

## “America is different”

In 1954–1955 American Jewry marked its tercentenary, three hundred years of a fairly happy history in the land of opportunistic Alexandria. In a society where ethnic pluralism is no longer simply accepted but is even actively encouraged, Jews find it difficult to regard themselves as living in “exile,” and the process of their Americanization has assumed some very distinctive traits.

An era of prolonged prosperity during the post-World War II years has transformed this community of nearly six million people into a strong group, overwhelmingly native, extensively college-educated, and heavily concentrated in the mercantile and professional classes. Although a relatively low birth rate and limited immigration have reduced its percentage in the overall population, the self-confidence and the influence of American Jewry in cultural, political, and economic affairs have considerably increased. Antisemitism has all but disappeared from public view; and when John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic President, was elected thanks to the support of most of the minority voters, the prosperous Jewish community also attained political maturity.

As might be expected, most American Jews rally to the liberal camp – a tradition dating from the years of mass immigration, manifested in the enthusiastic support for Roosevelt’s New Deal, and still evident today. In all presidential elections about two-thirds of the Jewish votes are cast for liberal candidates.

It was therefore natural for Jews to play a major role in the American Civil Liberties Union and in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and for the whole community to express its satisfaction with the social reforms introduced by the Johnson administration. The battle against antisemitism conducted by Jewish organizations has also always been directed against every other form of religious or racial discrimination. Unfortunately, relations with the black community

have been gravely strained since the 1960s. Militant black nationalism, which filled the void created by the assassination of Martin Luther King, was tainted with antisemitism. Some Jewish sectors, on the other hand, feared that the advancement of blacks would be at the expense of Jews.

The tendency of American Jews to fight for liberal causes has also manifested itself in recent decades on the feminist front. The new feminist consciousness is expressed not only in words but in practice as well. More and more women occupy important positions of authority in community organizations; the Reform Movement began to ordain women as rabbis in 1972, and the Conservatives followed suit in 1985. Even within the Orthodox community one hears voices calling for a redefinition of the role of women.

Despite rapid acculturation, the identity problem of the American Jew has grown more complex. In the years following World War II, congregational affiliation was the common solution. The synagogue not only provided religious and educational services but also served as the focus of social and community life. In the last two decades, however, its authority and prestige have declined. Nowadays only one out of two Jews declares affiliation with a synagogue. Yet the transmission of Jewish culture in the United States is carried on through additional channels. In 1948 Brandeis University joined the network of schools in existence from before the war; and, since the 1960s, innumerable programs, departments, and academic chairs of Jewish studies have been opened in many other universities.

A striking feature of American life in the last half century has been the prominence of Jewish intellectuals in various cultural arenas. Jews

constitute over 10% of academic faculty members, and their contribution to American science has been remarkable. Furthermore, an outstanding number of Jewish writers, publishers, producers, musicians, artists, and critics have attained distinguished reputations. East European Jewish folk humor has suffused much of American literature, theater, and films. Novels and short stories concerned with specifically Jewish topics have become huge best-sellers. Even Yiddish writers, such as Isaac Bashevis Singer, have become U.S. literary celebrities. An interesting phenomenon evident since the 1950s has been the sense of social and spiritual alienation expressed by so many young creative Jews. It appears that these third-generation Americans wished to satirize as vulgar materialism the ambition of their parents to Americanize at any cost. Oddly perhaps, these feelings of estrangement evoke general identification within the American intelligentsia. In many respects the conflicts of the Jew, despite everything still the perennial outsider, became, particularly during the 1960s, a symbol of American anti-establishment culture.

The fight against assimilation has been on the agenda of the organized Jewish community for a long time. In an open society, however, where explicit discrimination is no longer in evidence, it is an impossible task. The figures of mixed marriages are regarded as alarming: from 7% in the 1950s, they have risen to over 40%. Since less than half the children of these marriages remain in the community, this trend is bound to erode American Judaism.

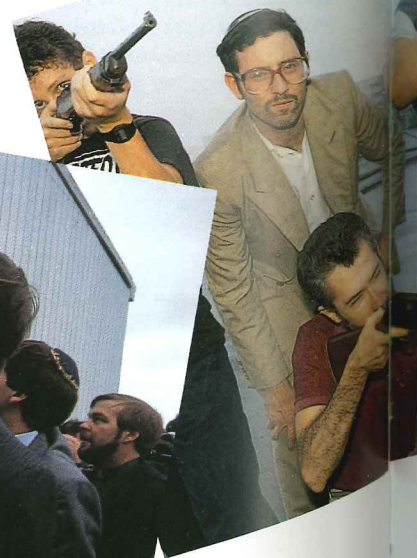
3. Jewish Defense League. 1980s.



