

Greeks in the Garden of Eden

Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis, by Robert Graves and Raphael Patai (Doubleday. 311 pp. \$4.95), asserts that the writers of the story of the Creation adapted ancient pagan myths to their own purposes. Theodor H. Gaster, who specializes in the mythology of the Ancient Near East, is professor of Ancient Civilizations at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

By THEODOR H. GASTER

FOR THE past few years Robert Graves has been beguiling us all with a series of highly individualistic and intrepid excursions into ancient mythology. Now, returning bloodied but unbowed from forays into the broadlands of Greek myth, he strikes out for the dense forests of the Old Testament. This time Mr. Graves is accompanied on the safari by a well-known Jewish anthropologist, presumably more familiar with the terrain. Nevertheless, the net result of their joint expedition to date amounts, one has regretfully to report, to little more than going around in circles and getting lost.

What these two daring explorers are trying to do is to reconstruct the ancient pagan myths which, as they contend, the writers of the Book of Genesis utilized and transformed to suit their own distinctive outlook and faith. This is done by aligning the Biblical stories with others told elsewhere—especially in Ancient Near Eastern and Classical liter-

ature—and by detecting in the Scriptural narratives, or rather behind them, motifs and patterns more explicitly articulated in such material.

By this method, for example, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib is derived from the misunderstanding of an ancient relief that showed the Canaanite goddess Anath poised naked in the air, "watching her lover Mot murder his twin Aliyan; Mot (mistaken . . . for Yahweh) was driving a curved dagger under Aliyan's fifth rib, not removing a sixth one." Adam's naming of the beasts is "a tale derived perhaps from a myth of how the alphabet was invented, the first and third Hebrew letters being *aleph* and *gimel*, namely, 'ox' and 'camel.'" Noah is identical with the Greek Deucalion not only as the hero of the Flood but also as the planter of the first vine, for the name Deucalion, we are informed, is simply the Greek *deuco-halieu*s, "new wine-sailor"! The 'Anaqim, a primitive race of giants in Palestine, are the descendants of Anax who, according to a Greek tradition, ruled Anactoria, in Asia Minor. Lilith, Adam's other wife in later Jewish legend, "typifies the Anath-worshipping Canaanite women, who were permitted pre-nuptial promiscuity." Canaan is the same as the Greek Agenor, and Ephron the Hittite as Phoroneus. And so on, and so on.

Let us put it on the line. As the lucubration of two imaginative and inventive minds, all this is fascinating enough, but it really amounts to no more than the imposition of a new mythology upon the old. As sound scholarship it simply

will not do. What is wrong is that the whole effort lacks discipline and control. The authors blithely jumble together genuine Biblical stories and much later Jewish elaborations of them, naively supposing that the latter represent uncensored survivals of the original pagan material. The fact is, however, that many of the later Jewish legends are simply adaptations from quite extraneous folktales picked up from other peoples in Asia and Europe among whom the Jews came to reside.

It is also painfully obvious that the authors are not at home in the languages of all the myths that they cite; else they could not possibly indulge in the fanciful etymologies and combinations on which some of their arguments are based (e.g., Ephron-Phoroneus; Eve-the Hittite goddess Khepit), for these rest all too often on rough-and-ready transcriptions that do not reproduce the original consonants.

Moreover, there is no proper attempt to stratify the stories cited and compared either ethnographically or chronologically. As every competent folklorist knows, you cannot compare stories of different cultures and ages until you have determined the history of each and thus separated the original nucleus from later borrowings and accretions. The later Jewish material is, in the main, simply lifted from Louis Ginzberg's classic *Legends of the Jews*, and the impressive parade of references resolves itself, on examination, into a wholesale pilfering from that source. The authors constantly fail to realize that because certain stories have the same general motifs, it does not follow that they are related to one another. Finally, and most importantly, stories are all too often compared because both have first been forced into the straitjackets of the authors' capricious interpretations. On this basis anything can be anything.

Take, as specimens of the authors' reliability, the examples cited above. Here are the cold facts. First: in the Canaanite myth of Aliyan Baal and Mot, Mot is not in fact killed by a knife driven into his ribs. He falls as the result of a fight in which the two antagonists charge at each other like wild animals. Subsequently, he is dispatched with a falchion by Anath herself! Second: *gimel*, the third letter of the Hebrew alphabet, probably has nothing to do with a camel. Its original form resembles a boomerang, and the name is more likely to be connected with the Akkadian word *gamlu*, which means a weapon of that type. Third: the derivation of Deucalion from *deuco-halieu*s, "new wine-sailor" is, to say the least, tenuous. The element *deukos* does not mean "new wine," but is a dialectical word for "sweet," while *halieu*s in normal



Robert Graves and Raphael Patai—"capricious interpretations."

Greek means "fisherman," not "sailor." Fourth: the 'Anaquim cannot be associated with the Greek Anax, because the earlier pronunciation of that word was Wanax, and because the Hebrew word has an initial guttural sound. Fifth: Lilith as a voluptuous sylph has nothing to do with the Canaanite Anath, since she comes from Mesopotamia. Her later development into a *succuba* is due to assimilation to the well-known child-stealing witch (e.g., Gello) of European folklore. Sixth: Canaan and Ephron are distinguished from Agenor and Phoroneus by the consonants in the Hebrew forms of the names. In general, this reviewer has counted thirty-one uncontested misstatements of fact in this volume—and it is only the first installment of a projected longer work.

