*

“Matti Friedman’s *Spies of No Country* tells the story of four men who became members of the Arab Section and went undercover in Beirut for two years. Readers who know Friedman from his previous books, *Pumpkinflowers* and *The Aleppo Codex*, will already appreciate Friedman’s talent in creating dramatic nonfiction. A spy story inherently involves situations that complicate the life of the main character. Friedman enhances his story by defining how his character perceives the situations he encounters, but also how he, the writer, perceives the character perceiving the situation.”

—*Jewish Herald-Voice (Houston)*

“In his new book, *Spies of No Country*, Friedman, who is now based in Jerusalem, combines his in-depth knowledge of Israel with a riveting narrative to recount the story of the Arab Section, an Israeli spy operation active from January 1948 to August 1949. Based on both interviews and archives, Friedman drops readers into the complex, shifting and dangerous landscape of the 1948 conflict. *Spies of No Country* is a fascinating journey into the past that reads like a spy novel—except in this case, it’s all true.”

—*BookPage*

“Friedman tells the fascinating story of the Arab Section . .

. At that time, Israel was many things, and the author deftly navigates the complicated identities and the stories beneath the stories. An exciting historical journey and highly informative look at the Middle East with Israel as the starting point.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“In evocative prose detailing mid-20th-century life in the dangerous streets of Haifa and Beirut, journalist Friedman recounts the intertwined stories of four underground spies for the Arab Section of the Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organization in Palestine that became part of the Israel Defence Forces after Israel’s founding.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“[An] absolutely arresting account of espionage at the genesis of the Israeli state.”

—*Booklist (starred review)*

“At that time, Israel was many things, and the author deftly navigates the complicated identities and the stories beneath the stories . . . An exciting historical journey and highly informative look at the Middle East with Israel as the starting point.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"A fine, moving piece of writing, told with simplicity and artistry."

—**Benny Morris, author of 1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War**

“This book sure looks like a rollicking spy story. It’s got all the necessary parts: a high-stakes war for a new state’s existence, double identities, suspense, betrayal. But it’s more than that. This is a book about being an outsider many times over. The four spies in *Spies of No Country* grew up as Jews in Arab lands; came of age in British Palestine as dark-skinned Middle Easterners looked down on by their European counterparts; lived undercover as Arabs in hostile territory; and were never publicly acknowledged in Israel as the heroes they were. Justice demanded that their stories be told. We’re lucky that a writer as gifted as Matti Friedman came along to tell them.”

—**Judith Shulevitz, New York Times op-ed contributor and author of The Sabbath World**

“Matti Friedman shows us how an heroic little band of Jewish spies from Arab countries helps explain the political and cultural transformation of Israel from its European Jewish origins into the largely Middle Eastern country it is today. With *Spies of No Country*, Matti Friedman proves that he is one of the essential interpreters of Israel writing today.”

—**Yossi Klein Halevi, New York Times bestselling author of Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor**

The Phantom Menace of Judeo-Bolshevism

How a political fantasy became an excuse for genocidal anti-Semitism

By David Mikics

November 1, 2018

It's the bad luck of the Jews, and a persistent shonde, that some of the most notorious Communists were members of the tribe: "Iron Lazar" Kaganovich, Stalin's brutal henchman; Jakub Berman, head of the Polish secret police; Romania's Ana Pauker ("Stalin in a skirt"); and of course Exhibit A, Leon Trotsky. Like most of the other Red firebrands, Lev Davidovich Bronstein declared his Jewish identity meaningless. But maybe it wasn't. For one thing, Communism promised to solve the Jewish question in a way that other movements could not. World revolution, unlike Bundism and Zionism (both more popular options among Eastern European Jews), offered an escape from Jewishness in the name of universal humanity, and at the same time satisfied the classically Jewish prophetic urge.

