



מלועה לש הדובאה ותמשנ
סוכרמ דוד לש תיתורפסה ותביתכו קרוקב תידוהיה הליהקה

The Lost Soul of the World The Cork Jewish Community and the Fiction of David Marcus

Anam ídithe an domhain
Pobal na nGiúdach i gCorcaigh agus Scríbhinní
de chuid David Marcus



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by
Gerald Y. Goldberg



Civic reception for David Marcus
Cork City Hall, 23 April 2008

Published by Cork City Libraries, 2008

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First published in *The Cork Review* 1993

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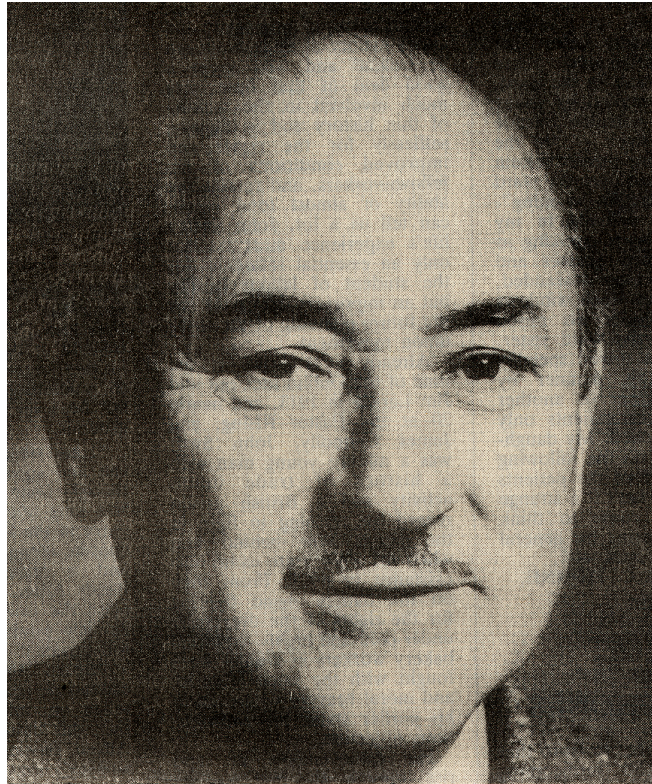
Introduction

The decision by Cork City Council to grant a Civic Reception to David Marcus, one of the city's greatest literary sons, is a very welcome one. The Civic Reception prompted Cork City Libraries to bring this essay on Marcus's writing and the well whence it springs back into the public domain. The essay is written with insight by his uncle Gerald Y. Goldberg, himself a former Lord Mayor.

David Marcus has made a unique and decades-long contribution to Irish literature, as a writer of novels and short stories, as a memoirist, as an editor and anthologist of an astonishing list of collections, as borne out by the bibliography at the end of this booklet, as the long-serving editor of 'New Irish Writing' in the *Irish Press*, and as mentor to many emerging writers – Neil Jordan, Clare Keegan, Pat McCabe, Dermot Bolger are just some of the writers first published by David.

The Cork World Book Fest is a celebration of books and reading, and I can think of nothing more appropriate to the spirit of the Fest than this celebration of David's life and work.

Liam Ronayne
Cork City Librarian



David Marcus

I am the eleventh child born to my father, Louis Judah Goldberg and my mother, born Rachel Sandler. They were married at the Synagogue, Cork, on September 23rd, 1891. He was twenty-four years old, described in their marriage certificate as of 23, Mount Pleasant, Limerick, and a dealer. She was seventeen years old and a Spinster. As far as I know there was no Registry of Births in Ackmehan (now Ackmene) in the province of Kovno (now Kaunas) Lithuania, where he was born hence the date of his birth is guessed as being in or about the year 1867 for he arrived, unintentionally, in Ireland, as a boy of fourteen years running away from conscription into the Russian army to which penance every Jewish male child, with certain exceptions, was liable from the age of twelve years and upwards. To most Jewish children this offered a living death from which, even if they survived thirty years conscription and banishment from their villages, there was no other way out other than escape. And the escape was America. The call came from a Jewish poet, Emma Lazarus, whose words were addressed to the poor and the needy, the persecuted and the refugee. They are carved in stone on the Statue of Liberty at the entrance to New York harbour and many an Immigrant from Europe read and wondered and gave thanks to the Almighty for the promise it contained not knowing or forgetting that it was a Jewish voice wrote the words. There was a primary reason, however, why my father chose America. He was the son of my Grandfather's second wife - Elka Kurland: As the surname suggests she came from the country then known as Kurland - now Estonia. She was a trained confectioner and she brought into the family a fluent German, apart from the Yiddish jargon used by Jewish people to communicate with each other. One of the privileged occupations permitted to some Jews was that of owning and running a 'Shenkel' - a public house.