1. Confirmation ceremony in a Reform synagogue. 1980s.



2. New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean cleans antisemitic graffiti. 1980s.

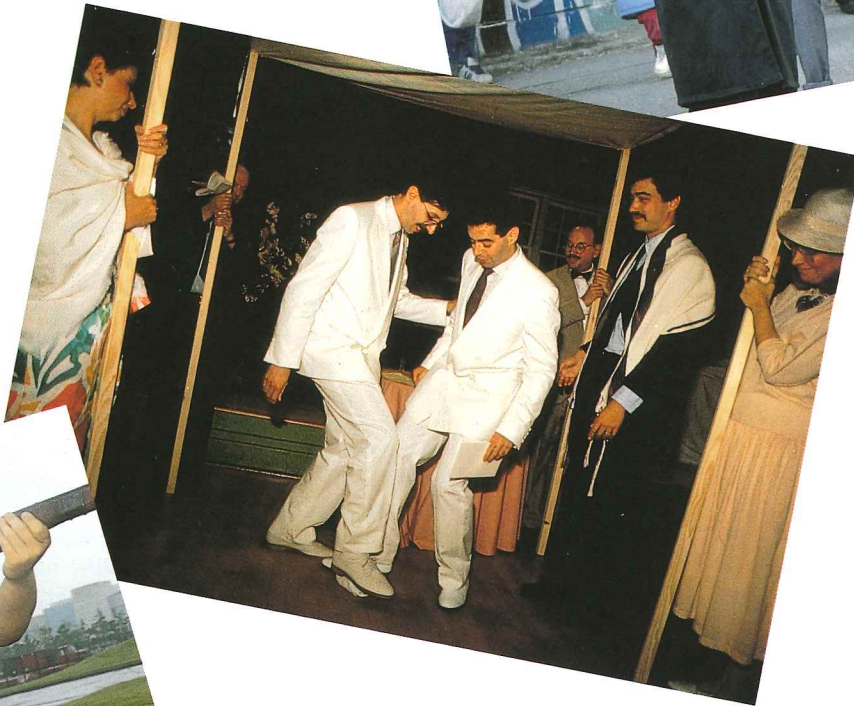


## 1945 / 1991

The strong attachment of American Jews to the State of Israel, however, remains firm. It can be explained, no doubt, by the traumatic memory of the Holocaust. The bond was later strengthened by the Six-Day War. The anguish in May and the victory in June 1967 provided a cementing element for the community itself and for its ties with Israel. Admittedly, the exaltation of that summer has cooled down considerably. The war in Lebanon, the Pollard affair, the *Intifada* – to mention but the most painful moments of the last decade – have tempered the unconditional solidarity with Jerusalem. Yet for most American Jews, Zionism still means not only an obligation to sustain the Jewish State with funds, immigrants, and political support, but also to regard it as the center of Jewish culture, religion, and national identity.



5. Hasidim in Brooklyn, 1980s.



4. A Jewish marriage ceremony for a gay couple, 1980s.

world-wide support for Jews in the Soviet Union and in Arab countries.

**Late 1950s–early 1960s:** The “Jewish decade” or “Jewish renaissance” in American literature.

**1957:** Leon Uris publishes *Exodus*.

**1958–1960:** Allen Ginsberg’s *Kaddish*.

**1961:** Bernard Malamud’s *A New Life*.

**1961–1963:** The Kennedy years. First important arms deal with Israel.

**1964:** Lyndon Johnson is President. Intensification of the war in Vietnam. Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*.

**1965:** The *American Jewish Year Book*, appearing since 1899, deletes the section covering antisemitic events.

**1967:** American Jewish volunteers and huge financial contributions are sent to Israel in its hour of greatest danger.

**1968:** A teachers’ strike in New York City exacerbates the tensions between Jews and Blacks. In Brooklyn, Meir Kahana founds the Jewish Defense League.

**1969:** Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*.

**1970s:** Crystallization of the main socio-economic trends of American Jewry. Between the beginning of the decade and its end, the proportion of Jews in the professions and in the business world rises from 40% to 53% (compared with a rise from 21% to 27% in the general population), while their position in manual occupations falls from 21% to 12% (in the general population the percentage remains more or less stable, around 40%). The revenue curve reflects these trends. In the general population the proportion of families earning more than \$15,000 per year rises from 15% to 49%; in the Jewish community it rises from 31% to 63%.

**1972:** The Reform Movement ordains the first woman rabbi.

**1973:** Henry Kissinger is Secretary of State. Abraham D. Beame is the first Jewish Mayor of New York City; in 1977 he will be succeeded by another Jew, Edward Koch.

**1974–1977:** Presidency of Gerald Ford.

**1977–1981:** Presidency of Jimmy Carter.

**1978:** In an *Open Letter to American Jews*, Anwar Sadat asks them to assume an “historic responsibility” in creating peace between Israel and Egypt.

**1979:** The Camp David Accords (in March). Andrew Young resigns from the State Department because of his unauthorized meeting with the PLO; American black leaders issue an angry statement against American Jews.

**1981–1988:** Presidency of Ronald Reagan.

**1985:** The first woman rabbi in the Conservative Movement.

**1987:** Jonathan Pollard arrested for espionage in the service of Israel.

**End of 1980s:** The proportion of Jews declaring their affiliation to a religious denomination declines from 86% at the beginning of the decade to 75% (34% Conservatives; 29% Reform; only 9% Orthodox).

**1989–1990:** *New York Stories*, Woody Allen supplied in his section of the film a personal Jewish viewpoint.

**1990, October 14:** Death of Leonard Bernstein.

**1991, July 24:** Death of Isaac Bashevis Singer.

**1991, September:** Blacks attack Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn after a Jewish driver kills a black boy in a car accident.

*Habad* Hasidism. The leader of *Habad* (or Lubavich) Hasidism, Joseph Isaac Schneerson, descendant of Shneur Zalman of Lyday, arrived in New York in 1940.

**1948:** President Truman recognizes de facto the State of Israel shortly after its Declaration of Independence. A Displaced Persons Act authorizes the admission of over 200,000 European refugees to the U.S. Brandeis University is founded in Waltham, Massachusetts.

**1949:** Arthur Miller wins the Pulitzer Prize for *Death of a Salesman*.

**1950–1953:** The Korean War. The anti-Communist witch-hunt conducted by Joseph McCarthy.

**1952–1969:** Within seventeen years, fourteen Nobel Prizes are awarded to American Jews in physics, chemistry, medicine, and physiology.

**1954:** Founding of AIPAC (American-Israel Public Affairs Committee), the “official” Israeli lobby in the United States.

**1955:** Nahum Goldmann founds the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations to coordinate activities concerning Middle East affairs, and to organize

**1937–late 1980s:** The proportion of the Jewish community in the general population in the U.S. declines from 3.7% to 2.5%. An internal migration to sunnier regions brings its distribution closer to that of the general population. New York City loses its status as the city where the majority of American Jews reside: the percentage of Jews living there goes from 56% in the 1930s to 38%. The other major Jewish cities are Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia, and Chicago.

**1945:** Founding of the monthly *Commentary*, identified for many years with the progressive left.

**1947:** Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar (Satu Mare, in Transylvania) settles in the Williamsburg quarter of Brooklyn, New York, where he establishes an ultra-Orthodox Hasidic congregation. Fiercely opposed to Zionism, he is also a strict opponent of

## Eastern and Central European Jews: A Fragile Revival



1. Sukkot service in a Russian synagogue.

The recreation of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and throughout the CIS (Community of Independent States, ex-USSR) is a veritable construction project. It certainly ranks as the most significant experience of revival in the Jewish world today.

Following the fall of the communist system and the passage to democratic transition that varied from country to country depending on conditions and ways of living, moribund or persecuted Jewish communities could finally aspire to a degree of social and cultural visibility that was formerly denied them. The political conditions applying to the revival were founded on the proclamation and enforcement of basic rights – freedom of worship, thought and speech, freedom of movement and association – the recognition of the State of Israel and the forming of diplomatic and economic relations. Another factor was the opportunity granted to transnational Jewish organizations (Jewish Aid, B'nai B'rith, Joint) to work together and set up agencies aimed at helping communities who were short of means and resources.