It shouldn't be verboten to speak of a certain Jewish aptitude for Communism. The historian [Yuri Slezkine](#) busted that taboo in his masterwork *The Jewish Century* when he suggested that the notorious image of the Jewish commissar was more than just an anti-Semitic smear. Jews combined "relentless rationalism and exuberant messianism" and so made excellent revolutionaries, Slezkine wrote. Slezkine sensibly remarked that "most radicals were not Jews and most Jews were not radicals, but the proportion of radicals among Jews was, on average, much higher than among their non-Jewish neighbors." Seven out of 10 members of the original leadership of the Polish Communist movement were Jewish, and in the 1930s Jews made up about 65 percent of all Warsaw Communists, 75 percent of the Polish Party's propaganda apparatus, and 90 percent of MOPR, Poland's international Communist relief organization. We can keep such facts in mind, Slezkine argued, and still avoid sliding into the anti-Semitic slander that Bolshevism was a Jewish plot.

The revolutionary spirit that seized some Jews and many more non-Jews in the early years of the 20th century has led to all kinds of trouble, not least for the Jews themselves. In the early 20th century, Slezkine wrote, Jews looked like a vanguard people, modernity incarnate. But a trapdoor loomed for the Jews: Modernity now meant nationalism, the new opiate of

the people, "states that posed as tribes." A head-on collision resulted between nationalism and the Jews in which the latter suddenly looked like the enemies of the newly chosen people, the Germans, Poles, Hungarians, and Romanians. Despite the Jews' strenuous devotion to the national gentile cultures, their love for Goethe, Mickiewicz, Petöfi, they were still suspect, rootless aliens. Jews came to represent the evil, corrosive side of modernity, string-pullers of international capital and media, and worst of all, ready to destroy one's nation in the name of global Communism.

Enter the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, capably explored by Paul Hanebrink in his new book, [A Specter Haunting Europe](#). For many Europeans in the late 1910s, the face of Communist revolution was Jewish. Short-lived revolutions swept across Eastern and Central Europe in the wake of the Bolshevik coup, and many of the leaders were Jews or half-Jews, like Hungary's Bela Kun and Bavaria's Kurt Eisner. Like Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin, Eisner was no Bolshevik, but that didn't matter. After these revolutions collapsed, Jews were blamed for the chaos and bloodshed.

Granted, Jews were overrepresented in a few Communist regimes. There is still a huge leap between this fact and the anti-Semitic notion, sharply on the rise in today's Eastern Europe, that "the Jews" were responsible for Communism, and that they should be unmasked as aggressors, not merely innocent victims of the Nazis. Judeo-Bolshevism has become a way not just to blame the Jews, but to minimize Polish, Hungarian, and Romanian responsibility for anti-Jewish crimes.

Romania's history provides a prime example of Judeo-Bolshevist prejudice and its deadly consequences. In June 1941, Ion Antonescu, the Romanian leader, ordered his military commander to identify "all Yids and Communist agents and sympathizers" in Romanian border areas, a clear signal for a mass killing. Soon after, the Romanian secret service killed 4,000 Jews in the town of Iași. When Romanian troops moved eastward that summer into Soviet-controlled Bessarabia, which they had lost to the Russians the previous year, they shot at least 12,000 more Jews, and deported almost 150,000. Antonescu justified the massacres by citing the nonsensical rumor that Jews had handed over Bessarabia to the Soviets.

After they recovered Bessarabia, the Romanian police surveyed the number of Jews who had worked for the Soviets—a remarkably low number, as it turned out. The provincial gendarmerie inspector was enraged: "the data," he said, "contradict the facts."

No sooner did Communism fall than Romanian Judeo-Bolshevism reappeared, having lived an

underground existence during the Cold War. In 1991 Elie Wiesel went to Romania to speak at the 50-year commemoration of the Iași pogrom. While he was speaking, a woman jumped to her feet to call him a liar. The Jews “did not die,” she yelled, and added, “we will not allow ourselves to be insulted by foreigners in our country!” The woman was the daughter of Colonel Dumitru Captaru, a leading perpetrator of the pogrom. Nationalists defended her, arguing that Romanians did not commit the Iași pogrom, if it ever happened at all.

