

1984 ISRAEL COMMENTARY 2025

1984 ISRAEL: A PERSONAL MOBILE for Yosef Druch (1921-90)

I. CAESAREA: ARCHEOLOGY

Where water was not to be had
naturally Herod had an aqueduct built

stones exposed to rain erode

was thought to date back to
but in fact dates back to

the history book says

where one builds another suffers
the owner says

stones exposed to wind give in

dusk collects the changing hours
in this tourist art gallery café

ruins raised for new use

David's Star flies high
lit above the amphitheater

war jets tear at air.

II. MENASHE HILLS: ISRAELI PERIODS

The cut is in

and all that glitters after is glean for storks

en route from Asia to Africa

they say
3,000 years ago
through Wadis Ara and Milek
Egyptian and Assyrian troops worked their way to and from the sea
that hungry men without provisions stopped here
collecting carob hyssop berries fennel even capers
brewed and cooked with wild meat

at the margins of the fields
sunlight blasts eucalyptus into shrapnel of shade
bougainvillea burst magenta
and oleanders snake through the sloughs
atop fence posts
the song of meadowlarks are torn
by sirens from factory towns
and war jets from the base.

III. SOURCES OF THE JORDAN

Fenced in by Lebanon
petal fall of almonds
encircling the trunks
sheltered from Syria
flocks of white cattle egrets
jazzing the herd
figs trees greening out

among roots and rocks
of the Banyas the Hatsbani and the Dan
where rivers meet
what makes all else possible
flows blood in water.

IV. AEROGRAM FROM ROSH HANIKRA

No sleep last night. Too sun burnt to use sheets. Up early & out to do these old grottos. A new hat to beat heat. We've just been ordered to wait inside this funky café. Helicopters & gunfire—hope they're just practicing. Tanks & bulldozers & Lebanese swarming checkpoint—the fighting must be right over the hill. Somebody told me Beirut—Alexandria railway once ran right below these chalky cliffs. Ice plant blossoms blaze like crazy. Fantastic street food everywhere shoots my diet to hell. I'll mail this in Nahariyah when we get back.

V. TIMEPIECE: TEL-AVIV

Where dust paths cross
blood red hands a coral tree
offers flowers to the plaza at large

where people passing through don't seem to notice
lunch hour litter impaled on palms
or the sundial shaped by fronds
in pairs and trios of solitude
they step across clock spokes
shadows shifting as noon goes down.

VI. YOM HAZIKACRON: REMEMBRANCE DAY

Sirens slash

names named

songs sung

stones set down

with weeping and flowers in a broken vase

sirens slash

troops

back on trucks

transported away.

VII. TZFAT: EREV SHABBAT

At sundown

over Mounts Meron and Canaan

a full moon floats

high above the blue graves of the holy

I can see from afar

but not go down

under the palms

through dwarf blue doorways leading

into courtyards to synagogues

beneath balconies

behind wooden doors
beside veiled windows
evening escorts me past their singing
a humming I can hear
but not go in

I listen
outside the centers of their prayer.

VIII. HAR MEGGIDO: EXCAVATIONS

Blades clash
grips slip
if and when whatever war is about to be
is about to undo all

first one hand flies off at the wrist
then another
until nothing is left
but the reddened earth.

IX. HAIFA: BAT GALLIM

Amid date tree debris and litter of eucalypts
with trumped-up Mediterranean memories I sit
in ceremonial preference for instant nostalgia
my face in cracked pane glass a souvenir

the ritual café entry in another man's land
the one beloved
soon I will be leaving you.

*

Container ships sailing low toward Haifa Port
an antique train skirting the coastline
below stones at Akko
beyond cliffs of sunlit Rosh Hanikra
beneath clouds carrying the Mediterranean inland
to Jordan or Syria
around its base Mount Carmel
sports radars and weaponry
what's not named or numbered is suspect.

*

The owner rolls his morning awning out
within seconds the click of heels
your head of hennaed hair
your rings bracelets necklace
moving between me and the sea
then the foreign accent again
and one last look between our eyes
first one then the other
between entries in the book.