This was a hazardous occupation as customers from time to time became unruly and were known to burn down Jewish pubs. I don't know whether this was the cause of the fire which destroyed the shack which housed the 'Goldberg Arms' in Ackmehan, but burn it did and following this my Grandfather Szymon David Goldberg suffered a heart attack and died. By his first wife a daughter had been born. She had married a man named Clein and with an Irishman named O'Connor set up a boot and shoe business in Chicago. I remember writing a letter, in English, which my father dictated to me. The firm of 'O'Connor and Goldberg' still subsists in Chicago but research has failed to elucidate any information as to the whereabouts of either one or other of their descendants.

Following marriage with my mother my father brought his wife to Limerick. He brought grandmother Elka, his brothers and a sister over from Ackmehan and two of my mother's brothers 'obliged' by coming from Cork to live with them, and there they lived until the events of 1903-1904 when the Jewish Community of Limerick saw the beginning of its end. In due course my father brought his growing family to Leeds, Yorkshire, where his younger brother Solomon Goldberg, who had worked as an unpaid Secretary for Theodore Herzl, had married and settled down, devoting his life to Zionism. When you read *To Next Year in Jerusalem* and *A Land Not Theirs* you may find the foregoing a help to a better understanding of the inner life of a Jew in Cork, its internal politics, its wranglings, and never-ending disputes; but, above all its loyalty to and love of Judaism and its concern for Palestine as it, then, was. You will find English the predominant language of the novels, but Yiddish and Irish are used in the text. The one remembers the past, the other pays tribute to the present and the future.

In Limerick there was born, among several children, to my father

and mother, my sister Francis Rebecca Goldberg, David's mother. She was not their first child; but she was the first child to survive. She must count as one of the greatest influences in both my own and David Marcus's life. She was possessed of a remarkable memory and at the age of sixty set down her recollections and reminiscences of life in Limerick and paints a rich picture of Jewish communal life. She met Daniel Corkery when she lived in Cork and with Frank O'Connor joined the little class in literature which Corkery gave. She became a Nationalist and with my sister Molly joined the Cumann na mBan. I remember their marching in a parade one or two years following upon the death of Thomas Ashe. They were led by Ms Mary McSweeney.

I do not suggest that the Republican story told by David in *A Land Not Theirs* emanated from his mother. The events he writes about are within my own personal recollection in so far as they consist of fact. What I am trying to say is that the influence on David Marcus cannot disregard those of his mother and, possibly, of my sister Molly (Shillman) in whose home in Terenure, Co. Dublin, he lived while studying for his call to the Irish Bar. My sister married Solomon Marcus on 7 March 1918 at the Synagogue. He was described as a 'Photo Frame Manufacturer' and the business he established is still in existence in Cork. He was a member of a distinguished Dublin and Cork Jewish family strongly nurtured in traditional Judaism, its history and literature.

The foregoing is only a skeleton sketch of a family experience which had its ups and downs and which call for treatment elsewhere.

Early Writings

David Marcus wrote *To Next Year in Jerusalem* and published it in 1954. It was an early work but mature. It bore all the signs of an artist trying to get out from a particular mode of life. It encompassed all the trials and tribulations of a young boy on the verge of manhood. There is no suggestion that the hero of the work is other than a serious minded, responsible individual concerned with all the problems that manhood brings. How he deals with them is the kernel of the work. Jonathan, the hero of the novel, is not an entirely fictional creation any more than are many of the characters who teem in and about the narrative. In some respects he is David Marcus. Notice that Jonathan is the product of several cultures. If English predominates as the language in which the work is written, Yiddish, from time to time, rises to his tongue. Irish, from time to time is spoken between Jonathan and Father Jim, a Roman Catholic priest, in the course of their discussions.

