

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

This issue of *Literature and Belief* celebrates the work and lives of Jewish authors in the past and present and looks forward to the continuing contributions of American Jewish writers in specific in the twenty-first century. The issue is dedicated to the proposition that few things matter more than memory and that in an historical moment increasingly shot through with attempts to marginalize the history, contributions, and suffering of the Jews, a celebration of the writings of select Jewish authors is not merely helpful but needful. In *From the Kingdom of Memory*, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel observes, "I fear forgetfulness as much as hatred and death." This issue of *Literature and Belief* is The Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature's most current attempt to help insure that memory, witness, hope, and faith continue to find place in an uncertain world.

Although both Christians and Jews link their fates to the Messiah, the two faith traditions hold radically different views concerning who—and what—the Messiah is. And in "On Being a Jewish Author: The Trace of the Messiah in Elie Wiesel's Novels," David Patterson both provides a helpful overview of teachings concerning the Messiah in Jewish tradition and highlights traces of the Messiah in various of Wiesel's novels—traces that help define Wiesel as a distinctively Jewish author. In a post-Holocaust era, Patterson concludes, "God Himself needs the advent of the Messiah as much as His children do. And man is, indeed, God's link to the Messiah" (23). Wiesel's personal commitment to wait for the Messiah by seeking to help repair the world—*tikkun ha-'olam*—is alluded to in Asher Z. Milbauer's "Life Encounters: Reflections on Elie Wiesel." In his reflections on his periodic encounters with Wiesel, Milbauer—who grew up in the Carpathian Mountains, a son of Holocaust survivors whose presence was barely tolerated in the land of his birth—praises Wiesel's efforts on the behalf of Soviet Jews (including members of Milbauer's own family), noting that "in the course of his entire life," Wiesel had "never given up praying and wishing for a world of tolerance, peace, and grace" (27).

Wiesel's 1986 Nobel Peace Prize came some twenty years after S. Y. Agnon shared the Nobel Prize in Literature with Nelly Sachs, and in certain respects Wiesel's novels bear what might be called a family

resemblance to Agnon's stories and allegorical tales. Like Wiesel, Agnon is concerned with memory and the act of witnessing, and in "Transcending Textual and Temporal Boundaries: S. Y. Agnon on Witnessing and Belief," Gila Safran Naveh makes a convincing case that Agnon challenges the boundaries between the sacred and the profane by reviving the art of quotation from sacred texts. In the process, Naveh notes, Agnon creates a complex intertextual web that "take[s] Agnon's reader back to a multitude of cultural contexts, both Biblical and post-Biblical[,] . . . which ultimately put into question the relationship between the sacred and the secular and point to a new mode of spirituality" (39).

While Naveh's essay reminds us of important links between the past and the present, Victoria Aarons' "American Jewish Writing in the Twenty-First Century: New Global Directions" argues persuasively that contemporary American Jewish literature "is in the process of re-defining what it means to be Jewish at this particular moment in history and of locating the expansive possibilities for a range of Jewish literary expression" (60). Aarons both highlights significant differences between such post-war writers as Saul Bellow and Philip Roth and the current generation of American Jewish writers and identifies a number of typical characteristics and trends in twenty-first century American Jewish literature. Aarons uses two case studies—the work of the Guatemalan Jewish novelist Eduardo Halfon, who lives in the United States and writes in Spanish, and that of Ayelet Tsabari, a Canadian writer of Yemeni descent who grew up in Israel—to highlight a number of such characteristics, including what Aarons aptly labels "a performance of the complexities in the inheritance of diasporic invention" (65). Contemporary American Jewish writers like Halfon and Tsabari—Aarons concludes—are increasingly part of "a generation of travelers, traveling among contrastive geographies and languages and the spaces of the imagination . . . / While earlier generations of Jewish writers in North American might be thought to have mapped 'America' on to their emerging identities, this new diasporic generation seems to transfer identity onto newly found place" (65, 75).

Aarons' analysis is a logical extension of what might be called the generational model of post-Holocaust writing, and the next two essays in the issue revolve around examples of the second, third, and subsequent generations of such writing. In "The Reluctant Witness: A

Meditation on Andrew Grof's *The Goldberg Variations*," Milbauer and Alan L. Berger explicate Grof's welcome—if belated—addition to the literature of the second generation, that written by the children of Holocaust survivors. As Milbauer and Berger make clear, although *The Goldberg Variations* arrived somewhat late on the scene, it is quintessentially second generation in that it

treats core issues of identity, the nature of memory, transmission of trauma, and the complexity of bearing witness to an unexpected event. Furthermore, Grof's novel problematizes the key second generation notion of time by insisting on the burning need to seize the moment and bear witness while defying the seductive, yet illusory, clear-cut lines of demarcation between the past and the present. (79)

This abiding concern with memory, trauma, and the ways subsequent generations are likely to remember—or misremember or fail to remember—the Holocaust is similarly evident in Berger's analysis of Nava Semel's recent *And the Rat Laughed*. In "The Future of Holocaust Memory: Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*," Berger shows how Semel's novel, opera, and film script dramatize the challenges faced by the remembearers of successive generations as they attempt—in a number of different times and settings—to become links in the chain of Holocaust memory transmission. In that respect, Semel's work—Berger concludes—reveals in the fraught age of the internet and visual culture "both the difficulty and the necessity of transmitting traumatic memory and its manifestations in the generation of 'postmemory' and beyond" (120).

In addition to contributing articles to this special issue of *Literature and Belief*, Aarons and Berger recently published *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (2017). This issue concludes with a brief review of their book.

I appreciate the excellent work done by all of this issue's contributors, and I am particularly grateful for Alan's generosity and care in helping bring this issue of *Literature and Belief* to fruition. Thank you, my friend. *Shalom*.

—Daniel K. Muhlestein