*

This song is a pair of footprints
in sand already shifting, a fish
about to be caught, an empty freighter
riding high out to sea
at the promenade's end
where three of Christ's wives from Stella Maris come down
to lift hems and bare white calves
to the warm October waters of Haifa Bay
at Sunday School I wandered in the Holy Land taped up
alongside a poster of Jesus in long hair and striped robe

[*sung to the tune of* OH TANNENBAUM]

“First the line of Coast we make,
Meron next, a marshy lake,
Then the Sea of Galilee
Exactly east of Carmel Sea.
The Jordan River runs through both
To the Dead Sea on the South,
And the Great Sea westward lies
Stretching far as sunset skies.”

*

A broken reflection I traffic in
images to sweep me away
never at ease
watching their manners
listening for the ripple of our last words

flicked at rushing water
dead letters thrown off
taking leave
a guest apart
watching my manners
the ghost I dance to a peninsular end
invents a new solitude then pauses
to consider how far out is.

*

The once beloved
now I will be leaving you.

*

As if none of us will know a natural death.

COMMENTARY 2025

PREFACE August 1983 I made my first visit to Israel when my wife and I went prospecting for a kibbutz in which to live and, eventually, raise a family—possibly. Welcomed as “special guests” on Ein-Hashofet in January 1984, we began a two-year trial period, testing whether our participation would be a mutual match between the kibbutz and us as candidates for permanent membership. My wife was a Sabra returning to Eretz Israel after six or seven years abroad. I was a West Coast WASP originally hailing from metropolitan NYC and New England.* Fall 1984 I announced I would be leaving the kibbutz and our experiment—including the new immigrant/citizenship process—behind; by January 1985 I was back in the USA where, following a brief trial separation, my wife rejoined me in the SF Bay Area.

* In grand sweeps and granular detail, NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS recounts the first thirty-three years of my life prior to meeting Ophira in Santa Cruz CA in April 1981. Document accessible at peterboffey.com.

ISRAEL 1984: A PERSONAL MOBILE remains intact from poems drafted during that year, reshaped and refined upon my return to the States. In 2024, with Hell on Earth playing out louder than ever in the Wholly Crazy “land of two peoples,” I revisited the sequence and composed my 2025 commentary to the original poetry.

The *subtitle*, A PERSONAL MOBILE, indicates the interrelated nature of the nine separate poems. Under the influence of the Roman and Byzantine tilework preserved in places I was exposed to while traveling and living in Israel, I had entertained the notion of labeling the sequence as a mosaic (no pun intended). But all the mosaics I saw existed on floors, yielding a flattened effect; their artful, two-dimensional arrangements typically presented patterns of teleological and historical narrative. Although ISRAEL 1984 does present itself in a linear sequence, whether read on the page or heard when read aloud; although it does re-present a progressive gain of knowledge (mine), its individual pieces, which may stand up alone, generate a livelier dynamic when suspended in relationship. Conceived as a mobile rather than a mosaic, the poems become moving parts, shifting and interacting in ways more accurately approximating my own felt experiences during the turning of seasons in the public sphere and my private life.

The *dedicatee*, my father-in-law, Yosef “Joe” Druch (1921–90) along with his wife Miriam enfolded me into their loving Haifa home in both 1983 and 1984. I relished our daylong and overnight excursions en famille throughout Northern Israel. Also, with extraordinary patience, the entire family helped me navigate the challenges and singular stressors of my eventually aborted induction into what was a new and foreign country.

I had gradually to admit that the overly simplistic Zionist premises which were shoring up my immigration campaign were infinitely more complicated than I had ever imagined. The long, complex, and contentious debates about the relative values of various versions of Zionism and the Jewish Diaspora are embedded in ISRAEL 1984. Explicitly and implicitly, this background argumentation was not preconceived as a theme but emerged as the poems were written and rewritten, raising unsettling questions about the resilience of institutional democracy in the Middle East and the ultimate sustainability of a militarized political State of Israel. Juxtaposing past and present “periods”—imagined encounters running throughout the separate poems—foments, I hope, a deep questioning of standard histories and historiography, subjecting habitual assumptions to further scrutiny

COMMENTARY (A)

I. CAESAREA: ARCHEOLOGY At the site of a major port and colonial settlement of the Roman occupation, extensive visible ruins—including an amphitheater re-purposed for contemporary performances and ceremonies—set the mood of an omnipresent and, for me, inescapable *memento mori* writ large. Ubiquitous evidence of the military technology buttressing Israeli domination since 1948 seemed to iterate the advanced engineering technology of Herod and Co. (1st c. CE). This poem’s subtitle is meant to provoke a conflation of past, present, and

future tenses, challenging the premise of historical progress and underscoring the questionable “escape clauses” of historiography.

