

rather than the inculcation of British modes of civilisation among East European Jewry. Even so, it surely shows a degree of cultural insensitivity akin to that for which Green takes Crémieux to task.

Overall, Montefiore is portrayed in this study as a remarkably humanitarian, fair-minded, religiously devoted individual who truly cared for the causes he embraced. His intentions indeed seem beyond reproach. Some aspects of Montefiore's "mild and judicious representation" are perhaps less uncontroversial, though. As Green observes, Montefiore at several junctures "deliberately underplayed" the Jewish dimension and instead stressed the universalist merits of a give cause (172), evidently in order to mobilise as broad a spectrum of public opinion as possible in its support. Christians, in other words, were asked to consider the treatment of Jews as human beings, rather than as Jews. It was for this reason that in promoting his campaigns at home, in London, Montefiore was willing to recruit Christian evangelists, such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, who was, for many years, president of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews. Whether such figures ultimately undermined the Jewish cause – especially in the long term – is a question that is not addressed in this book. Additionally, Montefiore's longevity and continued presence as president of the Board of Deputies, ensured that his model of intervention, his "mild and judicious" approach, continued to dominate the Anglo-Jewish establishment's response to international crises for a generation after his death. Whether this was a positive aspect of Montefiore's legacy is also not explored in Green's study and, in general, the discussion of British attitudes towards Montefiore is pretty one-sided. In this regard, we are led to believe that Montefiore was venerated not only abroad but also at home, as an "Imperial hero" (which has the unfortunate effect of conjuring up images of General Gordon and the like). Alas, on this matter, too, the case remains unproven.

### Note

1. Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*.

### Bibliography

Frankel, Jonathan. *The Damascus Affair. "Ritual Murder," Politics, and the Jews in 1840*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

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**Yiddishlands: A Memoir**, by David G. Roskies, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2008, 225 pp. + CD, US\$27.95, ISBN 978-08143-3397-6

When a mature and accomplished professor tries his hand at belles-lettres, he must be admired for his courage. In *Yiddishlands*, the imparting of solid knowledge and the attempt to write a memoir that is itself literature are inextricably intertwined. While it would serve little purpose to conceptually mark up the two strands of this book (or mechanically regenerate them into two separate documents), it is important to

understand the gravitas of the author's scholarly contributions over the decades as the backdrop to this effort.

Without ever having been a theoretician, innovator or shaker of conceptual worlds, David G. Roskies is one of the stalwarts of solid, competent Yiddish literary history and one of its consistently productive practitioners. Yiddish studies in all its branches is, alas, sometimes populated by unqualified and underproductive academics, who are, moreover, not seldom actually at home in one of the adjacent fields (Hebrew, comparative Jewish, Slavic, German or even English literature). Roskies, in the tradition of the late twentieth-century master Chone Shmeruk of Hebrew University, and his own more illustrious sister, Ruth Roskies Wise of Harvard, has churned out a long and impressive list of descriptive and historical studies of Yiddish and Jewish literature. These include *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (1984), *The Dybbuk and Other Writings by S. Ansky* (1992), *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (1995) and, perhaps most ambitiously, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (1999). The rigor, sourcing and solidity of his work has helped set a standard for Yiddish literary studies as an academic discipline aspiring to a status like that enjoyed by other minority literatures. He also plays a significant role as editor of Yale University Press's New Yiddish Library (and previously of *Prooftexts*).

Many thousands of Yiddishists who grew up in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe – writers, teachers, editors, political and social activists, actors, artists and more – resettled in countries out of the reach of both Hitler and Stalin. Yet, tragically for modern Yiddish secular and literary culture, they managed to bring up only a pathetically tiny number of postwar-born children (baby boomers) who would go on to make weighty contributions to one or more of the branches of Yiddish. Roskies, by age and accomplishments, is one of the deans of this group (whether it forms an “elite” or is “jinxed” is now and again debated with differing degrees of jocularity). In *Yiddishlands: A Memoir*, Roskies shares his autobiography with generosity of spirit, and with unfettered willingness to acknowledge the treasures bequeathed to him by his family. His maternal grandmother, Fradl Polachek Matz, married into the Matzes, one of the Jewish “royal families” of the Vilna of old – the city once known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania. For some time, she actually ran the fabled Matz Press that produced an array of Hebrew and Yiddish books in the city (now Vilnius, capital of Lithuania).