I think that Jonathan, as a character, sums up the difficulties of Jewish life in Cork. Looking back it was a life inhibited by superstition, chaotic, grim life, a struggle for survival, a people suspicious of and wary of each other as well as of their non-Jewish citizens, a life subsumed by fear. We have a positive indication and declaration of this when Father Jim urges Jonathan to accept nomination as President of a particular club. Jonathan's instinct is to refuse the offer: He explains –

“I feel as if my soul is perpetually in Exile. I feel as if I have no roots, no home, nothing to rely on, nothing I can be sure of. I am always wary, on the *qui vive*, as it were. In a sense I am always afraid.” (p 140)

A gap of thirty-two years separates the publication of *To Next Year in Jerusalem* from *A Land Not Theirs*. When I read the later novel I was impressed by the apparent association between it and

the earlier work. In *A Land Not Theirs* two freedoms are involved – that of the right of Ireland and its people to self determination. The other is the right of Diaspora Jews and elsewhere to live in peace. I saw, also, the determination of Irish Jews to be a part of the rebuilding of the Land of Israel. Once again I find myself reading events which conjure up the images of things past, a past to which we were reaching out and so that ‘here, upon this bank and shoal of time, we’d jump the life to come’.

I think I should revert to a series of incidents described by David Marcus when the Jewish inhabitants of Drumgoole send plenipotentiaries to Israel with a view to spying out the land, making a purchase of land upon which the community could start and settle down to a new life. When I was a boy of twelve I would remain on in the Synagogue after Hebrew classes had ended. There was a small cupboard in the classroom and I avidly searched through the mass of papers which had been hastily and without examination cast aside. There I found a Minute Book setting out meetings of what was known as ‘The Lovers of Zion’, founded in Russia and the Baltic countries by Dr Leo Pinsker a forerunner of the Zionist organisation. This Society which had as its motto the famous saying of the great Rabbi Hillel - ‘If I am not for myself who is for me; and if not now when’. In the Minute Book I read the recorded events of Cork Jews (Drumgoole) described by David. When Chief Rabbi David Rosen was leaving Ireland to take up a teaching post in Israel he asked me for something which he could offer Chaim Herzog, President of the State of Israel. I gave him the original Minute Book which in turn was presented to the President who, in turn, presented it to the Archive of the Zionist organisation. I received a letter of thanks expressing amazement that so small a community as ours had made so great a contribution, as disclosed by the Minute Books, to the cause of Israel.

Irish Writing and its Beginnings

Some time in the year 1927, when a student at Presentation College, I found myself occupying the same school desk with a boy of my own age. He was in class but not of the class. A dreamer - he lived in a world of his own. He was highly strung. He was not the type from which a student is made. Neither Latin or Irish or Maths concerned him and, more frequently than was necessary, he suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in the form of many strokes of the *slat*. But when English, as a subject, was reached then his eyes lit up and he launched forth on aspects of literature and of writers remote from our ken. Once, our English teacher, a Waterford man named Connolly, brought that great Irish writer Donn Byrne to talk with the students; but it is with my desk mate that the discussion took place. Terence Smith was his name and he lived on the Western Road. He was a strong influence in my appreciation of English literature. In due course he became a sub-editor in *The Cork Examiner* whence he gravitated to Dublin. When some twenty years ago I crossed swords with a Limerick gentleman on the events which we call 'pogrom' (a word which is understood by us as referable to fears which arise out of violence rather than to the mass murders associated with it) I received a large number of supportive letters. Among them I recognised the handwriting of Terence Smith. It was an unsigned letter but his genius, the very richness of his words, the manner in which he expressed himself left me in no doubt but that it was he. He would take my exercises in English literature and pen short notes correcting my clumsy writing and advising how I could improve myself. Once he came to me with a volume of Essays by Walter Pater on the Renaissance and Leonardo da Vinci. At the same time he had in his possession a copy of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* selected by William Butler

Yeats. He urged upon me the beauties of Pater as exemplified and contained in his thoughts about the Mona Lisa: 'She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire she has been dead many times'; 'what Pater wrote', he added, 'was pure poetry and Yeats has set it out as such'.

Irish Writing was published at a time when there was a dearth of literature relating to the Short Story and no little opportunity for Irish writers to find a market for their skills. David and Terence Smith were its first editors and David's brother Abraham (Brammie) Marcus was its business manager. I played a slight part in ensuring its birth by becoming, for a short space of time, its financial guarantor. In the course of a brilliantly written foreword the joint editors wrote.