Throughout this “personal mobile,” the poetry wrestles with the political power of place names. The very terms of engagement seem to entrench perhaps insolvable conflicts between two peoples laying claims to the resources of the land “between the river and the sea” in the Southern Levant. Are we dealing with an *Arab* problem? A *Jewish* problem? A *Palestinian* problem? All of the above? Academic questions seem moot during episodes of all-out war.

II. MENASHE HILLS: ISRAELI PERIOD A blatant parallelism between past and present informs this poem as well. Wadi Ara, once part of the ancient route of the Roman Via Maris, connects the Jezreel Valley with the coast and, in broader terms, Egypt with Syria. A network of historically significant kibbutzim occupies this region between Mt. Carmel and Mount Amir/Umn el-Fuhm located in the Coastal Range. Ein-Hashofet was neighbor to Ramat Hashofet and Ramat Menashe; these and other influential kibbutzim of the Kibbutz Artzi organization derived from the Hashomir Hatzair youth movement in Europe.

III. SOURCES OF THE JORDAN Kibbutz Ein-Hashofet invited me—as a volunteer worker and *ulpanist* (Hebrew language student)—on its language school-organized field trips throughout the country. Armed with a paperbound edition of the popular GUIDE TO ISRAEL (1969) by Zev Vilnay (1900–1988), I was exposed to a rich array of sites and Jewish-inflected stories, and became familiar with a variety of maps—a specialty of that geographer-author. The GUIDE was itself saturated in references to the writings of 1st century Roman-Jewish historian and military leader, Flavius Josephus, whose texts remain, other than the Hebrew Bible, one of the greatest sources of information about the region in antiquity. This poem recaps one bittersweet outing in the picturesque vicinity of three tributaries flowing in flagrant violation of current geopolitical boundaries in the Upper Galilee.

In addition to such *ulpan* excursions in 1984, on my second or third day in Israel in 1983 my wife and her family took me touring in the coastal area north of Haifa Bay. After we had visited the holiest site of Baha’i, the shrine of Bahá’ú’lláh (1817–1892), we ate at Abu Christo’s, then and perhaps still now a simple outdoor terrace with salty, pungent sea water lapping at my newly sandalled feet beneath the table at ... but what to call that place? Akko (Hebrew), Akka (Arabic), Acre (British)? Ptolemais (Greek/Roman), St. Jean d’Acre from Sanct-Jehan-d’Acre (Crusaders)? One of the longest continuously inhabited settlements on Earth, this site has been occupied sequentially by powers that be (or were) from the Early Bronze Age down through the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate to today. As soon as we use one place name to the exclusion of another, our political assumptions and prejudices become apparent, sometimes ingrained, often myopic. I never grew comfortable having to make such expedient everyday choices.

IV. AREOGRAM FROM ROSH HANIKRA Although the IDF was ostensibly only engaged in mop-up operations at the close of the First Lebanon War, the 1984 northern border was still a militarized zone. For an adult child of affluent suburban and urban America, a “flower child” since disabused of the pacifistic 60s and— yet one still compelled to test my socialistic meddle in Israel while craving rites of passages that felt legitimate and worthwhile—observing Lebanese refugees jamming the makeshift turnstiles, their exits barred, while witnessing Israeli youth operating military convoys was overwhelming. I resorted to stylized self-satire to face and turn away from a hard scene to watch. With affected touristic recourse to a bygone era—when Beirut was known as “the flower of the Orient”—the aerogram’s facetious attempt at levity bespeaks the inconsequential almost frivolous aspect of this writer’s presence (at such a time and such a location).

V: TIMEPIECE: TEL-AVIV During my stay I would take notice of semblances of what I considered normal, routine life. But an undertone of suspicion colors this piece of the mobile, a sense that this quiet hour in this modest plaza was only a momentary respite, a provisional spell of sleepwalking within a nightmare temporarily suppressed.

