



only from his being “sick of being ruled by the goyim,” but because he believed that it could provide fertile grounds for the renaissance of Judaism as a whole. This was the source of his tremendous fear that after the 1967 War, the whole character of the state was liable to change.

Rosen-Zvi discerns another phase in Leibowitz's thinking during the Lebanon War: He began to call upon soldiers to disobey orders, dwelled less on the character of the state and reforms, and introduced more and more ethical terminology when speaking of the occupation. He also notes that Leibowitz expressed clear religious Zionist views when discussing the desirable character of the state in the 1930s and '40s.

A private matter

From the 1950s on, he stopped talking about a Torah state and began to push for the separation of religion and state, with halakha relegated to the private domain. Rosen-Zvi explains that this change was due to a more realistic view of the state as essentially secular at the core, and recognition of the vital role of religion as an independent opposition, not only in Israel, but in countries everywhere.

Science was another major part of Leibowitz's intellectual and worldly pursuits. Uri Ram (“Knowledge and Opinion: Leibowitz's Theory of Knowledge and the Post-Modern Challenge”) argues that Leibowitz's basic position on knowledge and opinion was clearly modernist and positivist. He drew a strict line “between text and context, opinion and knowledge, subject and object, culture and nature.” According to this approach, knowledge is totally distinct from “what should be” or opinions on “what is.” Ram offers an impressive and comprehensive analysis of various approaches in the sociology of knowledge and opinion. He breaks new ground in suggesting that Leibowitz, the scientist, could be seen as a proponent of the “modern-critical pragmatic approach,” perhaps even against his will. Ram further points out that while Leibowitz insisted that knowledge and values were totally separate, he recognized that matters were more complex when it came to medicine.

Two other excellent articles in the book are those of Prof. Asa Kasher (“Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Between Responsibility and Criticism”) and Prof. Avi Saguy (“Religious Commitment and Cultural Angst: Leibowitz as a Test Case”). Saguy compares Martin Heidegger and Leibowitz on the subject of “cultural angst.” For Heidegger, cultural angst plays a central role in man's journey to authenticity. Leibowitz refuses to discuss culture. He says that human identity is shaped by religious commitment. Kasher explores the fascinating turning point in Leibowitzian thought, from an early period of thinking, when he declared that religion and nationalism were not separate entities, to when he later called the very concept of religious nationalism “an abomination.”

While it is impossible to mention all of them here, the book contains other articles that are no less impressive in subject matter and insight. The final product testifies not only to the high level of the contributors and the skill of the editor, but also to the uniqueness of Leibowitz's thought.

Over the years, people may have become more critical of Leibowitz, especially his strident and extreme views on certain subjects, and indeed, many have opted, as time passes, for a more complex and dialectical approach. But I have the feeling that it will not be long before interest in Leibowitz's keen and perceptive distinctions resumes with renewed vigor.

worships himself, and his idealistic humanism turns into fascism and communism, paving the road to atrocities perpetrated in their name.

Using these very same words, Leibowitz shows that he is a humanist, in that he warns of the evil that looms if the pursuit of human freedom descends into totalitarianism. It is Leibowitz's own humanism that makes him want to reject it.

In his article “Political Radicalism in the Thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz: History, Theology and Ethics,” Yishai Rosen-Zvi takes a different approach to Leibowitzian ethics. In 1929, Leibowitz wrote: “With respect to the Arabs, we choose only the rights and points of view that we are prepared to recognize.” His harsh criticism of Israel's conduct in Qibya in 1953, and Kafr Kassem three years later, is also well known. In the wake of the Six-Day War and the First Lebanon War, his political views changed, but remained radical. A few days after the Six-Day War, he was already calling for unilateral withdrawal from the territories. In 1970, he wrote: “The territories do not interest me at all. The only thing that matters to me is the quarter of a million Arabs living there, and not because I care about the Arabs but because I care about the Jewish people and its state. Incorporating these Arabs within our jurisdiction means the destruction of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Israel will be turned into a country of the Shin Bet, with a devastating outcome for education and the democratic system of government.”

