

ROBERT COOPERMAN

Menachim Landau, a Hebraist, After the Anti-Yiddish Riot at the Mograbi Theatre: Tel Aviv, 1930

To protest the premiere of the first Yiddish talkie in Tel Aviv, Hebrew speakers attacked the theatre with smoke bombs and tossed ink at the screen.

A hard land requires hard men,
not these Yiddish speaking socialists,
with their endless glasses of tea sucked
through sugar cubes, their interminable
debates over Lenin or Trotsky,
as if arguing about football forwards.

Action, not talk, will win this land
from the Arabs in the war that's coming,
the one that'll make the Arab riots of 1921
look like a game of "King of the Mountain."

As for that kerfuffle at the Mograbi yesterday?
Our way of showing the Yiddishers
what to expect when the Arabs wake up
to what we're up to: *they* won't be content
with smoke bombs and tossed ink at a screen.

The most ruthless win the free-for-alls
that pass for history. Look at the American,
the French revolutions. Time to be one giant fist
and to strike; if the Yiddishers can't see that,
they'll be trampled, as were our cringing
parents and grandparents, by the Tsar's Cossacks.

Give me King David's war chariots.
Hell, give me guns, grenades, tanks,
and the Hebrew to back up our claims
to the land that was ours millennia before
there was Yiddish, even if the Book of Joshua
is more poetry than a proper deed.

Chaim Levin, After the Anti-Yiddish Riot at the Mograbi Theatre: Tel Aviv, 1930

When the mob burst in, like bison stampeding
in a Western movie, I trembled under a seat:

Hebrewer shtarkers hurled smoke bombs,
flung ink at the screen; and suddenly
it was 1921: Arabs trying to murder all us Jews.

When the Arab's gun had jammed, I ran,
my legs sticky in the fig syrup of my fear.
I burst into our flat, and beheld Magda,
her throat slit; all my fault: for thinking
it more important to report on the riots,
than to protect my darling. I wept, beat my chest;
then saw the knife in her bloody hand, and knew
she'd been braver than me, had wounded
her murderer; I searched the hospitals,
but never found him: doctors and staff staring
at the bloodstained knife in my hands.

I never remarried: too guilty, too scared
to be responsible for another in a world dangerous
as Masada. Nine years later, I just wanted
to watch a harmless movie, but in Palestine
every public act is of Biblical significance,
and that's not even counting the Arabs.

So when the Hebrew mob burst in, I hid,
pressed a handkerchief to my mouth, against
drifting smoke, like battlefield poison gas.
When it was over, I scrambled out,
and ran to the cemetery, to trace my hand
along Magda's stone as if her dear face,
whenever she'd take me in her arms
and kiss away the troubles of the world.

The Decency

After Nixon was forced to resign,
Professor Stanley spat—
while he treated a bunch of us
grad students to Friday afternoon beers—

“If only he'd had the decency
to blow his brains out.”

Professor Stanley had flown missions
over Korea, and, it was rumored,
had once bombed the wrong village.

More rumors had it he'd tried to kill himself,
but the gun was wrestled from his grip,
and years of counseling had helped,

though we'd padded past his sobbing
office that late Friday afternoon,
a couple of us grad students bull-shitting
down the hall in our own cubby-hole office:

until he knocked, and asked
if he could treat us all to a few beers,
and we thought it a kindness
not to let him drink alone.

Robert Cooperman's latest collection is *Just Drive*, from Brick Road Poetry Press. His work has appeared previously in *The Homestead Review* as well as in *Measure* and *The Sewanee Review*.