

1950s were given over to studies of the importance of myth in the development of all cultures. Although the book focuses on the French Surrealist group, there are also pages on the related movements that appeared in other countries throughout the 1930s. The connections between Surrealist writing and other arts (even the rarely considered field of music) are also intelligently explored.

The major strength of this work is its thoroughness. By analyzing not only the major works of Surrealism, but also the countless reviews and pamphlets that appeared throughout the movement's fifty-year existence (many of which are extremely hard to find), Chénieux-Gendron has accomplished a monumental task. Her bibliography alone is a gold mine for any student of the movement, and her discussions of the conflicts with Marxism and psychoanalysis are likely to become authoritative for quite a few years.

Despite its appearance, Surrealism was not merely a variant of Romanticism. Even though both movements emphasized the imagination's ability to restore our innocence, Surrealists did not equate this with rediscovering a prior state of Edenic purity. Rather, it meant forging a new innocence vis-à-vis our own acts, and hence acting freely, unfettered by guilt. Breton's 1930 title "Il y aura une fois" says it all: "Once upon a time (a coded invitation to the powers of imagination) there *will be*" the real.

David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky, eds.
*RABBINIC FANTASIES: IMAGINATIVE NARRATIVES
FROM CLASSICAL HEBREW LITERATURE*
Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990. Pp. 364
Reviewed by Miriam Roshwald

". . . in the history of Jewish literature before the nineteenth century a negative attitude towards imaginative writing has been the rule more often than the exception . . ." (16). "Mere stories and profane matters" was the derogatory judgment on narratives not related to the interpretation of the Torah and its moral teaching. This does not mean, however, that the play of imagination and the creative impulse are absent from rabbinical literature. The Midrash, or homiletical interpretation of the Bible, is replete with narrative which, though intended to perform a pedagogical role, fall into recognizable genres of imaginative writing. Parables, allegories, legends, tales, and folklore found their way into the legal discussions and homilies. "The biblical narrative thus became for the rabbis a giant screen upon which they projected the story of their own existence. Responding to the most subtle, latent possibilities of meaning in Scripture, these exegetes allowed their narrative imagination to blossom in the cracks of the biblical text, sometimes literally inside the empty spaces separating words or atop the wavy scribal crowns adorning letters" (7).

The present volume consists of sixteen texts of such imaginative narratives, covering nearly seventeen hundred years, starting with the second cen-

tury A.D. The selections fall into several roughly defined categories: rabbinic parables, the retold biblical story, the exemplum, the apocalypse, hagiography, and the rhymed-prose romance, known as *maqama*. Each selection is newly translated from Hebrew texts and prefaced by an explanatory introduction.

The parables chosen were taken from the midrashic literature, covering about five centuries, from the third to the eighth. They are followed by *Two Narratives about God*. This text forms a part of a long exegesis of Isaiah 22:1-12. The striking element in this narrative is that it presents two contradictory views of God. One sees God as a sympathetic participant in the Jewish plight, considering Himself as much of a victim as His people. The other perceives Him as a distant onlooker, moved to compassion only by Rachel, the biblical matriarch: "Feeling compassion for my sister, that she not be disgraced, I suppressed my desires . . . But You! . . . Why are you jealous of idols without substance?" (56).

The narrative entitled "Jonah and the Sailors" is an example of the "rewritten Bible genre," namely a patchwork of old legends and rabbinic commentaries, which grew around the scriptural story, fashioned into a new version. Here Jonah's flight from the mission entrusted to him by God turns into a "comedy of mishaps," with the happy ending of the gentle but idolatrous sailors becoming pious Jews.

Of the many apocalyptic books none was more influential than the *Book of Zerubbabel*. It was written in the seventh century, against the background of the wars between Persia and the Byzantine Empire. Drawing on forms, themes, and images from earlier centuries, the anonymous author employs allegorical techniques to represent the forces of evil and the eventual triumph of the righteous. Messiah, the end of days, and cataclysmic events, in which nature and all known laws of physics are suspended, figure in this phantasmagoric vision of a universe purged, chastened, and reshaped to a fervid heart's desire.

Other specimens of literary narrative, within which the rabbinical scholars and other writers let their fancy roam, are exemplary anecdotes, parodies, and wisdom literature. The latter is concerned with the universal virtues of humility, piety, discretion, and obedience to elders. To represent the different genres, the editors of the volume offer us selections from such works as "Midrash on the Ten Commandments," "The Tale of the Jerusalemite," "The Legend of the Ten Martyrs," "The Alphabet of Ben Sira," and the book of Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*.

The first known secular Hebrew fiction from medieval Spain is the story "Asher in the Harem." Stylistically it belongs to the genre of *maqama*, or rhymed prose, which was "an ancient tradition of Arabic writing." The story "is to be read against the background of ideas of courtly love . . . in medieval Europe" (253). On the other hand, "The Misogynist," another secular story from Spain, is based on the theme of love's revenge. The story is a parody of a low-brow folksy character. An example of wisdom literature is the story "The Sorcerer," written in the rhymed-prose style rich in "aphorisms, poems and stories, which include other framed stories, in the manner of the Thousand and One Nights" (296).

The last selection in the present volume is from the "Dream Talks" of Nahman of Bratslav, a Hasidic rabbi who lived a mere two hundred years ago. Rabbi Nahman is "a spinner of fantastic yarns." He combines "folk motifs, biblical images, and kabbalistic symbols to create works of a startling mythic profundity" (333). The "dreams" are marked by an uncanny sense of a treacherous, slippery reality, foreshadowing Kafka's anguished world of abandonment and crushing guilt. The paralyzing impotence vis-à-vis a mocking malignity, which informs those dreams, strikes a responsive chord in our modern consciousness.

The excellent introduction by David Stern and the evocative afterward by Mark Jay Mirsky open a window onto a world hardly known to the outsider and help clear up some long-entrenched misconceptions. The rabbinical world emerges from the conventional, dry-as-dust image, and turns into a flesh-and-blood civilization, fired by an inner world of turbulent passions, humor, doubt, and creative imagination.

Fritz Senn and Christine Van Boheemen, eds.
JOYCE, MODERNITY, AND ITS MEDIATION.
Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1989. Pp. 228
Reviewed by Michael Patrick Gillespie

Joyce, Modernity, and Its Mediation, the first volume of a new series being brought out by Rodopi entitled *European Joyce Studies*, evokes at least two distinct responses. One of course wishes to assess the efforts of the work's contributors, both in terms of the insights of specific essays and with regard to the volume's overall success at addressing its announced topic. At the same time the commitment to an ongoing publication devoted to presenting essays on Joyce leads one to consider a range of interesting ontological issues.

Christine van Boheemen, the series associate editor, leaves the broader questions to which I allude to the individual reader. Her introduction to volume one focuses exclusively on its announced topic—a study of how Joyce's canon situates the sensibilities of contemporary readers within the flux between the modern and the postmodern. One certainly understands her decision, for this perceived oscillation of Joyce's canon between artistic periods has generated a wide range of criticism demanding a concerted response. With this doubtless in mind, van Boheemen offers a fluent blend of the conventional and the imaginative that proves a refreshing alternative to the more predictable readings that leave one both confused and restive. Van Boheemen reminds us of the need to review Joyce's traditional position as a figure that mediates the confrontation of modernism by postmodernism, but she also promises a broad exploration of the implications of that conjunction through critics who eschew conventional readings.