

that the narrative is suggesting a synthesis of feminism and Marxism to replace patriarchal oppression. At the end of the book Valentin is able to see beyond his one-dimensional Marxism because, "Molina as artist shapes the materials of his culture to create significance for Valentin as his audience" (44). This reading neither accounts for the book's complexity nor the fact that both Molina and Valentin ultimately fail and are victimized by their own popular culture visions. Valentin's vision is in actuality a harkening back to the homoerotic Romanticism of Whitmanesque literary culture. The text expresses ambivalence toward the possibility of transcendence.

Regardless of its critical/interpretive flaws, *Pop Culture Into Art* is a firm beginning for Puig scholarship in English and should not be overlooked by anyone embarking on that path. Given the biographical/literary importance of popular culture that Lavers finds in Puig's novels, the notion of transcendence might actually be obsolete. Lavers suggests that in Puig we see popular culture made into art; more accurately, we might actually be seeing the passage of art into popular culture.

Sami Michael

*REFUGE*

Translated from Hebrew by Edward Grossman

Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988. Pp. 382. \$19.95

Reviewed by Miriam Roshwald

In *Refuge* Sami Michael contrived to translate into a fictional medium Israel's glum reality: the conflict of two peoples claiming the same piece of land as their own. Cutting through the manifold layers of Israel's society, he zeroes in on its political fringe--the Communist Party. It is a tribute to Michael's artistry and psychological acumen that this peripheral segment of Israel's political landscape becomes a compelling reflection of one of the country's most complex and urgent dilemmas.

The book appeared in its original Hebrew in 1977, some four years after the Yom Kippur War. The story takes place on the eve of and during the first few days of this fateful conflict. The main characters are a Jewish couple, Shula and Marduch, of European and Iraqi origin respectively, and their retarded son; Shoshana, a rebellious kibbutznik, and Faud, her Christian Arab husband; and Fatkhi, a Moslem poet. The group is closely knit, bound by ties of Communist ideology as well as personal friendship. Then the war breaks out and everything changes. The alleged cohesion of the group comes under strain, and the diverse members are suddenly forced to confront themselves and each other as they really are--formed, nurtured, and ultimately committed to the origins from which they came. The war brings to the surface deeply buried loyalties, ostensibly renounced for the greater good of World Brotherhood.

Marduch, the Iraqi Jew, antinationalist and citizen of the world, is the first to break the ranks. He joins the army, impatient to play his part in fending off

the pincerlike invasion of the Syrian and Egyptian forces. His motives are never clarified. The author, who himself escaped hanging in his native Iraq for leftist activities, draws on his gruesome ordeal in portraying Marduch. This Jew, who loves Arabic poetry and language, was also singed, body and soul, by the savagery of Iraqi torture chambers. In spite of his martyrdom, he does not hold a grudge against his Arab comrades. Nor does his angry disapproval of the Jewish state, which gave him a home and refuge, soften. This earns him the trust and respect of all the members. Therefore, when this reluctant Israeli joins the ranks of the citizen-soldiers with impatient haste, there are no murmurs of betrayal, but rather an acceptance of a changed reality, and a realization that the hour of truth has come.

Nor was there any doubt about the Arab comrades' true feelings: "She [Shula] knew very well what Fatkhi and Faud . . . had in their hearts . . . they were hoping and praying for the destruction of the armies of Israel. They [Marduch and Shula] didn't delude themselves—an Arab victory meant a holocaust" (195-96). Nevertheless, when Fatkhi, the poet of the Palestinian suffering, afraid that he may be arrested as a security risk, appears at Shula's home and expects to be given a safe haven there, he is not disappointed. Though grieving the death in battle of a childhood friend and first love and distraught by worry for Marduch's safety and the state's survival, Shula does not flinch. At the same time her allegiance to Israel becomes clear to her and she vows to leave the Party. She feels free for the first time in her life.