Initially, these new embryonic community institutions were intended as community services responsible for the basic needs of the members of their communities. Care was also taken to establish the essential structures of community and religious life. This included the building of cultural centers, the rebuilding of disused synagogues, the restoration of abandoned or neglected cemeteries and the holding of regular religious services.

The challenge today is all the more formidable because these Jews from Central and Eastern Europe together form the third largest Jewish community in the world, after the United States and Israel. By the 1990s, having been classified as Jewish in their Soviet identity papers but simultaneously experiencing a process of accelerated cultural assimilation, they realized that their Jewish connection had lost all real meaning, reduced at best to traces and scraps of symbolism. And so, with the awakening of ethnic and religious aspirations that swept through Europe when it shook off half a century of communist hegemony, we see a demand for identity emerging as much in the former USSR as in the former satellite countries. We see it among people who had deliberately chosen to disguise their Jewishness while living under a communist regime and others too, who had always been kept ignorant of their Jewish origins.

In terms of the different manifestations of Jewish identity, what is happening in the East may be compared to an *in vivo* laboratory experiment. There are four possible options and the future of East European

Judaism largely depends on the choice that is ultimately made by each member of this vast community.

The first option is to adopt an exclusively religious definition of Jewishness. Despite a historical hiatus spanning more than a century, those in favor of this option aim to rebuild an active center of strict observance within a space that at certain times in Jewish history has ranked as a focus of religious zeal. This approach is principally led and supported by members of the Chassidim movement Khabad, originally from the region but headquartered in New York since the Second World War. Khabad's mission is to denominationalise the entire community, but it has to contend with the reality of cultural integration and a militant atheism that actually predates the October revolution.

The second option is to revive the ethnic-cultural dimension of the Jewish identity, with or without the help of a religious practice that has been reduced to a handful of basic rituals and symbols.

This is by far the most varied, most com-

plex and most innovative of the approaches – unlike its former incarnation. Witness that it does not appear to have sponsored the revival of Yiddish despite efforts made in that direction. Yes, there is still the Jewish State of Birobidjan founded by Stalin in 1934, but its future is clearly limited due to its remote location in eastern Siberia. We note also that this lay version of the Jewish identity plainly challenges the commitment to Marxist ideology of the Bund, which is the historical precedent in this context. However it could continue to win the approval of those who understand the concept of a hybrid identity based as much on their inescapable Russian side as that sought-after Jewish dimension. Jewishness promises to enhance their Russian legacy, making their contact with the outside world richer and more complex. They do not necessarily regard the two as conflicting or indeed mutually exclusive.

Now that the archives are open and historical research is freed from communist manipulation, there are signs of growing interest in the Jewish past in general and Jewish communities in particular. Witness the

Jewish population in Central and Eastern Europe from 1985 to present day

Year	1985	1990	1995	2000
Russia	—	619 500	360 000	290 000
Ukraine	—	375 000	180 000	100 000
Byelorussia	—	75 000	28 000	26 600
Moldavia	—	50 000	9 500	6 500
Latvia	—	18 000	14 200	8 600
Lithuania	—	9 000	6 200	4 400
Estonia	—	3 500	3 000	2 000
Soviet Union then CIS	1 515 000	1 150 000	600 900	468 100
Hungary	60 000	57 000	54 000	52 000
Rumania	21 500	17 500	14 000	11 500
Poland	4 400	3 800	3 500	3 500
Bulgaria	3 200	3 100	3 200	2 600
Albania	—	300	0	0
Czech Republic	8 200	7 800	2 200	2 800
Slovakia	—	—	3 700	3 300
Serbia and Montenegro	4 800	4 500	1 800	1 800
Croatia	—	—	1 300	1 300
Bosnia	—	—	200	300
Slovenia	—	—	100	100
Macedonia	—	—	—	100

## 1989/2002

Emigration of Jews from CIS, 1990-1999 (in thousands)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Israel	185,2	147,8	65,1	66,1	68,1	64,8	58,9	54,6	46,0	66,1
U S	32,7	35,6	46,1	35,9	32,9	24,8	22,0	14,5	8,0	6,2
Other	10,0	12,0	20,0	14,0	9,0	20,0	24,0	20,0	3,0	
Total	227,9	195,4	131,2	116,0	110	109,6	104,9	99,1	57,7	72,3
No. of Jews	200,0	159,0	96,0	80,0	75,0	70,0	60,0	55,0		

establishment of Jewish 'theological' faculties in Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia and in certain places, the foundation of research institutes and departments of Jewish history and civilization in Warsaw, Kiev and Odessa. But though we continue to dig up the past and the Jewish legacy, the area of Jewish creativity remains confusing. There are those who take the pessimistic view that this once flourishing culture has had its day. Censored under Stalin and subjected to years of oppression, it is now doomed at best to a celebration of its great ancient monuments and the worship of its great literary and artistic figures.

All of these approaches to revival are threatened by two further possibilities. The first is emigration and the second is integration. Emigration is not an economic phenomenon although it fluctuates at times of growth and depression depending on the situation (see table). Emigration is a constant process that inevitably undermines local population growth by depriving the community of its life force. The impact of the Jewish reconstruction project has plainly been limited by massive Jewish emigration (more than 1,200,000 Jews in the period 1989-2000). The destination chosen by those emigrants, is significant however. Israel, with more than one million Jewish emigrants from Russia and the CIS, has become a major Russian point of attraction. In a way, as they wait for the processes of integration and Israeli socialization to bear fruit, the members of this large Russian community now settled in Israel could regard themselves as a Russian Diaspora thanks to the cultural, linguistic and familial links that they maintain with their homeland. Under the circumstances, they could hardly ignore the plight of the Jewish community in Russia to which of course they are anything but indifferent. Israel is now home to an increasingly flourishing Russian culture with its own press, clubs, political leaders, artists and intellectuals.