VI. YOM HAZIKACRON: REMEMBRANCE DAY Bracketed by two wailing sirens broadcast for two minutes at the start and close of the Israeli equivalent to the American Memorial Day, the population observes total silence. No BBQs, holiday sales, recreation.

In 21st century Israel the prospect of permanent war throughout the Middle East seems a fait accompli. When, in the wake of September 11, 2001, the US policy of Global War on Terrorism was initiated, the perennial siege under which the State of Israel has existed since its inception became perhaps somewhat easier for Americans to appreciate. New Yorkers might now imagine Staten Island as the declared target for destruction by all other NY boroughs (including Manhattan) as well as New Jersey and Long Island, not to neglect mention of enemies operating from a farther remove. Or, out West, Northern Californians might think of Alameda Island having to defend itself against its eight contiguous Bay Area contiguous counties (including San Francisco).

On one occasion I announced to my parents-in-law that I was planning to participate in a non-violent demonstration organized by Shalom Achshav (Peace Now). After silence, my father-in-law (who had survived WWII as an officer in the Russian Army) softly and sadly said, “It will make no difference.” My mother-in-law, a Holocaust survivor whose immediate family had been exterminated, said nothing.*

* Forty years later, in 2024, her memoir, THANKS TO LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS, was privately published; its text and images say as much or more than many open minds and broken hearts can bear.

VII. TZFAT: EREV SHABBAT If any one place could tantalize me with the possibility of finally melding my personal fate with the destiny of the Jewish people and satisfying my hunger for aesthetic and spiritual wholeness, it would have to be Tzfat.

Tzfat (alternately called Safed) is one of the four traditional Holy Cities of Judaism (along with Jerusalem, Hebron, and Tiberias). Located at an elevation of 3,000 feet in a northern part of the Upper Galilee, it is the city (pop. 40,000) with the highest altitude in the country and is a strategic military position for whoever rules or seeks to rule the region. Like most places in Israel, it has been inhabited by different ethnic groups and political powers at different times; we have historical information dating back to the Crusader Conquest (“... the history book says....”) and apocryphal description dating back to its foundation by a son of Noah after the Great Flood! In recent centuries it has served as a hotbed of studies for Kabbalistic and Hasidic Jews, and during the second half of the 20th century—its so-called Golden Age—was a center of artisanal and artistic activities. During lulls between the storms of war, picturesque Tzfat—nowadays a 30-minute drive from the Sea of Galilee—is a touristic destination. Having uprooted myself from my native soil, from which I felt thoroughly alienated; having transplanted myself to an alternative soil, to which I felt profoundly drawn—one would think that Tzfat of all places might console me, putting my heart and mind at ease.

After forty years it remains challenging to communicate how, let alone why, as a non-Jewish, non-Hebrew speaker, I had cut my ties with the US, packed my belongings, and taken the first concrete steps toward Israeli citizenship. It is clear, in retrospect, that I was undeniably impacted by my bride, who remains the love of my life—forty-four years and counting. But the peculiarities of my choice put my idealism through a trial by fire whose heat I had not foreseen.

My thought that I had a shot at such improbable redemption through converting to a kindred secular if not religious culture had its antecedents. Growing up I had witnessed the twists and turns of my mother’s largely frustrated Christian religiosity. In Presbyterian Sunday School, I had listened to basically “good news” from the New Testament—compared to pretty mixed reviews of the future from the Old. Like everyone else I knew, before I was ten years old I’d swallowed whole Charlton Heston as Moses in *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS* (1956) and then as Ben-Hur (1959). The *KING JAMES VERSION OF THE HOLY BIBLE* was familiar, even friendly, and always a respected vessel communicating the linkages in a Judeo- Christian tradition. [The particulars of this indoctrination are detailed in *PART ONE: Childhood &*

Adolescence in NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS at peterboffey.com.] Secular Jews were ever- present in my life in and around New York City: friends of the family; my father’s colleagues; my roommates at secondary school and college. During my first year at Bard, I had studied the Bible (among other Great Books) as comparative literature and, for my senior-year project, I dug into—almost over my head—explicating Melville’s 18,000 line poem *CLAREL: A POEM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND* (1876); that yearlong trip

through the holy land of Melville's imagination was also a fact-packed journey including the Southern Levant via the 19th century-style Grand Tour [cf. PART TWO: College Years, *ibid.*].