In Polish history, like Romanian, Judeo-Bolshevism thrives. After Germany and Russia divided Poland between them in 1939, most of the reports by Polish nationalists under Soviet occupation “lacked any trace of nuance and labeled Jews collectively as traitors,” Hanebrink writes.

In Eastern Poland there were no masses of Jews supporting the Soviet regime, despite many Poles’ claims to the contrary. The few Jews who worked for the Soviets were quickly replaced by Russians. Yet an overwhelming majority of Poles “had an unshakeable conviction that ‘the Jews’ as a collective group had been responsible for Soviet terror,” Hanebrink writes. When the historian Anna Bikont examined Polish testimony, she discovered that though many Poles insisted that the Jews “were” the NKVD, they gave few if any names of Jewish NKVD men—far too few to support the prejudice that Jews stood behind the Soviets.

The Judeo-Bolshevist tradition in Poland revived in the wake of Jan Gross’ shattering history of the Jedwabne pogrom, *Neighbors*, published in 2000. Right-wing figures like Antoni Macierewicz proclaimed that Jews were a fifth column for the Soviet occupiers, and that they were driven by “a terrible hatred toward Poland” and a wish to take “cruel revenge on Poles.” In present day Poland, casting the Jews as the nation’s persecutors has become [dangerously mainstream](#).

In Hungary, too, anti-Semitism has been in the air. Shortly after Communism fell, one conservative intellectual announced that “Hungarian-Jewish relations were poisoned not by Nazism, but by Bolshevism,” adding that after 1945 Jewish Communists “became just as vile as the fascists and became so accustomed to depredation that they could not stop.” In Hungary Jews are linked not just to the Communist past but to a present day liberalism that, it is said, exaggerates Hungary’s guilt for the murder of its Jews and ignores the sufferings of the Magyar nation. In 2014 the ruling Fidesz party erected a monument to the victims of the German invasion of Hungary in 1944. The massive sculpture in the center of Budapest shows a German eagle clawing at the Archangel Gabriel, Hungary’s traditional patron. The monument left out the more than half a million

Hungarian Jews murdered in Auschwitz and, at times, by fellow Hungarian citizens. Fidesz seemed reluctant to admit a basic historical truth: Jews were the main victims of the German occupation.

Calling Communism a Jewish plot was not Hitler’s idea, as Hanebrink points out. He borrowed it from a slew of national anti-Semitic movements that sprung up in the wake of the failed revolutions of the 1910s. Hitler did, however, make the most devastating and cynical use of Judeo-Bolshevism.

The Nazis were often opportunistic in their understanding of Judeo-Bolshevism, relying on the principle that one should take revenge on Jews, any Jews, for crimes committed by the NKVD. Both in Lviv, where the NKVD had killed thousands, and in Drobomyl, the SS carried out retaliatory massacres. Victims were chosen, one Nazi commander wrote, “according to the principle that Jews were the carriers of Bolshevism.” The infectious-disease model provided carte blanche for random killings of Jews, and relieved the SS murderers of the need to show that any particular Jew had been a part of the Communist apparatus. Judeo-Bolshevism became an excuse for genocidal anti-Semitism.

In a fascinating chapter, Hanebrink addresses the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. The German historian Ernst Nolte suggested that Nazi genocide against the Jews stemmed in part from a real fear of Bolshevism. The fact that there were prominent Jewish Bolsheviks in Russia and elsewhere was the “rational core” of Hitler’s genocidal project, Nolte argued. Hitler saw his deeds as part of a “European civil war” between Nazism and Bolshevism, with the Jews on the side of the Bolsheviks. For Nolte, anti-Communism took precedence over anti-Semitism in Hitler’s thinking. German scholars and thinkers rushed to condemn Nolte because, they said, he had minimized the Nazi evil. For him Nazism was merely a reaction to the Communist threat and an imitation of Communist cruelty. Nolte was trying to lighten German guilt, his critics charged, by downplaying Nazi anti-Semitism. The German campaign against Nolte’s theories reinforced Germany’s refusal, from the 1970s on, to balance its wartime suffering against that of other peoples, especially the Jews. Whatever Germany had endured during the war was a righteous punishment for its sins, and in no way comparable to the Jewish disaster. The Germans of the Nazi era would always be perpetrators rather than victims, with later generations elaborately aware of their ancestors’ guilt. In Hungary, Poland, and Romania, as Hanebrink shows, postwar history took an altogether contrasting shape. All too often, right-leaning Eastern Europeans excuse crimes committed against Jews before, during and after the Nazi era. They point out that Jews, in their role as Bolsheviks, inflicted death and suffering