It is noteworthy that all of these social, educational, cultural and religious initiatives aimed at structuring the community do generally meet with the approval of the authorities who see them as a means to stem a tide of migration that saps the energy of the body of the community. The authorities also value a dynamic, flourishing Jewish community as a major asset: it indicates a successful process of democratization, and occasionally helps to accelerate international recognition. Relations between nations and Jewish communities raise no particular problems apart from the dispute now in course of resolution regarding the restitution of goods that were nationalized after the Second World War. Plainly, historiographical debate about the attitudes of populations towards their Jewish fellow citizens during the Shoah has not always led to an acknowledgement of responsibility, complicity, deliberate cover-ups or cases of *laissez-faire*. All too often, the exclusive blaming of the Nazi occupying forces exempts people from taking responsibility for the indifference and inertia shown by their elders at the time of the Jewish extermination. New information does come to light however thanks to brave people such as the historian Jan Tomasz Gross who spoke out about the pogrom in Jawabne.

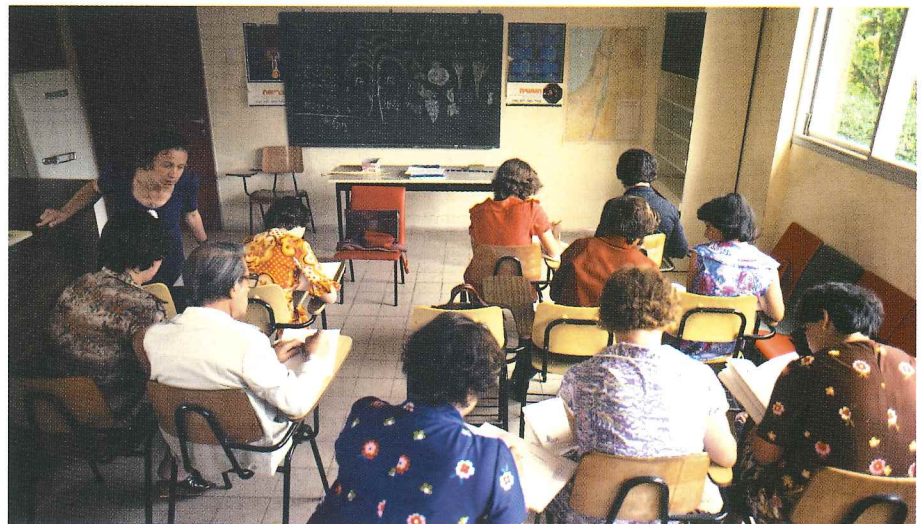
Jewish communities in the midst of revival have a number of assets, most notably a high-level intellectual potential and an urban lifestyle and type of leisure activity that enhance the value of literature and music. All the same, their future is strictly dependent on various structural factors that are not always within their control. This style of associative and communal living can only continue to flourish providing the pro-

cess of general democratization also continues. But that process again is a phenomenon of a transitional society and as such, it is reversible. As we saw in the Balkan wars, it is especially vulnerable to heightened ethnic and nationalist tendencies that frequently turn against the Jews, or at the very least, cast a doubt over their future.

Anti-Semitism that was officially forbidden in the communist era has since become more visible, serving various ostensibly contrasting causes situated at opposite ends of the political spectrum. For instance, we see the Jews accused of establishing a communist system by the nationalists in the Pamyat movement, but also accused of hastening its downfall by the nostalgic members of the regime. Yet responsibility for the 'Jewish conspiracy' in the current Russian decline was renounced with equal conviction and using the same arguments by both Vladimir Jirinovski and Albert Makachov. Nationalist groups in Eastern Europe, not content to follow the example of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion have embarked on the rehabilitation of pro-Fascist 'patriots' who collaborated with the Nazis in the Second World War. Among them, the regent Horthy of Hungary, Father Josef Tiso of Slovakia, the Croatian Ustashe leader Ante Pavelic, the Russian General Vlassov and Marshall Antonescu of Rumania. This form of anti-Semitic ideology that fosters xenophobia and a rejection of the West goes hand in hand with a social anti-Semitism that is quick to draw attention to the economic success of a small minority of the Jewish community. The political impact of such anti-Semitism, despite its genuine potential for destabilization, is progressively reduced by the economic progress and democratic stability of the country concerned. Rumania and Hungary are the only two countries where this tendency has become politically organized (witness the Hungarian Democratic Forum led by Itsvan Csurka) but is highly likely to be marginalized or outvoted altogether by the imminent prospect of entry into the European Union.

Actually however it is the issue of demography that is the determining factor in the future of these communities: there are half a million Jews in the CIS and 80,000 Jews in Central and Eastern Europe (including 50,000 in Hungary and 15,000 in Rumania). Half of them are more than 60 years old. There is a high rate of mixed marriages (between Jewish and non-Jewish) and the birth rate is too low to guarantee the survival of future generations.

In this respect, the policy of social and cultural voluntarism that has been adopted in a bid to overcome this demographic handicap can appear fruitless. It remains amply justified however, following the extinction of the Jewish communities in the Maghreb and the Machrek, if we want to try and prevent this other great center of the Jewish world from vanishing without a trace.



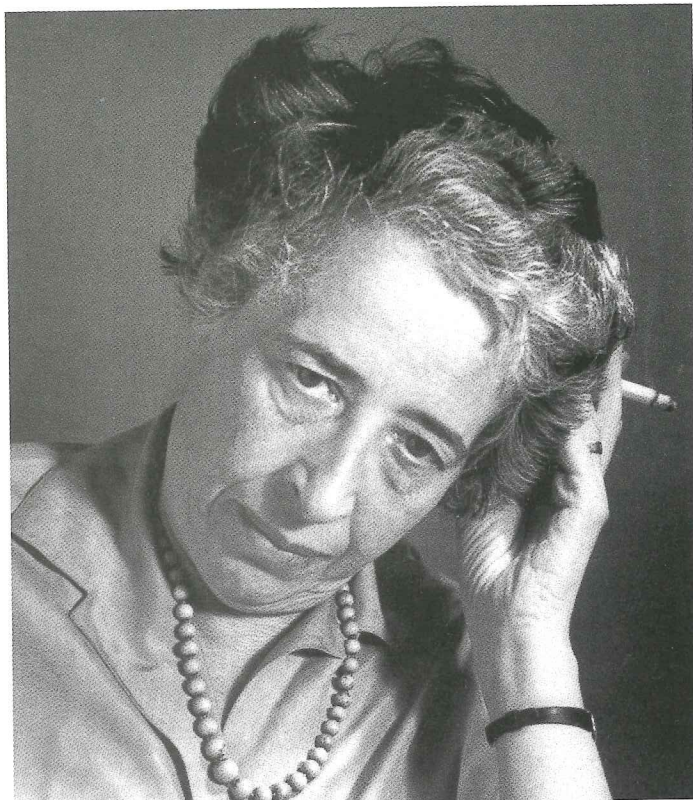
2. Whether to remain in Moscow or go to Jerusalem - Russian Jews at a Hebrew class.