For the student of modern Jewish cultural history the book has two great strengths: firstly, the narratives about actual pre-war Jewish life in Vilna. These parts of the book, imparting the author's family lore, particularly his mother's, tell tales of lovers, haters, dreamers and schemers. In other words, they offer an account of a real life in a real environment, rather than the idealised image of a city of “rabbis and socialists” that some renditions seem to offer in the spirit of post-Holocaust romanticisations and idealisations. Secondly, there are his own memories from the second half of the twentieth century of Yiddish writers and cultural personalities in Montreal, New York and Israel. Although these are generally not the same people whose exploits are so well recounted in earlier chapters, there is a certain continuity spanning pre-war Yiddish Eastern Europe and its post-war remnants. The concise and excellent “Genealogy” at the end provides useful microcosmic biographies and cultural historical background. It is likely to be valuable in its own right even for those who do not read the book as a whole.

The book's weakest parts are those dealing with the author's own academic, religious, social and sexual exploits, musings and complexes. They are by and large

neither interesting nor edifying, and he is no storyteller. The progression from young idealistic Yiddishist to establishment bigwig who throws scorn on “ideological lovers of Yiddish” seems to correspond neatly, in this volume, to a shift from the captivating to the tedious.

This makes us love the author’s mother all the more. Masha Welczer Roskies is the magnificent East European Jewish mother that you never had. For many decades, her literary salon in Montreal was an important international address for Yiddishists. The author has faithfully channelled her voice for this new century. It was a stroke of beauty to include a CD of her singing in Yiddish, Russian and Polish. It conveys her authentic spirit and power to pass on a heritage, precisely because she was no professional singer.

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**Chocolate and Chess (Unlocking Lakatos)**, by Alex Bandy, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009, 476 pp., €38.00, ISBN 978-963-05-8819-5

Imre Lakatos was one of the most brilliant philosophers of mathematics and science in the second half of the twentieth century. Born in Hungary, he came to England after the 1956 revolution. In 1961, at the age of 39, he obtained a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Cambridge. From 1960 he taught at the London School of Economics (LSE) alongside Karl Popper, Joseph Agassi and John Watkins and was promoted to Professor of Logic in 1969. In 1974, aged 59, he died of a sudden brain haemorrhage. His work on the theory of knowledge and scientific method, notably in *Proofs and Refutations*, is still held in very high regard by his peers. His original ideas, delivered with an unmistakable Hungarian accent, made him an extremely popular lecturer. What none of his friends, colleagues or students in the West knew was that before taking refuge in the UK Lakatos had led a very different kind of life in Hungary. Only the authorities seem to have had some suspicions, as they twice turned down his application for British citizenship.

In fact even in Hungary today his biography is full of gaps and mysteries. Many of the relevant documents have been destroyed and the memories of the individuals who knew him contradict each other. His own inclination towards secrecy and deception did not make matters clearer. Even his surname was not the same throughout his life.

He was born in 1922 in Debrecen as Imre Lipsitz. His father was a prosperous wine merchant, separated from his wife, who perished in Auschwitz. Imre attended the gymnasium and university in Debrecen. He was highly gifted, with a particular talent for mathematics, philosophy, chemistry and physics. While at university he became politically active, setting up Marxist study groups and running them in an autocratic manner. In 1944, when the Holocaust reached Hungary, he fled from Debrecen to the larger city of Nagyvárad, where he went underground and, protected by both Jewish and non-Jewish friends, organised clandestine Marxist–Leninist cells with himself as their leader. He adopted the name of Imre Molnár (Miller), which he changed again after the war to the more proletarian-sounding Lakatos (locksmith).