

planation for what happened. But valiant attempts have been made to understand its origins and development, and this book is one of the best.

NORMAN COHN is an accomplished student of the shady realms where ideology, theology, psychopathology, and mass behavior meet. The phrase *Warrant for Genocide* suggests his view of the relation of ideology to action under Nazism. But the subject of this book is somewhat broader, as its subtitle suggests: "The myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*." The *Protocols* are a notorious forgery, regarded as the most widely distributed book in the world except the Bible during the 1920's and 1930's, concocted during the early nineteenth century in France from various sources and amplified by numerous editors, but of unknown authorship. They purport to represent lectures setting forth to the Elders of Zion a plan for Jewish domination of the world, by one of their number. It is in the *Protocols* that Mr. Cohn finds his answer to the central question of when anti-Semitism moves out of the realm of social attitudes into that of systematic attacks on Jews. In his words:

"As I see it, the deadliest kind of antisemitism, the kind that results in massacre and attempted genocide, has little to do with real conflicts of interest between living people, or even with racial prejudice as such. At its heart lies the belief that Jews—all Jews everywhere—form a conspiratorial body set on ruining and then dominating the rest of mankind. And this belief is simply a modernized, secularized version of the popular medieval view of Jews as a league of sorcerers employed by Satan for the spiritual and physical ruination of Christendom."

This book, then, is an investigation of how the medieval view was adapted and transformed for use in modern industrial societies in the nineteenth century, and then revived and put to work with such devastating effect in the twentieth. Mr. Cohn is a remarkable guide and interpreter in this weird subculture of mystics, swindlers, psychopaths, and charlatans of all kinds and degrees, who wrote, edited, published, and

distributed the forgeries and slanders that millions came to accept. With careful scholarship and in excellent prose, he traces the composition and describes the dissemination of the *Protocols* and related texts, and studies their impact on anti-Semitic thought.

Though the account ends in 1945, we are reminded that the myth is still propounded, particularly in areas harboring Nazi émigrés—the United Arab Republic and certain South American countries. An elaborate Spanish version of the *Protocols* was one response to the Vatican II debates on the Church's position concerning the Jews, and a new German edition printed in Switzerland has recently been reported. Elsewhere in Europe and the United States, the *Protocols* are by now virtually out of circulation.

IN AN AGE of extreme, sometimes even myopic specialization in historical studies, such extensive emphasis on ideological backgrounds might arouse suspicion that Mr. Cohn has exaggerated the importance of his own set of concerns. Nothing could be further from the truth. The author keenly understands that will-o'-the-wisp, influence, and seeks to specify the general changes in the European environment that enabled the "pathological fantasies disguised as ideas" which

Confessional

Calvin's cold control
Is bad for my young bones.
The North is far too damp,
Too flat to be annoyed
With Sunday "Rock of Ages."

I need the warm ritual of Popes.
The pious concern for hot flesh
And the dark, private
Forgiving confessionals.

In faith I can be faithless.
To know the gothic chill
Will give my body up,
To hope he too
Had eaten well.

—NORMAN JACKSON

were "churned out by crooks and half-educated fanatics for the benefit of the ignorant and superstitious" to become the foundation of national policy in Germany. It was in the widespread disorientation following the Russian Revolution and the First World War, and during the ensuing economic crises, that these ideas came to be accepted by political opportunists and seekers of scapegoats. "On the other hand all these disasters together could never have produced an Auschwitz without the help of a myth which was designed to appeal to all the paranoid and destructive potentialities in human beings."

The trials of reading this book all have to do with the nature of the materials, for the author makes deft use of his examples and spares unnecessary detail. Time and again one is struck by the grotesque disparity between the views of the anti-Semites, in all their patent and ridiculous absurdity, and the grim savagery they stimulated. Farce becomes tragic irony, and the world is its stage. Many of the key figures in the propagation of the myth would seem like comic-opera villains, were it not for the unbroken chain of thought and action that leads from them directly to the pogrom at Kishinev, the murder of Rathenau, the Nuremberg Laws, and the gas ovens. No one is more conscious of this irony than the author, who observes that "It is characteristic of the story of the *Protocols* that it keeps jerking one out of farce into the starkest tragedy."