# Feminism

In many ways, female emancipation from male tutelage has been the most significant and enduring of the revolutions initiated in the 20th century. This velvety, unbloody revolution is by no means over in the West and remains to be fostered in many parts of the world. So what of Jewish women? What part have they played in the Feminist movement? What specific goals have they pursued? To what extent have Zionism and the first half-century of Israel's existence favored this political and social modernization of Jewish women and offered them the possibility of increased autonomy?

After centuries of marginalization and even exclusion from the worlds of action and creativity, the access women now have to knowledge and an autonomous lifestyle has encouraged the emergence of outstanding personalities who have left a mark on their time and their art. Their contribution to the conceptual development of feminism has been equally remarkable, especially as their theoretical reflections have always been accompanied by active participation in the struggle for women's rights. We think here of women such as Elisabeth Badinter, Hélène Cixous, Betty Friedan, Shulamith Firestone and Susan Sontag.

However, the history of Jewish women amounts to more than the display of dynamic genius that we owe to these exceptional individuals. We have also seen social change at the collective level, although the advantages gained have been neither conceded nor freely granted. Generally speaking, they are the product of the particular militant activities of organizations of Jewish women set up at the start of the 20th century. These institutions functioned as places of transition from the sphere of private to public activity; transition from a moral and religious perspective to social and political awareness. The concept of philanthropic and charitable activity was replaced by the concept of social work. Good will and amateurism gave way to professional and militant competence. These women's groups functioned on a national scale, redefining the role



1. Political and philosophical theorist, Hannah Arendt in 1963 (1906-1975).

of women within their respective communities that were in all cases dominated and led by men. They challenged the traditional image of the Jewish woman as destined to reign only in her own home. Women like Bertha Pappenheim and others like her became the pioneers of a form of social feminism. We should also note that alongside these organizations of women from privileged backgrounds, trade union cells were being formed by Jewish working-class women in London and New York. Thus Emma Goldmann and Rosa Luxemburg made a rich contribution to this Revolutionary epic.

It was in Palestine that the idea of the 'Hebrew woman' was rethought and fashioned on the model of the 'new Jewish man'. The national imperative took precedent but there was also an explicit and valued aspiration for social change. It was in the nature of the Zionist Utopia to encourage the auto-production of new social models. For the sake of equality, it therefore became highly desirable that any woman, providing she had the right qualifications, should be eligible for the same

position and able to do the same job of work as a man. The feminine nature was no longer a reason to relegate women to the confines of domesticity, even less to restrict their role to that of mother in the home. This reallocation of roles that occurred in the kibbutz placed Zionism at the forefront of social experiment.

In truth though, the 'New Hebrew Woman' was probably more of a myth than a reality. Despite being offered freedom of choice, the pioneering woman finished by taking on conventional tasks. And in the War of Independence when we saw thousands of young women in khaki uniform join the ranks of the Hagana and the Palmakh, orders came from on high forbidding them from going onto the battlefield. Likewise after the foundation of the State of Israel when military service became compulsory for women, the auxiliary duties assigned to women soldiers lent a certain ambiguity to the Israeli woman's egalitarian, modern revolution-

## Founding of W.I.Z.O.

1920

**1885:** Constance Rothschild (Lady Battersea) in London founds the Jewish Association for the Protection of Young Girls and Women to combat prostitution and the female slave trade.

**1893:** Hannah Greenbaum Solomon in Chicago chairs the first Jewish Women's Congress, giving rise to the founding of the National Council of Jewish Women.

**1897. August 29:** the Zionist Congress holds its first meeting in Basle, with 209 delegates including 17 women.

**1919-1926:** Jewish women in Palestine fight for the right to vote in the representative institutions of the *yishuv*.

**1920:** The W.I.Z.O. is founded (Women's International Zionist Organization).

**1923. May 6-11:** The World Congress of Jewish Women holds its first meeting in Vienna, with delegations from Jewish women's organizations from more than 20 countries.

**1926. January 15:** The elected representative assembly of the *yishuv* proclaims "equal rights for women in every branch of civil, political and economic life ...".

**1938:** Rivka Freher founds the Aliyat Ha-No'ar responsible for the immigration of German Jewish children into Palestine.

**1944:** Hannah Szenes, parachuted into Hungary on a rescue mission, is tortured then executed by the Nazis.

**1949:** International Council of Jewish Women.

**January 25:** Rachel Kagan, put forward by the women's list of the W.I.Z.O. wins a seat in the first general elections of the Knesset.

**March 8:** Golda Meir is appointed Labor Minister in the first government led by David Ben Gourion. Military service becomes compulsory for women.

**1951. July 17:** The Knesset enacts the law on equal rights for women.

## Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel

1969

**1958:** Hannah Arendt publishes a pre-war manuscript entitled *Rahel Varnhagen, The Life of a Jewish Woman*.

**1966. December 10:** Nelly Sachs wins the Nobel Prize for literature (jointly with S. Y. Agnon).

**1969. December 15:** Golda Meir becomes Prime Minister of the State of Israel (until 2 June 1974).

**1972. June 3:** Sally Jane Priesand, of the Reform Movement, is appointed the first female rabbi in the United States.

**1973. December 31:** The civic rights list presided over by Shoulamit Aloni wins three seats at the legislative elections of the Knesset. Radical feminist Marcia Friedman is elected.

**1977. May 17:** The radical feminist list put forward by the "Women's Party" loses at the Knesset elections.

**1979. June:** Simone Veil is elected President of the European Parliament.

**1986:** Rita Levi-Montalcini wins the Nobel Prize for medicine (jointly with Stanley Cohen).

**1988:** The extreme leftwing, extra-parliamentary movement "Women in Black" is founded.

**May 19:** Following a decree issued by the Supreme Court, Lea Shakdiel becomes the first woman to sit on the religious council of the town of Yeroukham.