on the homeland; the resulting anti-Jewish pogroms were in part the Jews' own fault. Hanebrink ends his book with a doubtful argument. He thinks that our current fear of radical Islamic terrorism echoes the earlier paranoia about the Jewish Bolshevik. The Judeo-Bolshevik myth, he claims, is a "fertile source" for "anti-Islamic sentiment." The truth seems to me quite the opposite: Islamist terror owes a debt to the Judeo-Bolshevik idea. Radical Islam links Jews to colonialism and the evils of modernity. Jews are seen as the foreign oppressor unjustly occupying Muslim lands, like the Jewish Bolsheviks who supposedly crushed Poland or Hungary. It is politically correct these days to cast Muslims in the role of Jews. This analogy is misleading. Radical Islam is a real entity; Judeo-Bolshevism was not. European wariness about Islamic radicalism finds a real basis in the fact that its adherents murder innocents in the name of religion, as Jews did not. Islamist terrorism is not a paranoid fantasy, like the notion that the Jews are behind Communism. Chaotic waves of mass immigration play a key role in the debate over Islam in the West, as they did not for the promoters of the Judeo-Bolshevist theory. To imply with Hanebrink that Islamism does not threaten Europe or oppress ordinary Muslims encourages a liberal blindness that will result in more prejudice against Muslims, not less. We need to convince Muslim immigrants to the West to reject Islamism, not just to stop terrorist attacks, but to free Muslims who feel trapped in a severely patriarchal culture. Despite Hanebrink's concluding misstep, his book comes just at the right time, when nationalism is again on the upsurge, and not just in Europe. A few days ago our callous and crass president excitedly remarked to reporters, "I'm a nationalist! ... Use that word!" The urgent task for us today is to see if we can use the word nationalism without being racists and xenophobes. The strange, persistent history of Judeo-Bolshevism shows how often nationalist pride depends on a fantasy of the evil other. But nationalism has often enabled a people to know itself, even to become itself: Look at America, Israel, and, yes, even [Poland](#) and [Hungary](#). We can't just see nationalism as the big bad wolf of politics and overlook its immense contributions. But we must not shrug off the dangers that can come with it, like the phantom menace of Jewish Bolshevism.

Tablet

[David Mikics](#) is the author, most recently, of [Bellow's People: How Saul Bellow Made Life Into Art](#). He lives in Brooklyn and Houston, where he is John and Rebecca Moores Professor of English at the University of Houston.

Shabbat of Unrest A Jewish Community Under Bomb Threat

By David Shimon Ben Avraham

MAR 17, 2019,

*Please note that the posts on The Blogs are contributed by third parties. The opinions, facts and any media content in them are presented solely by the authors, and neither The Times of Israel nor its partners assume any responsibility for them. Please contact us in case of abuse. In case of abuse, **Report this post.***



Members of the Jewish Community of Belgrade rushed to the JC building right after the prayers on Saturday, as soon as they were called upon by the community's security. Police personnel could be also seen in the picture taken on March 16th, 2019.

Holy Days with Dark Memories

Shabbat or the Sabbath, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar comes once every week. From the sunset of Friday until that of Saturday, the Jewish people leave the troubles of this world behind, following a strict set of Torah laws that helps us dedicate this day to rest and to worship. This day is one of the strongest symbols of Jewish identity; this day is the 7th Day on which Jews rest peacefully, just as God rested after 6 days of creation.