"If, as Yeats sang "Our mother Éire is always young", it is to her literature we turn today for evidence of the quickened pulse. And it is to the world as an active influence in creative literature, that Ireland gives of her bounty'.

Indeed there was no end to the courage and achievement of the 'only true begetters' of the legacy of Irish writing. Just as was *The Bell* in its own genre so was *Irish Writing* a gift *inter vivos* whose achievement has never received the recognition it deserved.

The exposure to cosmopolitan influences initiated by *The Bell* and *Studies* in the 1940s, and by *Envoy* and *Irish Writing* in the 1950s, was expected to facilitate the process of modernisation, bringing Irish Society into line with the rest of the advanced industrial nations.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The creative act, word, and thought are indivisible. They represent the summa summorum of the writers art and a 'Guide for the Perplexed'. Actually, Moses Maimonides, better known as 'the Rambam', wrote the work so named. Joyce found it and in spite of mis-translating the title, brought it to the notice of non-Jewish readers. Thus, "Averoes and Moses Maimonides, dark men in mien and movement flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness showing in brightness which brightness could not apprehend". I apprehend Maimonides's works are as difficult as Joyce's but they are illustrative of 'the obscure soul of the world' and the brightness lies in the function of word, thought and literature. After all Joyce did as much for the short story as an art form as any writer then or since, and never let it be forgotten that *Dubliners* was the forerunner of a word picture of that city and its peoples. I say 'peoples' rather than 'people' because *Ulysses* was the first fictional work to feature an Irish-Jewish character, one of the greatest in world fiction. And may I say that I think *A Land Not Theirs*, in its own way, is a picture of Cork and its peoples that will never die.

Years ago when I was researching the history of Jewish Communities in the City of Cork I came across a work by Alexander the Coppersmith, written in 1791, which opened with the fascinating statement,

"Tho the Jews appear by a peculiar malediction to be dispersed into every flourishing sea port upon Earth yet I can't find a Synagogue in this second City of the Kingdom".

The words 'a peculiar malediction' are a misdescription 'rough hew them how you will'. I regard the statement as one of the best Irish-Jewish short stories ever penned. Alexander didn't try hard enough.

My late brother-in-law, Bernard Shillman, the Republic's first Senior Counsel, in a lecture delivered to the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1925, established the existence of a graveyard in Cork and an older one in Dublin, and he urged me to search it out, find and identify it. I did but my identification erred in that it was another Jewish Community and not the one that Alexander might have found if he looked for it. At the same time I found Isaac Periera who was the Duke of Marlborough's Commissary-general in September 1694 when he invaded and captured the City of Cork. But, for future generations of Coppersmiths just as Joyce word-painted Dublin so David Marcus has word-painted Cork. Both David Marcus's novels lovingly describe the streets, alley ways and bye-ways of the city by which it will be remembered. And, I think that word and thought may well have been the touchstone which lit-up David's approach: to a sensitive problem, that of two freedoms. That is why I regard these works as a gift *inter vivos* rather than a legacy. His love of literature, of writing and especially the short story as an art form has inspired and passed on to untold dedicated writers who test their mettle in the jousting yard of the written and spoken word urged on by the words of Macbeth - "but screw your courage to the sticking place and we'll not fail".

I have, already, dared to speak of the dearth of literary opportunity open to young writers in the Ireland of the 1950s, the need to express oneself, the greater need to find an avenue that would lead one to public recognition. There were all kinds of urgings and all were associated with words, words and, still, more words. In *The Magic Mountain* one of Mann's greatest characters, September, speaks of literature as,

“nothing else than the combination of humanism and politics”, and goes on to enlarge “upon the cult of ‘the word’, the art of eloquence, which he called the triumph of the human genius - for the word was the glory of mankind, it alone imparted dignity to life and not only was humanism bound up with the word, and with literature, but so also was humanity itself, man’s ancient dignity and manly self-respect”.

In a glorious peroration he reminded us that “writing well was the next thing to acting well. All moral discipline, all moral perfection derived from the soul of literature”. David Marcus has succeeded in opening the literary treasures in Aladdin’s metaphorical cave and Ireland is all the better for it. Synge who found inspiration from listening to the soft talk of servant girls through a chink in the floor never anticipated that he would see the day when literateurs like David Marcus would open a window and lead the good clean, exciting air of twentieth century Irish literature into that of the twenty-first. Therefore let us salute him - Exegi monumentum aere perennius: My work is done, the memorial more enduring than brass.

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