**1993:** The extreme rightwing, extra-parliamentary movement "Women in Green" is founded.

**February 21:** The first international conference is held on "Jewish Orthodoxy and Feminism".

**1998:** The foundation of the Movement of the Four Mothers demands the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon.

**1999. January 1:** Ruth Dreifuss becomes President of the Swiss Confederation.

## 1900/2002



2. Feminist demands and victories: Pauline Bebe is the first Liberal female rabbi in France.



3. A new role in society: pioneering women on a kibbutz in 1935.

nary movement. But while they may have been few in number, women such as Manya Shohat, Rahel Yanait and Henrietta Szold who did rise to positions of responsibility in the *yishuv*, command our respect and admiration.

In 1969 Mrs. Golda Meir's appointment as Head of the Israeli government was proof of the absence of discrimination even in the upper echelons of power but it had a perverse effect. It gave rise to the idea that equality reigned in Israel because a woman could hold a position of supreme authority. This widely held rationale evaded the import of several social factors that were resistant if not hostile to feminist demands. Among them was the crucial significance of the family unit to refugees from the Holocaust who were hungry to restore it; also, the primacy of patriarchal conceptions among the Jewish masses from Moslem Arab countries; the upholding of traditional legislation required as a matter of personal right by Orthodox religious parties; and the existence of a state of war that favored male domination.

Radical feminism, introduced in the 1970s and passionately defended by newly immigrated Jewish American women, failed to attract a following. Since then, civil society has produced a great many organizations that try to raise public awareness of the gravity of acts that entail violence against women: cases of female rape or battery, wives murdered by their husbands, prostitution and women sold into slavery.

With the decline of egalitarian and collective ideologies, Israeli women today rely on a social individualistic model borrowed from the West to win their place and defend their rights, as much within the couple as in the workplace.

For a proper evaluation of the female condition in Israel and throu-

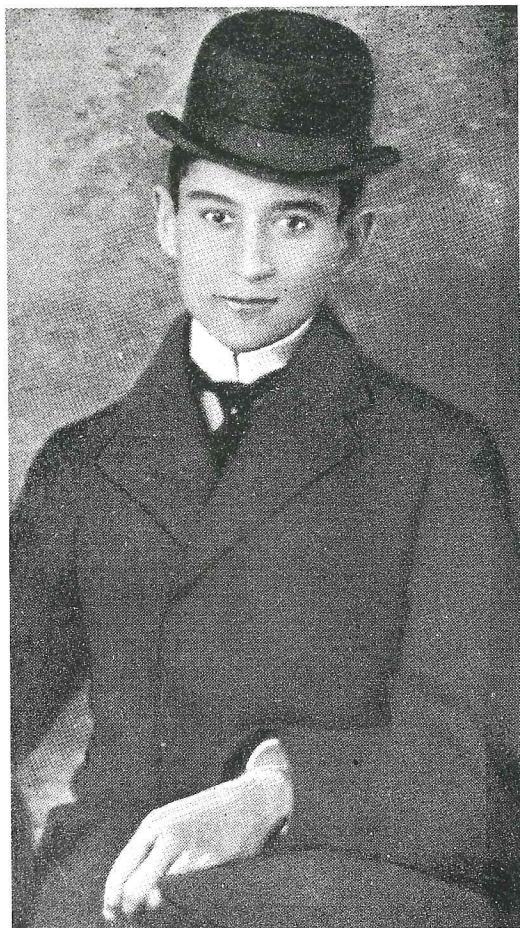
ghout the Jewish world, we also need to take a look at the status of women within Judaism, an area where the questions, demands and victories of the feminist lobby this century have been decisive. Plainly, the institutionalized discrimination of Judaism ran seriously counter to the prevailing climate of social evolution. The facts speak for themselves: women were a non-participating presence in the Synagogue. They did not count in the quorum required to form a *minyan*; they could not become members of the Torah, read the weekly section, deliver sermons, wear the phylactery or the ritual shawl; and they were relegated to an upper gallery or separated from the men by a curtain. Lastly, they were traditionally excluded from religious study even though this is one of the cornerstones of Judaism. The effect of feminist questioning was to make women feel excluded by these exemptions. In the United States, imperative changes such as the ordination of female Rabbis have now been introduced by powerful Reform and Conservative Movements, despite persistent resistance from Orthodox tendencies that remain opposed on principle to any change in this direction. All the same, there are signs of a growing demand for change from within because the later form of feminism based on the difference between the sexes and distinct male and female roles is entirely compatible with Orthodox Judaism, as much as the egalitarian form of feminism remains unacceptable (because it is committed to eliminating the differences between the sexes and giving men and women the same roles and the same jobs). In recent years therefore, we have seen demands for active religiosity by Orthodox women Jews lead to the introduction of Offices for women and strictly women-only Talmud and Bible study lessons. In this way, the principle of sexual segregation has been maintained but accommodated to suit certain ends that allow women to express their religious observance differently.

Far more serious – and here there is no significant relief in sight – is the inequality where divorce is concerned. In the Judaic faith it is up to the man to take the initiative and there can be no divorce without his consent. A husband who refuses to give that consent can put his wife in an impossible situation, leaving her entirely at the mercy of his persistent obstinacy. This condition does not affect the Jews of the Diaspora who by law are married according to a civil ceremony but it raises howls of protests in Israel where a religious wedding constitutes the only recognized form of marriage. For non-practicing, non-believing women who are subject to this condition, the only solution lies in the establishment of a civil marriage ceremony. But the political classes, fearing the reactions of the religious contingent, prefer to maintain the status quo and leave it to the rabbinical courts to handle matters of personal right.

In a sense, the Jewish women of the 21st century may be seen to continue their legitimate struggle on two fronts. Having been made aware of feminist demands, they refuse to be relegated to second place either in the religious or the public sphere.



4. 1941-2000: women soldiers yesterday and today.



1. Franz Kafka 1883-1924.

Is there such a thing as Jewish art? Is it possible to define Jewish cinema or theatre? Or identify Jewish literature? We can continue to argue endlessly over what we mean by these terms, exactly what they cover and whether or not we accept their conceptual validity or relevance to everyday language. What we cannot deny is that in the sphere of esthetic creation, the 20th century was a time teeming with geniuses that saw an extraordinary flowering of creative talent. Jews distinguished themselves in these domains, displaying unprecedented creative energy.