One of the most revealing points to emerge from the postwar trials is that important Nazis involved in the "final solution" commonly believed that their acts were morally justified. Far from regarding their work as in any way reprehensible, they believed that they were making an essential contribution to civilization by ridding the world of all Jews, whose leaders were on the verge of their final conquest. The Nazis, like the Russian *pogromshchiki* before them, found the ultimate moral justification for their behavior in the myth of the conspiracy.

MR. COHN goes beyond making these connections to suggest that the Jew as an archetypal figure

has been the victim of “unconscious negative projections,” whereby he came to be regarded as the “‘bad son,’ i.e., the rebellious son full of murderous wishes towards the father, and the ‘bad father,’ i.e., the potential torturer, castrator, and killer of the son.” He presents interesting evidence for this view, which can serve at least as a working hypothesis to explain why persecution of Jews has been historically such a different phenomenon from persecution of any other social, racial, or religious group. The traditional charge of deicide, the discussions at Vatican II, and much of the lan-

guage of medieval and modern anti-Semitism help to substantiate this hypothesis. It is also compatible with Mr. Cohn’s eloquent demonstration that the appearance of what he calls “exterminatory antisemitism” has much less to do with the real position of Jews in a given society than with the presence or absence of an ideology to justify the holocaust.

Of all the fantasies that have troubled men’s minds through the ages, none has had more vicious practical consequences, nor has any received more scrupulous and penetrating research and analysis than Norman Cohn has given us here.



Modi-fied Rapture

JAY JACOBS

MODIGLIANI, by Pierre Sichel. Dutton. \$10.00.

The Italian-born painter Amedeo Modigliani managed to get through his three score years and ten in exactly half the allotted time, and appears to have spent a considerable portion of his truncated life in eyeball-to-cobblestone confrontation with the gutters of Montmartre and Montparnasse. With not much else in the way of ideas or events to write about, it would be logical to assume that any book on Modigliani running to well over five hundred pages would be concerned for the most part with

the man’s art. Pierre Sichel, the latest in a long line of Modigliani biographers, has precious little to say about his subject’s work, however, and the most interesting questions his book raises are how its covers manage to stay as far apart as they do, and why its author chose to document Modigliani’s life with stupefying prolixity when, as he himself writes, “How he lived his life does not matter.”

Let us dwell fleetingly (or at least more fleetingly than does Mr. Sichel), for example, on the author’s inexhaustible fascination with his pro-

tagonist’s good looks. In his opening remarks Mr. Sichel makes obvious his contempt for what Modigliani’s daughter called “the indulgent sentimentalists who melt as they tell of the handsome and elegant young man. . . .” Less than two pages later Mr. Sichel turns somewhat molten himself in describing his subject as an “irresistibly handsome god.” In the rubric to chapter one we are advised that Modigliani was “*joli comme un coeur*”; this is repeated on page thirty, and a page later we are informed (by a now deliquescent Mr. Sichel) that the artist-to-be was “heartbreakingly beautiful.” By page thirty-four he has become “angelically beautiful,” and as Mr. Sichel warms to his subject, he melts apace. Page thirty-nine: “the sturdy dark-haired boy with the extraordinarily handsome face”; page forty-three contains two more “handsomes” and another encore of “*joli comme un coeur*.”

So it goes at the rate of a “handsome” or such every few pages. Skipping the routine references, we get, on page seventy: “her son’s shining, ecstatic face—never more beautiful than now”; page seventy-two: “In any group of people Modigliani would have demanded a second or a third look: the rich, burnished mass of curly black hair . . . the firm, good straight nose; the strong up-tilting chin; the smooth, white-marble-like complexion with the blueish tones of a heavy beard”; page 190: “He had . . . unforgettable good looks [we are reminded]. He was still a beautiful man. He walked like a young god . . .” (further description of glossy black hair, etc.)

MR. SICHEL’s dithyramb is momentarily interrupted at this point, in part by a portfolio of photographs of Modigliani, who turns out to be not bad looking. By page 195, though, he is back on the job, this time assisted by the sculptor Jacob Epstein, who tells us that Modigliani was “handsome.” A second sculptor, Jacques Lipchitz, is recruited on page 207, and dutifully remarks on Modigliani’s “handsome appearance.” Still another sculptor, Ossip Zadkine, joins the chorus on page 221: “‘He—so beautiful, so fine in the oval of his face’”; Zadkine reappears to do the “young god” bit on the fol-