The worst enemies of the Jewish nation throughout history, who had dedicated themselves to the destruction of our nation, made it a tradition to attack Jews on this day, the holiest day in our life cycle. We all remember how Jews were recently attacked as they went to pray during the [Sabbath in Pittsburgh](#), Pennsylvania, US. This trend of attacking Jews during the holiest of their holidays was also seen when Jews

were attacked in Israel on [Yom Kippur 1973](#) by 9 Arab armies backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

A Shocking Parallel

Although what happened today in Belgrade cannot in anyway be compared in intensity to the aforementioned tragedies still, invoking unrest upon Jews during a sacred day is a parallel that one can draw in terms of essence.

The Jewish Community of Belgrade, in addition to [being under fire in recent months](#), has seen another shocking turn of events today. Around midday today, March 16th, the local Police alongside the Special Anti-Explosives units arrived at the Jewish community building. They explained that they had received a tip claiming that there was a bomb in the building and requested to be allowed entry in order to ensure that the building was safe. The community's security realised that there was a heinous plot behind this. They refused to let anyone in for some time until the community members who were at the synagogue nearby were informed and asked to arrive urgently at the scene. Three officers from the anti-explosives unit were then allowed in, accompanied by a sniffer dog, in order to verify the tip that they had received. They came out half an hour later confirming that the building was safe and that the tip was a false alarm.

Devils Lurking in Every Corner

The police did not arrive alone. At the same time, associates of Danilo Medić, including his confidante and private security employee, Tomislav Gačić, two of their lawyers and a team of 5 security personnel from Euro Security, a private security firm, arrived at the scene.

Tomislav Gačić is one of Medić's closest associates; he lead the siege of the community building on February 28th and he could also be [seen in the security footage](#) in which Medić and his puppet Avram Izrael were seen attacking an employee of the community on the same day.



Tomislav Gačić coordinating the siege of the community building ordered by Medić. Photo taken on February 28th, 2019.

Euro Security personnel stood across the street from the building, the two lawyers quietly stood by the community building, while Gačić was obviously coordinating their presence there, since he was seen standing with the security personnel in some instances and with the lawyers in other instances.



Tomislav Gačić with two of Medić's lawyers next to the Belgrade Jewish community building on March 16th, 2019.

The police did not inform Medić and his overthrown administration of this potential threat, so the questions that remains unanswered is what was his personnel doing there? And how did they know about the tip the police had received? A more pressing question is: why did his security team and lawyers arrive there? What could they possibly do about a bomb threat?

Danilo Medić, 48, whose paternal grandmother was Jewish, became a member of the Jewish community of Belgrade back in 2006. Since then he had been entirely absent from and unengaged in all aspects of community life. He then resurfaced out of nowhere back in 2015.

In October 2017, Medić was one of two candidates for the presidency of the community. He won an election that he could have hardly lost given that the other candidate was disqualified from the race.

Medić was overthrown on December 2nd of last year by an absolute majority of 233 community members at an extraordinary assembly, ending over a year of his presidency. His reign was the darkest for this small Jewish community, with him and his team constantly breaching the community's by-laws, using its resources for personal affairs and diverting restitution money to their own pockets. So far, Medić continues to refuse the results of this vote and he continues to orchestrate campaigns of defamation and propaganda against community members. Many accuse his rhetoric against community members of being damaging and anti-Semitic given that he insists on portraying the issue as "Jews fighting over money" and branding community members opposing his

corruption as "opposition political activists" in an attempt to invoke the government's dismay.

In relation to claims that this is a fight about money, Brane Popović a member of the Interim Administration elected to replace Medić and his administration, has said:

"It doesn't surprise me, it's the same old anti-Semitic story of Jews and money. I'm a man who has given his life to the service of this community and all I want is to see that these hands of evil and corruption will be lifted from our community. Anyone who suggests otherwise is a lying fool".