Unknown to me during the first three decades of my life, these antecedents to my curious, unconventional *aliyah** would provide a foundation, however fantastical it turned out to be, for an eventual immersion in Israel. By Oregon law, I'd been married to and divorced from a Portland Jewess and, by common law, married to and divorced from a Jewess from Brooklyn [cf. PARTS THREE, FOUR & FIVE, *ibid.*], but Ophira was the first Israeli Jew I'd ever met. It followed suit for me to study Hebrew at Berkeley Hillel, to participate in a Zionist group (*hug*) dubbing itself the Mordechai Anielewicz Circle, and to investigate options for throwing my lot in with the Chosen People ("... chosen for suffering..." Moishe Feldenkrais once quipped *sotto voce*). Yet midway through my year in Israel, and at the end of this poem, all I could figuratively and literally do was wander through alleys between houses of study and into courtyards of intriguing, semi-subterranean synagogues, listening "outside the center of their prayer"—a stranger in a strange land.

III. HAR MEGGIDO: EXCAVATIONS carries forward the tenses and tensions of the mobile's overarching theme: a reckoning between past and future. While entitling this poem, I wrestled with what to call it.

- *Har* means hill, mount, topographic rise.
- *Tzomet Meggido* refers to a junction where major North-South and East-West highways intersect.
- *Tel Meggido* is the site of extensive and productive archeological research.
- *Armageddon* is the New Testament name for the place where the classic and final battle between Good and Evil will transpire (Book of Revelations: Chapter 16).

On one bus ride through Megiddo Junction—which brought me as close as I ever got to the Arabic city of Umm-al-Fahm—my optimism was permanently disabled by hateful bullets shot at me from the eyes of a fellow passenger, a ten-year-old Palestinian boy. Plainly, he perceived me as the Evil Enemy incarnate and, for minutes on end, stared at me with a defiant look that, given the opportunity, would indeed have killed me.

On June 5, 2002, during the Second Intifada that Megiddo Junction bus was bombed: seventeen people died; forty-seven people were wounded.

* *aliyah* translates from Hebrew as *ascent* or *going up*, with rich historical, Biblical, and contemporary meanings including *the act of moving to Israel from another country*.

IX. HAIFA: BAT GALIM or “Daughter of the Waves,” is a seaside neighborhood located in Haifa at the foot of Mt. Carmel. This poem is a somewhat fabulated composite of my leave-taking after having outlived my naïve Zionism and prior wishful thinking about living on the kibbutz or anywhere else in Eretz Israel. Although the stressors were mitigated by my privileged access to my in-law’s genuine, generous hospitality as well as by my relatively sheltered existence on Ein Hashofet, our year there had taken a toll on our marriage.

Late in that experimental year, during a necessarily pre-arranged phone call from Hawaii, my mother urged me to return to the States—“But it’s not *your* war, Pete,” she argued. At the time, considering the source of that declaration more than the content, I suppressed my own reservations about decisions made and resolved my resolve to tough it out. My decisive acceptance of the realization that my pipe dream was gradually being extinguished occurred over the ensuing months, until one day, in a flash, while I was lying on my back listening one more time to Jazz At The Philharmonic on a cassette badly damaged by heat and humidity, the genius of that American music called to me: it no longer made sense to sacrifice my gifts, to suppress my sensitivities, to lend my unequivocal support to competing and incompatible visions of either the Israelis or the Palestinians. For an ironist with empathy, it would be ill-advised, perhaps even fatal—to surrender my life to living in a land where, *de facto*, “*ayn lenu breira*”—“we have no choice.” My boutique Zionism had died and with it my commitment to stay on in Israel.

COMMENTARY (B)

Who am I—sitting cozily sipping tea in casual Coastal California—to play the tormented Zionist apostate? What gives me the right to aesthetically polish à la Ingmar Bergman these facets of the guilt and shame associated with my ancestral Northern European provenance? I have already explored my cross motivations stemming from a Protestant legacy and fallible parenting throughout NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS (2025). Should I expand upon one particular offshoot of that conditioning: a deeply entrenched Jesus Christ complex including responsibility to carry the weight of the world? * Am I still chasing elusive absolution? Does ISRAEL 1984 remain a strictly personal, artistic mobile after all? I’ve been dragging along my *pekle* ** of shame and guilt for as long as I can remember, and I’d be deceiving myself to pretend that I can now travel the world with nothing but a carry-on bag—and feel complete in wise old age. But I do want to have done with judgments about my having failed to produce peace in the Middle East in 1984, and the relentlessly apocalyptic news is cramping my lifestyle! June 2025 ... I can’t even imagine peace there now.