Faud and Fatkhi too are forced into a ruthless soul-searching and declare their innermost hopes. The poet, who until now has relished his role as the darling of the Tel-Aviv women, admits to himself that he is looked upon as an outsider both amid the Israeli bohemia and the scornfully tolerant fellow Moslems. He decides to join the ranks of the P.L.O. and throw his lot with the Arabs of the West Bank. Faud, the philosopher and unshaken believer in the Great Brotherhood, dismisses Fatkhi's sudden transformation as he does his poetry, which he deems mawkish and derivative. The clash between the Christian and the Moslem boils down to a collision between two mentalities. For Faud the war and the expected Arab victory means restitution of lost property—rectification, in concrete terms, of the ills resulting from the creation of the Jewish state. For the poet the war means vindication of the bruised Arab ego: "Honor is the essence of an Arab's life" (316).

Whatever their differences, they are both united in their ardent wish to see the defeat and demise of the Jewish state: "'Fatkhi, isn't there another way?' asks Shula. 'I used to believe there was. Faud still enjoys searching for it . . . I don't see any other way.' 'It's either us or you?' The poet fell silent" (335). Sami Michael does not apportion blame or praise to any of the parties to the conflict. He scrupulously seeks to balance the good and the bad in the opposing camps. To counterbalance Shula's honorable gesture in giving shelter to a self-declared enemy in time of a desperate war, the author makes Fatkhi reciprocate in kind. Convinced that Israel is lost, he decides to rescue Shula from the inevitable outrages which the victorious armies are sure to inflict on the vanquished population. He tries to convince Shula to steal out of her house and together with her child seek shelter with his friends in the West Bank. Shula declines. Her refusal is double edged. It is a refusal of a proud Israeli and of a woman wooed by a man to whom she is attracted. Fatkhi takes it as a snub and

responds with sudden hatred. "At that moment they ceased being a man and a woman. He was an Arab. She was a Jew" (382).

The book, though dealing with political issues of explosive implications, is devoid of impassioned emotions, rancor, and smug self-righteousness. The general tenor of the story is almost placid, suffused by gentle humanity and tolerance. The grim reality of a society torn by war is expressed indirectly by literary devices, such as obsessive memories, nightmares, and symbolic hallucinations. The combination of realism with flashes from the unconscious is an effective tool for conveying a state of mind overwhelmed by anxiety and ominous premonitions in the face of war, violence, and death.

Anne Hébert

*LE PREMIER JARDIN*

Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988. Pp. 188. \$19.95

Reviewed by Uta Doerr

Flora Fontange, the heroine of *Le premier jardin*, is an aging actress who returns, somewhat reluctantly and with misgivings, from France to the stage of her native Quebec. She soon finds childhood memories welling up in her. Such is the gist of this plotless novel. *Le premier jardin* (The First Garden) will strike many a reader as disconcerting for it lacks the suspense, the intensity, and the interest created by the unusual characters that have fascinated Hébert's readers in the past. It resembles a tapestry woven with threads of many colors that seem initially unrelated and incoherent till one steps back to contemplate the finished ensemble. Like most of Anne Hébert's novels (*Les chambres de bois* [1958], *Kamouraska* [1970], *Les Enfants du Sabbat* [1975], *Heloïse* [1980], *Les Fous de Bassan* [1982], *Le premier jardin* is multifaceted. Into the tapestry of Flora's memories are woven the themes of alienation, artistic creation, and the relationship of men and women. Past and present, reality and imagination are inextricably intertwined. Flora Fontange has always had to deny her own self, cover it up, silence it to comply with the prescripts of her environment. She is made into an object, squeezed into the narrow mold considered suitable by her adoptive parents. Conformity becomes normative. She thus becomes devoid of feelings and emotions, a lifeless, truncated tree without leaves or branches. The only escape route from alienation is artistic creation. As an actress, Flora is finally allowed to transcend the limits imposed on her by her adoptive family, to become truly alive and experience the full gamut of human emotions in the characters she incarnates on the stage.

The first garden (*Le premier jardin*)—a symbol of Flora's childhood—produces no flowers, boasts no colors, remains drab and gray. But the first garden is also a symbol of creation. At the same time as giving us a glimpse into the origins and processes of artistic creation (we may safely assume that Flora shares certain traits with the author), Anne Hébert picks up one of her favorite themes: the relationship between men and women. Contrary to some of her earlier work where men and women were in the grip of the most intense desire and the deepest hatred (such as *Kamouraska*, 1970 and *Les Fous de Bassan*,