It is difficult to speak with restraint of the mischief that is done to serious scholarship and research by such works as this. Coming with the prestige of Mr. Graves's eminent name, the public is all

too likely to accept it uncritically and consequently to get an entirely distorted view of what Hebrew myth really is. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly difficult to persuade Mr. Graves of his error, owing to his stubborn and cavalier disregard *ab initio* of recognized criteria of scholarship. If a man persists in setting up purely individualistic standards for the validity of his methods, intelligent discussion and criticism become impossible. True, Mr. Graves has said consistently that he is not hidebound and is ready to change his mind if other people's interpretations prove more tenable to him. But the obstinate problem arises of what Mr. Graves is going to accept as the criterion of tenability. This volume can hardly make one sanguine about the answer. One has the impression that there is too much sciolism, erudite legerdemain, and sheer intellectual gasconading at present in the way of serious discourse: Who is this that darkeneth counsel?

castigates. Where he does, in rare instances, cite the sources of his statements, he relies too heavily on historians, like Madelin and Dauban, whose works have been supplanted by subsequent research. And although he ignores the memoirs of those favorable to the Revolution, he makes extensive use of noble and/or counterrevolutionary propaganda literature.

THE author seems to suffer from the illusion that the Revolution was under the control of a handful of individuals. Thus, it was Danton who overthrew the monarchy on August 10, 1792, and Fouché who was primarily responsible for Robespierre's fall, although "the exact extent . . . of his part in the events of 9 Thermidor still remains unclear." Worse still, it was the Paris Commune, led by Marat, that organized the September Massacres. Were Mr. Loomis familiar with Caron's book on the events of September, he would recognize these extravagances for what they are. He would, furthermore, realize that, far from controlling the movement of the Paris crowd, these leaders often had difficulty in keeping up with them.

Questions of method and information aside, there are other errors that ought to be noted. Rousseau emerges as some unspecified kind of pervert of minimal philosophical and literary importance. Not only that, but he was un-French. (The attribution, whether justified or not, of foreign origin to persons Mr. Loomis dislikes is common throughout the book, a delightful example of reactionary xenophobia.) He manages to confuse the reign of virtue foreseen by Jean Jacques with sexual abstinence. He becomes downright nasty when he insinuates that most of the revolutionary leaders were not "male"—whatever that may mean. The Girondins are dismissed as having childish ideals. He tells us that the Jacobin Club, through its provincial affiliates, controlled the elections of 1792 but then says that most of those elected were neutral opportunists. A pity that he cannot have it both ways.

Finally, what are we to make of priests who "leap" over ten-foot walls to escape arrest? And what, pray tell, is a "lay priest"? How does Mr. Loomis know that the wives of certain revolutionaries were "shrill and termagant"? Is freedom of speech merely "that smokescreen behind which many another agitator has safely retired in moral rectitude"? Lack of space keeps me from going on with the list.

Those who wish a highly readable and accurate account of the Terror will still turn to R.R. Palmer's *Twelve Who Ruled*. Mr. Loomis's work ought to be consigned to the oblivion that it merits.

One Side of Violence

Paris in the Terror: June 1793-July 1794, by Stanley Loomis (Lippincott. 415 pp. \$6.95), concentrates on those who played major roles in the blood-stained days of the new French republic. Jeffry Kaplow, who teaches French history at New York University, is author of the forthcoming "Elbeuf During the Revolutionary Period."

By JEFFRY KAPLOW

THE TERROR of 1793-1794, roughly coincident with the Jacobin ascendancy in the year II of the Revolutionary Calendar, was a political instrument used to rid France of the twin evils of foreign invasion and counterrevolutionary subversion. Together with the total mobilization of men and matériel that was the *levée en masse*, it saved the Revolution. And that consideration stands out in the perspective of time as infinitely more important than the fact that some innocent persons, no doubt, fell victim to the excessive zeal of the Revolutionary Tribunal. As a moralist one can deplore their loss. But as a historian one is called upon to understand the web of circumstance in which they were caught.

No such considerations trouble Mr. Stanley Loomis, for he is not writing history, but fiction. Nor should one be misled by the title of the work. This is not a

book about the Terror at all, but about certain personalities who played a role in it: Danton, Robespierre, Marat and, of course, Charlotte Corday.

This book belongs to a genre that was thought to have died with the nineteenth century. The author evidently admires Rafael Sabatini and the Baroness Orczy. He is dominated by the image of the Parisian people as a mob and a great beast. They are "*canaille*" and their leaders are "ignorant and illiterate thugs for the most part," and both are dominated by the "terrible Marat," who is a "pariah of history." Indeed, Mr. Loomis's sympathy for his characters seems to vary in direct proportion to their noble rank and the way in which they faced execution. Thus, Charlotte Corday is not once but four times a "comely" young woman of "generous spirit," while Marat "crept out of the sewers" to show his "twitching face and rolling eyes."

Mr. Loomis is concerned about the "human side" of the French Revolution rather than its political and economic bases. Yet how can one understand the role of individuals without studying the issues that divide them? Mr. Loomis assures us that "little that is of interest or importance" in the National Archives in Paris remains unpublished (a false statement in itself), but he nowhere makes use of the results of existing research to tell us about the condition of the peasant or urban artisan who formed the crowds he so vigorously