* “That dying dawn I heard cry out your mappemonde/and Christophorus paused midstream...” from “To Ste.-Anne My Lady” (1974) in THE BOOK KEEPS CHANGES (peterboffey.com).

** Yiddish: package, bundle

Does the much vaunted poetical “self-expression” of ISRAEL 1984 merit any public hearing? Do I deserve a pass for faulty political analysis, then and now? Poets aren’t always astute or dependable politicians: Pound’s antisemitic theory of the roots of all evil; Tagore’s misconstruing the potential impact of his pan-Asian vision. Blown about by contemporary currents, my poetic mobile still spins round and round and where it stops... does anyone really know? Or care? ISRAEL 1984’s rendition of my idiosyncratic personal history may be of no help at all and have real-world consequences of zero rather than biblical proportions. Yet....

i speak of who speaks who speaks i am alone
i am just a little noise i have several noises in me
an ice-cold noise crumpled in the crossroads tossed onto the wet sidewalk
at the feet of hurried men running with their deaths
around death which extends its arms
on the dial of the only hour living in the sun ***

*

At this safe distance in time as well as space, I can afford to entertain the tragic complementarity of consequences between the survivors of the Holocaust (and their descents) and the survivors of the Nakba (and theirs). Reaching a critical mass in both populations, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder suggests the mechanism of the individual neuroses and collective psychoses being acted out on a stage viewed round the world. * As my own pipe dreams were being shattered forty years ago, I wrote a tortured poetry to survive; back in the States, I discovered and invented that raw language’s meaning and shape. In decades since, I’ve tried and failed—even linguistically—to heal the Arab/Jewish/Zionist/Palestinian split. Palestine? Israel? Paleszion? Gazion? Palesisraeltine? A ridiculous, fatuous, even hideous name game while what seems at times a grand, prolonged double suicide-homicide proceeds.

How to comprehend the endless enactment of hatred and vengeance? As a tango of death between sadistic-masochistic partners on a Freudian dance floor? As classic specimens of unawares Jungian projection upon the Other? As examples of a blatant absence of Rogerian empathy and listening? At wit’s end, I resort to elementary notions of “identity,” asking where do we draw our boundaries: As isolated individuals? As members of natal, nuclear, and extended families? As members of clans, tribes, states, nations? As human beings...? Ah, humanism!

*** translated from L’HOMME APPROXIMATIF (1931) by Tristan Tzara:

*je parle de qui parle qui parle je suis seul
je ne suis qu’un petit bruit j’ai plusieurs bruits en moi
un bruit glacé froissé au carrefour jeté sur le trottoir humide
aux pieds des hommes pressés courant avec leurs morts
autour de la mort qui étend les bras
sur le cadran de l’heure seule vivante du soleil*

Sophomoric psychologizing aside, I lament the historical sidelining dismissal of Buber's alternative strain of Zionism.**

*

While taking steps toward relocating my life in a Jewish Holy Land, Palestinian Arabs were not part of my thinking, certainly not part of any moral equation. I suppose in my earlier stages as an acolyte of nationalist Zionism, I was recapitulating an entry-level ignorance of regional history. In the first part of this Commentary, I identified my non-programmatic yet systemic exposure to Jewishness while growing up in the USA; tellingly, I neglected recalling the conditioning of my relations to Middle Eastern "Arabia": Disneyesque racist caricatures; facile dumbings-down of 1001 NIGHTS; LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, the 1962 blockbuster epic lifting this writer, then fifteen years of age, out of his seat, sweeping him up into the scenes on the big screen. Doubtless, I had taken in all these tropes *avant la lettre* of Western Orientalism as defined by Edward Said (1935–2003). How old was I when I first even heard of the Koran? My initial encounter with North African Arabs occurred in the early 60s through Camus' literary characterizations and, later that decade and early in the 70s, through an excessive submergence in the persona and oeuvre of Paul Bowles, whose expatriation and cultural conversion to Mother Morocco more than whet my appetite for adventuring in the Westernmost outpost of Islam. My long-distance infatuation with the Maghreb—and various intoxications—resulted in my 1975 fugue, a significant way station in a chaotic pilgrimage toward maturity. Although I disclaim quid pro quo identification with the main protagonists of my first novel, * I can't deny that my experiences of a deep but awfully narrow sample of one not especially enlightened sector of Moroccan citizenry did not endear me to a society whose dominant source was Mohammedanism (sic). The point is: prior to visiting Israel, I had studied basic Hebrew; read (in translation) novels by Amos Oz, David Grossman, and A.B.Yehoshua; puzzled over the correspondence between Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin—so, I had known something about the modern Holy Land; of the Muslim Levant, let alone Palestine—not much of irrefutable value.