The Obvious Answer: Bomb Threat, A Heinous Plot

A member of the community that was present at the scene said: "This is a hoax made by Medić; they were expecting the building to be evacuated, and they wanted to create a chaotic situation which would have given his associates a window to enter the building, take control over it and cancel the elections scheduled for tomorrow".

The Interim Administration of the Jewish community of Belgrade has scheduled an electoral assembly for tomorrow, while Medić refuses to recognise the legitimacy of the legally elected Interim Administration and continues to plot for the cancellation of the electoral assembly scheduled for tomorrow in an effort to buy himself some time to continue the battle for the survival of his overthrown mob. The chaos ensuing from a bomb threat could have indeed given him and his associates the perfect chance to take over the building that had been peacefully overtaken the Interim Administration on February 28th.

"I could exactly imagine what they had in mind. They thought the police would evacuate the building and in the immediate aftermath their associates would come in, lock down the building and forbid members from holding the assembly scheduled for tomorrow. Lawyers were there to give statements upon the takeover, and the private security would then ensure that the building was locked down. Fortunately, this didn't work out for them".

The professionalism of the Police Force as well as the community's security doomed any such plot to failure. Also, the immediate arrival of community members from the nearby synagogue made it impossible for anyone to even attempt to enter the building, except for the police who were allowed entry in order to carry out their duties.

Before they were allowed in, the police were told of fears that Medić's associates would use this as an opportunity to take over the building. A police officer responded to these fears saying "Worry not, nothing like that could happen under our watch. We are professionals and we came to carry out our duties, no need to insult our professionalism". The police were impressive and they carried out their duties calmly and professionally.

"Such a threat could also serve as a way to spread fear, so community members would refrain from coming to vote tomorrow, this is psychological warfare par excellence", another member of the community suggested.

How Far is The Medić Mob Ready To Go?

Medić had already lied when applying for membership at the community and failed to mention that he had been baptised, married and divorced in the Serbian Orthodox Church, something that according to the community by-laws would disqualify him from being a member, let alone president. If his involvement in today's hoax is proven, then not only is this man not Jewish, he is in fact anti-Jewish. If he was indeed behind today's heinous plot, then he has successfully aligned himself with countless anti-Semites throughout history who found in the Sabbath a suitable day to invoke unrest upon the Jewish community. Medić and his mob continue to prove that they are ready to go to unimaginable lengths in order to be able to continue abusing the community's resources and to rob it of the money of its Holocaust victims. If Medić was indeed behind this horrendous move, then this is no longer a fight for control over the community, this is a full-blown war on Jews and Jewish identity.

Hands Off Our Community and Shabbat Shalom

As the police were securing the building, members who were inside wrote on paper a sign saying "Hands Off JCB (Jewish Community of Belgrade)" and another saying "Shabbat Shalom" in both Hebrew and Latin Alphabet.

J.N., a member of the community commented on the situation saying "They wanted to at least strike at our morale, but each strike just makes us stronger and more committed to uprooting this evil from amongst us".

Calm after the Storm, or the Other Way Around

The professionalism of the police and the presence of our community members ensured that the situation was cleared without any violence or conflict. Upon securing the building the police moved across the street to investigate the suspicious presence of Medić's associates and perform identity checks.



Police investigating the presence of Medić affiliated private security across the street from the Jewish community building in Belgrade. March 16th, 2019.

Medić's associates then cleared the area around the building and retreated altogether. Calm then followed, but the community remains alert fearing that similar attempts maybe made tonight or tomorrow to prevent the elections from taking place. The local Media shortly arrived at the scene with both Prva TV and RTS covering the matter. [Blic](#) has also reported on the issue.

Elections, Hope and Resilience

If they're indeed behind what happened, today's events suggest once more that the Medić mob is ready to employ the dirtiest tricks possible in their fight. Thus, the community is more united and committed than ever to the success of tomorrow's elections.