Up until 1967, Leibowitz criticized the way Israel's wars were run, writes Rosen-Zvi, but from then on, he disapproved of the violation of human rights that became a basic component of Israeli rule over the territories. Rosen-Zvi rightly points out that Leibowitz's enthusiastic support of the establishment of the state derived not

FICTION

‘Are you in this family?’

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ceremony, the young groom, Leo Rubin, eldest son of the famous feminist crusader Rabbi Claudia Rubin, steps off the maternal bimah and into the middle-aged arms of his lover, the rebbetzin of a competing London synagogue. Pandemonium follows, broadens, briefly flags, and then comes into its glorious own, upending the lives of all six Rubins and a number of not-so innocent bystanders.

To guide us through the Rubins' deliciously disastrous story, we are presented with three characters who are at long last emerging from the suffocating fumes of myth in which Claudia Rubin wraps her kin like a musky perfume. We spend most of the book following Frances, the anxious, awkward eldest child, whose passive way of going through life has landed her with two reluctant stepchildren and a husband who reacts to her state of emotional near-collapse by observing, “You seem distracted. I think you should seriously consider switching to herbal tea.” Then there is Leo himself, the boringly responsible barrister, made terribly irresponsible but not significantly less boring, by forbidden, all-consuming lust. Finally, there is Paterfamilias Norman, who for decades has been content to write small books about minor poets, allowing his wife to claim all things big and major for herself. “It's so interesting that you're the less successful one. Do you find it emasculating?” he is

ing because, “if it upsets Mum I don't want it either.”

I found myself longing to see inside these frazzled psyches, not just to balance out the inner monologues of their kinder, duller siblings, but also because I suspect that Mendelson, with her careful attention to the details that make up a mind, could have done justice to them in a way most writers could not. But, alas, we are never given a revealing glimpse of the two damaged people behind the grotesque behavior.

Lawson meets Lerner

Nor are we given much insight into that cynosure of Jewish London, Rabbi Claudia Rubin herself. We are told many times about her irresistible beauty, her larger-than-life persona, and her “infinitely exciting mind.” She is Nigella Lawson meets Michael Lerner, only far, far better. Yet the bits of the book narrated from her perspective are the least revealing, filled with such gems of introspection as, “She has always thought that if the surface were perfect, the rest would follow. Could she have been wrong?” A renowned expert on family rearing, she meets challenges from her children with the question, “Are you in this family or against it?” and as the lives of her loved ones fall apart around her she is only minimally concerned with their pain, caring far more about the resulting ugliness and what this might do to her public



As individual dramas begin to interlock, marriages end, new fame blossoms in unlikely places, boys turn out to be girls, and an over-the-top Seder goes horribly awry.

asked at one point, and we are given to believe this sort of thing happens often. Norman is a beautifully realized character, real and intimate and heart-breaking, and I had the nagging sense throughout that his family had characteristically and quite unjustly elbowed him into too small a corner of the book. He could have carried it on his own.

Left as intriguing ciphers are the two younger Rubin children, who seem to have built a life out of family obsession simply because it was easier than cobbling one together through hard work and adult decisions. At ages 27 and 30, neither has any career to speak of; both live at home, straining the family budget to its breaking point; and both think it terribly unkind and selfish of the two elder siblings not to do the same. Sim, savagely gorgeous, casually violent, and a genius of as-yet-undefined talent, spends his days collecting family artifacts (even grocery lists go into the collection), bedding women, and inexplicably loathing his older brother, Leo. Emily, also a beautiful genius without a medium, decides at age 27 to stop dat-

reputation. It is no wonder that her husband and children are still struggling to understand how to give weight to their own preferences.

As these struggles move forward, and the individual dramas begin to interlock, marriages end, new fame blossoms in unlikely places, boys turn out to be girls, romances pop up where they ought not, and an over-the-top Seder goes horribly awry. Often hilarious, and consistently fun, still these plotlines – engaging as they are – are almost beside the point. They are merely vehicles for the resolution of some serious mother issues. Luckily, and without giving away too much, none of these get too neatly resolved. This is not psychotherapy lit, but clever social satire, and it builds to an ending that is more elegant than redemptive. And this, after all, is what we want from the self-obsessed family: to be able to forgive just enough to move past them, but not enough to forget them.

Yael Goldstein's novel “Overture” was published earlier this year by Doubleday.