One state? Two states? A confederacy of states? No states at all? Politically viable peace proposals seem null and void—dead before arrival at negotiations. The modern crisis in Palestinian leadership proceeds recklessly off-course or in perverse travesties of antiquated patriarch authoritarianism. Shall we exclusively attribute the failure of all efforts toward peace to Palestinian intransigence and double dealing? To toxic intervention by outside interests such as *our* Evil Enemy, antisemitic Iran? To post-colonialism, and whose—Zionist? British? Ottoman?

* I credit Rabbi Micheal Lerner (1943–2024) for framing (for me) the etiology of the conflict in terms of generalized, dual populations-wide PTSD; see EMBRACING ISRAEL/PALESTINE: A STRATEGY TO HEAL AND TRANSFORM THE MIDDLE EAST (2012).

** A LAND OF TWO PEOPLES: MARTIN BUBER ON JEWS AND ARABS (1983) edited with Commentary by Paul R. Mendes-Flohr.

None of the above? In a 2002 interview with David Frost, Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank was “in many ways worse than apartheid in South Africa.” Jewish humiliations of the occupied peoples and Palestinian threats of Jewish annihilation coevolve in escalating deadliness. An awful cartoon suggests itself: Frame 1, an Israeli Jew treats a Palestinian Arab like a dog, not a pet; frame 2, the dog bites back; frame 3, the master turns to us: “You see? They’re animals!” HAMAS and Iran are indeed still pledged to destroy the Zionist entity and endeavor to undermine all realistic peace agreements; Palestinian extremists concede that the process entails enduring ever more suffering for their own people, perhaps ten-fold the suffering inflicted upon their oppressors. One hundred-fold? One thousand? If it be the will of Allah....

Sorrows I had thought too old for new tears crack open the heart and out comes a cry for the hostages, all hostages—past, present, future—and a requiem for democratic Israel. Since October 7th 2023, Bibi and Co.’s actions seem one stylized bullfight, barely bearable to witness. The fates of the Jewish picadors, banderillos, and matadors may not be entirely sealed but the bull’s ultimate destiny is written in bloody sand. Ancient codes of honor and revenge remain in force. Absolutist extremists from opposing camps antagonistically mirror one another in an ageless cycle of violence. Undereducation; miseducation; noneducation—a list of contributing factors stammers its Babelesque lexicon of hopelessness. A frightful conclusion comes to mind: ineducability.

*

Is the West Bank now de facto annexed while the war with Iran plays out? Are surviving, displaced Gazans being concentrated under the fullest occupation until relocated elsewhere? Will Israel function as yet another pariah state with tacit support from or at least the tolerance of the USA? Mid-June 2025, predictions explode like cluster bombs over the Eastern Mediterranean, and the destruction goes on—more strikes and reprisals, more actions nurtured in ignorance, more blood in water and reddened earth.

Who owns Jerusalem? No one. Complimentary ethos of martyrdom, messianism, and sacred warfare have brought the region’s inhabitants to their present impasse, again and again. There are few to no realistic *and* humane solutions as far as I can see—even from here. But my own perspectives on Israel in 2025, as in 1984, may seem too idiosyncratic to matter to those passionately engaged in the war and peace efforts in meaningful ways.

Sipping tea in California, I do not stop the war or bring peace to the Middle East.

* TWO HALF BROTHERS, OR SEPARATING OUT (2014), half of which transpires in Morocco, 1968.