The community is now hoping that the Ministry of Justice will not fail to register the results of tomorrow's elections as they have inexplicably failed to do so in the aftermath of the December 2nd Assembly. Many believe that Medić's boasting about being supported by the government are true in light of the government's failures to proceed in accordance with the laws and the constitution. But hope that the government will come to their senses is strong, since people see any failure to register the results of tomorrow's elections as a scandal that the government cannot afford to commit a second time.

"We are committed more than ever, we are resilient and we will not back down until our rights to autonomy and the will of the majority of our community's members are respected. We will do whatever it takes, this is a fight that we will not lose", D.P., a member of the community stated.

Another member of the community, V.J, rushed to find a quote by Ze'ev Jabotinsky online, and read it to me out loud, the quote reads:

"It is always aimed at us, and we must respond. We must end this abuse of ourselves, at all costs. And it is very easy. They spit in our faces without fear, 'in passing', for no reason – not because our insulters are blessed with courage and want to pick a fight with us, but because this pleasure is so cheap for them: they will spit at us and go on their way, and nothing will happen."

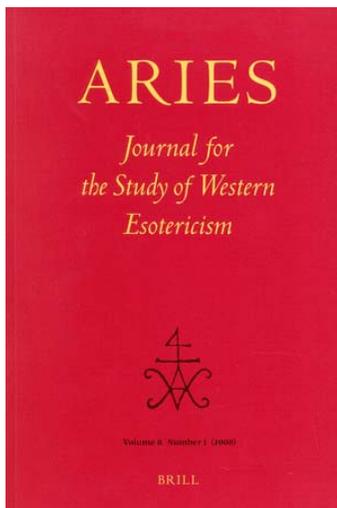
"We must respond and continue the fight" Added V.J.

As Purim is coming closer by the day, we once again go back to asking the question: will the Jewish community of Belgrade see salvation from their Haman (a.k.a. Medić) just as the Persian Jews did?

David Shimon Ben Avraham is the president of Olam Center for the Preservation and Advancement of Jewish Values. He has a degree in Arabic language, literature and civilization and is pursuing further studies in the fields of diplomacy, international relations and journalism.

The Times of Israel





Aries is the first professional academic journal specifically devoted to a long-neglected but now rapidly developing domain of research in the humanities, usually referred to as "Western Esotericism". This field covers a variety of "alternative" currents in western religious history, including so-called "hermetic philosophy" and related currents in the early modern period; alchemy, paracelsianism and rosicrucianism; christian kabbalah and its later developments; theosophical and illuminist currents; and various occultist and related developments during the 19th and 20th centuries, up to and including popular contemporary currents such as the New Age movement. Aries is a peer-reviewed journal publishing articles and book reviews in English, French, German and Italian.

Published under the auspices of the [European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism \(ESSWE\)](#).

Practical Kabbalah

Were this a horror film, we would now take over your television broadcast; but this is Aries, the "Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism"—so we have merely taken over your table of contents. Indeed, dear readers, students and scholars of "Western Esotericism," Jewish magic has displaced your typical fare in what follows. Rather than threaten, however, we should like to invite you to join us in an exploration of this rich world through four studies. They will undoubtedly strike many of you in turns as both foreign and familiar, hopefully in heuristic balance.

*Students of Western Esotericism, with its heady admixture of magical, scientific, and religious elements (all three taken as fluid categories!) hardly need be reminded of the *longue durée* perception of Jews as masters of the magical arts.*

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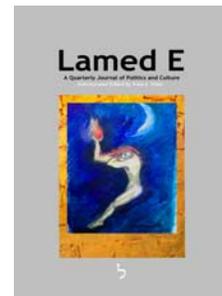
Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz: *Israeli Candidate Calls to Build Temple Now*

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**Selected and Edited by
Ivan L Ninic**

**Shlomo Hamelech 6/21
4226803 Netanya, Israel
Phone: +972 9 882 6114
e-mail: ivan.ninic667@gmail.com**

<https://listzaradoznale.wixsite.com/lamed>

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