Jewish public opinion likes to explain the phenomenon in terms of a twist of fate, perhaps demonstrating what remains of Divine election when it is put to the test of secularization. For anti-Semites on the other hand, a display on this scale is proof of a dominance that they repeatedly denounce, any challenges to established esthetic conventions being regarded by them as an expression of 'degenerate art', indicating an artistic decadence that prefigures social decline.

Sociological models may well isolate the precise social and cultural

conditions that determined such creative expansion, pointing out that there was a close connection between the artistic practice of the artists concerned and their existence on the fringes of society (inside and outside, integrated and excluded). In the case of the avant-garde artists, we can discuss their cultural inclinations and that esthetic radicalism that foreshadowed another world. But no theory can give an entirely satisfactory account of creative genius.

The paradox of Jewish literature is that it is not identified by the exclusive criterion of a Jewish language. Or to put it another way: Yiddish writers and Hebrew language authors are not the only contributors to Jewish literature. It is in fact expressed in many different languages, reflecting the Jewish people's dispersal worldwide. But it would be too sweeping to define the Jewishness of works of art in terms of the Jewishness of the author, just as it would be too restrictive to include only those evocations of childhood memories or places of collective memory that are connected with Jewish history. Although it may appear less precise, the benchmark of Jewishness is the conflict within the characters: that feeling of being torn apart between East and West, the particular and the universal, identity and otherness, tradition and modernity. We can also discern it in a certain tendency to prophesize or sometimes, at the other extreme, an inclination to self-mockery and humor. This intermediate literature so-to-speak is also a question of writing. While it may not have occurred to them to form a school, there is an affinity between French language Jewish novelists and poets. Is it possible to establish



2. Communicating passion for their art: Isaac Stern in Jerusalem, Gulf War, January 1991.

## Literature

**1913:** *Hebrew Ballads* by Elsa Lasker-Schüler  
**1921:** *Sodom and Gomorrah* by Marcel Proust  
**1927:** *America* by Franz Kafka  
**1934:** *The Cinnamon Shops* by Bruno Schulz  
**1944:** *Le Mal des Fantômes* by Benjamin Fondane  
**1946:** *The Dark Tower* by Arthur Koestler  
**1952:** *Like a Tear in the Ocean* by Manes Sperber  
**1953:** *The Pillar of Salt* by Albert Memmi, *The Witches of Salem* by Arthur Miller  
**1957:** *The Anniversary* by Harold Pinter  
**1958:** *The Days of Tsiklag* by S. Yizhar  
**1960:** *The Magician of Lublin* by Isaac Bashevis Singer, *I'm Talking of Jerusalem* by Arnold Wesker  
**1963:** *The Nobody Rose* by Paul Celan  
**1965:** *The Investigation* by Peter Weiss  
**1966:** *The Fixer* by Bernard Malamud  
**1967:** *Moisson de Canaan* by Claude Vigée  
**1968:** *Belle du Seigneur* by Albert Cohen, *La Place de l'Etoile* by Patrick Modiano, *My Michael* by Amos Oz  
**1969:** *A Void* by Georges Perec, *The Palace*

*of Shattered Vessels*, fictional cycle by David Shahar  
**1973:** *The Book of Questions* by Edmond Jabès  
**1976:** Saul Bellow wins the Nobel Prize for literature; *A Tomb for Boris Davidovitch* by Danilo Kis  
**1977:** *Past Continuous* by Yaacov Shabtaï  
**1979:** *Under Your White Stars* by Avrom Sutzkever  
**1981:** Elias Canetti wins the Nobel Prize for literature  
**1983:** *King Salomon* by Romain Gary (Emile Ajar), *Childhood* by Nathalie Sarraute  
**1986:** *See Under: Love* by David Grossman  
**1988:** *The Invention of Solitude* by Paul Auster, *The Counter Life* by Philip Roth  
**1991:** Nadine Gordimer wins the Nobel Prize for literature  
**1997:** *A Journey to the End of the Millenium* by Abraham B. Yehoshua

## Cinema

**1927:** *The Jazz Singer* by Alan Crosland  
**1930:** *Blue Angel* by Joseph von Sternberg  
**1931:** *M* by Fritz Lang  
**1935:** *A Night at the Opera* with the Marx Brothers  
**1937:** *Le Dybbouk* by Michael Wasynska  
**1942:** *To Be or Not to Be* by Ernst Lubitsch  
**1950:** *La Ronde* by Max Ophüls  
**1959:** *Some Like it Hot* by Billy Wilder  
**1963:** *Doctor Strangelove* by Stanley Kubrick  
**1967:** *The Two of Us* (also known as *The Old Man and the Boy*) by Claude Berri  
**1968:** *The Producers* by Mel Brooks  
**1970:** *Which Way to the Front?* by Jerry Lewis  
**1972:** *Sleuth* by Joseph L. Mankiewicz  
**1983:** *Zelig* by Woody Allen  
**1988:** *American Stories* by Chantal Akerman  
**1992:** *Life According to Agfa* by Assi Dayan  
**1999:** *Voyages* by Emmanuel Finkiel, *Kadosh* by Amos Gitai  
**2002:** *The Last Letter* by Frederick Wiseman, *The Pianist* by Roman Polanski

