EDITORIAL

Our policy of alternating themed issues with more general ones means that sometimes contributions that were delayed, or those sent in response to a particular theme, can be placed together in a subsequent issue. Here we have the opportunity to follow up on two significant subjects of recent issues, the 'Children and Literature' topic of Spring 2009 and the 'State of Yiddish' of Autumn 2009.

Barry Davis explores the challenges of translation into and out of Yiddish. As he notes: '100 years ago the primary role of translation was to present the outside world to Yiddish-speaking Jews ... but today the main role is the reverse, from Yiddish to other languages, to gain access to that lost Jewish world'. Aaron Eckstaedt traces the different stages in the new popularity of Klezmer music, particularly in Germany, and what it means for musicians and audiences alike. Esther Jonas-Maerten examines the life and work of the Yiddish poet Malka Lee. Born into the world of pious Hasidic life in the *Shtetl*, she emigrated in the twenties and re-imagined it in different ways, responding in particular to the impact of the Shoah, in her poetry written in the working-class environment of New York.

The theme of 'Children and Literature' also evokes the world from which Malka Lee came, as seen in Michael Katz's comparison of the stories of 'Tevya the Dairyman' by Sholem Aleichem and the novel 'The Five' by Vladimir Jabotinsky. Beneath their immediate impact as human dramas, both works document the larger theme of the disintegration of Jewish family life in Eastern Europe. Moreover they provide a background for understanding both authors' commitment to Zionism.

Though not a deliberate theme for this issue, it is interesting that the subject of anti-Semitism appears either directly or indirectly in three of the articles. Madelyn Travis tackles it through her study of 'heritage anti-Semitism' in British children's literature. In a multicultural and multiethnic Britain, Jews tend to be seen as belonging to the 'white' population or as simply another ethnic group. This allows for the re-emergence of older stereotypes (for example Oliver Twist's Fagin) without evoking great concern. As she points out, 'anti-Semitic stereotypes of the past are viewed either ironically or as inapplicable in Britain today'. (In the ironic, if distinctly ambiguous, category I could include an informal remark addressed to a group of Jews at a conference some years ago by a member of the Royal family, that Jews should not worry now as 'the blacks' will be the first target! That it was intended ironically is comforting; that the speaker could have assumed that Jews would be happy with such a remark is disquieting.) Nevertheless, issues concerning

the presentation of Jewish characters do arise when children's literature is concerned.

By chance two lectures held in London within a couple of weeks of one another touched upon the issue of Jewish identity, but from very different perspectives. Baroness Neuberger delivered the annual van der Zyl Memorial Lecture at the West London Synagogue on the subject 'Identity as a British Jew' in her customary forthright manner. En passant she touched on the theme of anti-Semitism, which forms the background to Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok's paper delivered at the London Society for the Study of Religion. His involvement as an expert witness in a court case against two disseminators of anti-Semitic literature led him to explore the question of whether Jews should be defined as an ethnic group for the purpose of ongoing British legislation.

On a different aspect of the question of identity, Professor Marc Saperstein's moving paper explores Western perceptions of Russian Jews during the First World War and the tragic situation of Jews, deeply loyal to their respective nations, facing each other as enemies across the battlefields of Europe.

Professor Adriel Kosman of the University of Potsdam offers a fascinating insight into a Talmudic passage concerning the troubled and ultimately tragic relationship between two of the great teachers of the period: Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish. He draws out the clash between the culture of the 'warrior' and that of the 'scholar', but also the critical attitude of the text itself to the inner struggles within the world of rabbinic debate, and explores the gender issues that lie beneath the surface.

We round out the issue with book reviews and poetry.

Jonathan Magonet