EDITORIAL

At the time of writing this editorial Londoners are still coming to terms with the terrorist bomb attacks in July. Jewish communities have been put on special alert as potential targets. A backlash against the Muslim community has been one inevitable result and Jewish voices have been strong in condemning such a response. The long term commitment to interfaith dialogue, often expressed in the pages of this journal, is one of the essential elements in challenging ideologies that foster the murderous violence of the bombers, and the crude brutalities of those who target Muslims in response.

Our opening two articles are reflections, in their different ways, on the relationship between horrific or tragic human realities and the need to capture them in a literary form. Ronald Harwood explores the issues raised by his work as playwright and screen writer, in particular as the author of the screenplay of *The Pianist*. His reference to an earlier work on Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* opens up another world of totalitarian invention, and Jane Haynes' account of her visits to a contemporary psychiatric facility in St. Petersburg evokes the 'true to the truth' of fiction like Chekhov's *Ward Six*.

The detailed account of the reconstruction of Jewish life in Antwerp immediately after the war by Veerle Vanden Daelen is a poignant reminder of what was lost and how different is the post-war Jewish society that began to emerge in Europe. It leads us into the second section which explores themes of memory, history and identity in contemporary European Jewish life. Robin Ostow's study of Amsterdam's Jewish Historical Museum, while examining its history in the pre-war, German occupation and post-war years notes how issues around continuity and identity are central concerns in the permanent exhibit.

A very different kind of 'museum' is the one located at the Westminster Synagogue in London. In the 1960s a British businessman negotiated the removal of some 1500 scrolls from Prague to London. Here they were examined and documented, restored and conserved. They have subsequently been distributed throughout the world to communities, while those damaged beyond repair have been taken by institutions memorialising the lost communities of Bohemia and Moravia.

At the opening of an exhibition commemorating the history of the scrolls and their subsequent journeys to new communities, two lectures by Jeremy Adler and Pavel Seifter provided a background to the fate of the Jews of Czechoslovakia.

A more direct approach to contemporary issues around the theme of Jewish identity can be found in the following articles. Bella Zisere's study of the Jewish community in Latvia illustrates the emerging patterns of Jewish identity in post-Soviet society. There is a split between ethnic identity, the category required in the Soviet Union, and religious affiliation. Thus a large percentage of people of ethnic Jewish origin may nevertheless consider themselves as Christian. Moreover the intermarriage rate is above 80 percent. She concludes that the 'religious aspect of Jewish identity (often considered as a core element in Western communities) remains relatively unimportant'. Their central feeling of identification with Jewry is as part of the 'Jewish people'. Where cultural activities are popular those who attend may be only marginally Jewish, according to Jewish law, or simply interested non-Jews. With a Jewish population of only ten thousand, despite the apparent success of Jewish revival, future decline seems inevitable.

The specific factors identified in Latvia have their echo in the transcript of papers read at the third General Assembly of the European Council of Jewish Communities (ECJC) held in Budapest in 2004. We have preserved the occasional conversational tone of the transcript. The theme was the nature of Jewish identity in the 'new' Europe. Anthony Lerman challenges the conventional focus on anti-Semitism, Holocaust and threats to Israel that are commonly raised under this subject and asks instead what an open Jewish world can contribute to a European future. Mikhail Chlenov looks at three basic models for Jewish identity and Shmuel Trigano explores the tensions between citizenship and Jewish community identity. Barry Kosmin's remarks need to be taken in relation to a recent publication of the Institute for Jewish Policy and Research (JPR) by David Graham, *Jewish Identity Survey at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. He draws attention to the disparities in the counting of Jewish populations because of different definitions: religious identity, based on Jewish law, national identity and the criteria of the Israeli Law of Return, the latter being more inclusive than any previous approach to Jewish population. Alberto Sendery speaks of a 'collage identity' in a post-denominational period. He gives the example of a man who 'enjoys going to a Chabad synagogue ... observes Shabbat like an Orthodox while he prays like a Masorti and ... likes cultural events organised by the Liberal community'. Everyone, he argues, is picking pieces to make up the collage that is their own identity. This is valued by the individuals, though highly problematic for the institutions. The editor was invited to an ECJC meeting in Basel in May 2005 to contribute to a debate on the theme: 'European Jewry cannot be effective as a force in Europe unless it becomes a pluralist community'. His paper concludes this section.

The origins of today's variety of Jewish identities go back to the Emancipation. One of the products of the emergence of Jews on the wider scene was the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) movement with its attempt to examine Judaism with the same scientific, philosophical and intellectual tools that were being brought to bear on other areas of human existence and thought. In our section 'From the Tradition', we publish a paper by Dr Esther Seidel on the philosophical underpinning of the movement. The second paper in this section by Catherine Brewer explores legislation against Jews under the Emperor Justinian and the question as to whether or not this represented a deterioration in the status of the Jewish communities.

Book reviews and poems complete the issue.

Jonathan Magonet