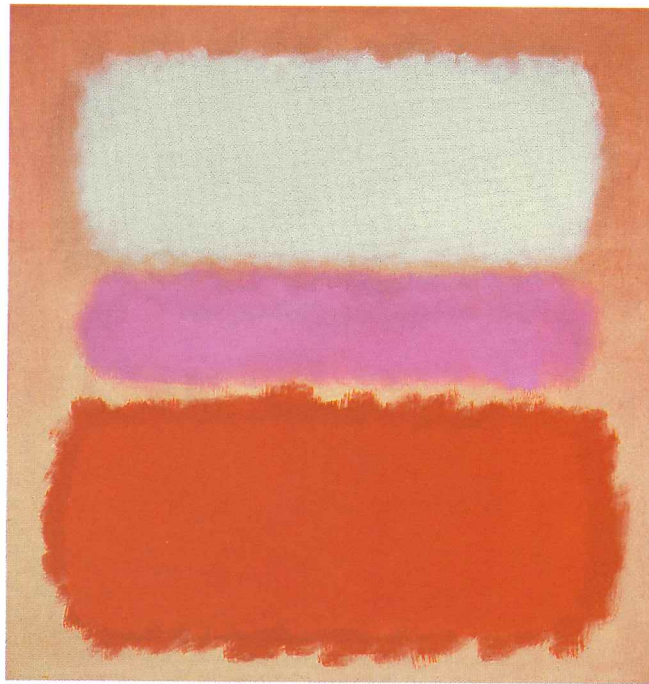
## Jewish themes

**1921:** *King David* by Arthur Honegger  
**1922:** *Ulysses* by James Joyce  
**1933:** *Joseph and his Brothers* by Thomas Mann  
**1943:** *La Marche à l'étoile* by Vercors  
**1947:** *Gentleman's Agreement* by Elia Kazan  
**1949:** *The Aleph* by Jorge Luis Borges  
**1956:** *Night and Fog* by Alain Resnais  
**1960:** *Description of a Struggle* by Chris Marker  
**1961:** *Babi Lar* by Eugene Evtouchenko  
**1962:** *Symphony No. 13* by Dmitri Shostakovich  
**1971:** *The Garden of the Finzi Continis* by Vittorio De Sica  
**1974:** *History* by Elsa Morante  
**1976:** *Mr Klein* by Joseph Losey  
**1979:** *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron  
**1987:** *Au Revoir les Enfants* by Louis Malle  
**1992:** *Etoile Errante* by J.M.G. Le Clézio  
**1997:** *The Seven Gates of Jerusalem* by Krzysztof Penderecki  
**2000:** *Esther Kahn* by Arnaud Desplechin

## 1900/2002

similarities that transcend language, such as those between the New York school and Central and Eastern Jewish writers?

Yiddish and Hebrew both underwent a metamorphosis in the 20th century. Thanks to the efforts of writers and poets who were determined to make Yiddish respectable, it was finally possible to create masterpieces of humor and gravity in a language that was once regarded by the very people who spoke it as an impoverished, worthless jargon that was barely suitable for conversation. But in a dramatic historical reversal, what had once been the privilege of Yiddish and its biggest advantage as a rival to Hebrew, was suddenly shattered and reduced to ashes by the Holocaust. Of those millions of people for whom Yiddish had been the *mame-loschen*, only a handful of survivors remained. Now deprived of a vast community of readers, Jewish writers like Aaron Tseitlin, H. Leivick, Itzik Manguer, Avrom Sutzkever and of course Isaac Bashevis Singer, all paid tribute to the language that had been exterminated:



3. *Against esthetic convention: Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Untitled, 1957.*

striving to follow in the footsteps of their elders, they wrote in Yiddish. Since that appalling catastrophe, there have been initiatives in France, Israel and the United States that suggest renewed interest in Yiddish, if not a revival. However, there is in fact no choice but to start all over again so the main priority is to teach people to speak Yiddish. Only then can we envisage the eventual renaissance of a form of creation that is properly literary.

The only Jewish language remaining today, for want of other contenders, is Hebrew. Its disadvantage was that it had always been the language of literature and liturgy, sacred and adored, emphatic and archaic, supported by layers of biblical and Talmudic strata. The test of spoken language was a necessary and vital aspect of its modernization, adding nuance and the vibrancy that we see today. Here again, we can measure the distance traveled and see the reversal that has occurred. Hebrew's inherent weakness – fixedness, rigidity – has now swung rather too far in the opposite direction, giving way to an astonishing suppleness that is beginning to worry the purists. Of all the works to come out of Zionism, none can rival the jewel that is Israeli literature. The novels of Amos Oz, Abraham B. Yehoshua and David Grossman and the poems of Yehuda Amichai and Nathan Zach have all reached out beyond their natural readership to an international audience. Moreover, the magisterial intellectual and moral authority exercised by the authors, though it does not keep them above the fray, does grant them particular status and commands our universal respect.

In the instance of art (painting and architecture), the yield is all the more remarkable because Judaism has weighed on art like a curse or at the very least a contradiction. One of God's commandments to His people in the Decalogue forbids the making of images. There is furthermore the Jewish tradition that has delighted in pinning a characteristic feature on each civilization, so that Yefet embodies beauty while Sem is exempt but loses nothing for turning away from it. None of these obstacles has impacted on the artistic vocation of a large number of painters of Jewish origin. As in literature, we find the same endlessly unresolved dialectic, a constant state of tension, between the assumption of singularity and a concern for universal values. Chagall may have been regarded as the Bruegel of the *shtetl*, but he also knew how to free his canvass of formal constraints, revealing an alternative universe that is the world upside-down, a familiar-looking universe that flows into the realm of dreams.

But is it also the case that Jewish art is ultimately defined by the painters' formal affiliation to Judaism? It is a necessary condition, but not

enough. A question of thematic content then? The suggestion is not groundless, but does it not focus on content, which is a secondary consideration in art? Does it not place emphasis on the figurative, on realism, not to say the picturesque? Confined to the *judaica* – the applied arts, interior ornamentation, sacred objects – art would only be Jewish by virtue of the place it adorned. If it really is Jewish, is it still art? The question remains open and seems more fruitful than any attempt to answer it. And what about abstract art where the plastic language deliberately defies all context and reference? Although to judge from what Yaacov Agam and Mark Rothko wrote on the subject, it does seem that their work is directly linked to a conception of an ascetic or mystical Judaism that called out to them.

On the music side, certain composers such as Darius Milhaud, Arnold Schönberg and Kurt Weill have dedicated a few of their pieces to Jewish themes. But the most notable Jewish contribution to music in the 20th century has been the

work of outstanding soloists: pianists, violinists and conductors who reached out to the audience, communicating a passion for their art that must rank as the Jewish quality par excellence.

Finally, even if it may not be relevant to a strict definition of Jewish art, we have to remember all those thinkers and creative minds who were apparently strangers to Judaism but for whom the unique historic destinies of the Jewish people proved a rich source of inspiration. Contemporary post-Holocaust reflections, inspired on the one hand by Freudian theory and on the other by the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, were open to questions raised by notions of Judaism (that it had formerly ignored or underestimated) such as the Law, the Book, the Letter and Otherness.

It matters not whether Jewish artists were believers, agnostics or atheists (which most of them were); whether or not they had come to terms with their Jewish identity, assimilated or refused their heritage. In the 20th century they appeared as the prophets and priests of modernity in art. In which respect, art for them was a substitute for religion: a way of working to save the world while striving for eternity.



4. *Self-mockery and humor: the Marx Brothers, A Night at the Opera, 1935.*