

the condition that Hamilton be made a major-general and the actual organizer and commander of the military forces. Adams was furious that Washington had compelled him to promote over the heads of more deserving men "the most restless, impatient, indefatigable and unprincipled intriguer in the United States, if not in the world to be second in command under himself."

IT IS HAMILTON'S behavior in this crisis that historians have most reproved. The Republicans thought that he intended to use the army against them. Hamilton certainly meant to suppress any domestic insurrection with a massive show of force. When rumors spread that Jefferson's and Madison's state was arming, he seemed eager to "put Virginia to the Test of resistance." When an uprising actually occurred in eastern Pennsylvania early in 1799, he told the secretary of war not to err by sending too few troops. "Whenever the Government appears in arms," he wrote, "it ought to appear like a *Hercules*, and inspire respect by the display of strength."

Hamilton believed that the crisis of 1798 offered an opportunity to create what he had long wanted for the government: a respectable standing army. Such a permanent force would enable the United States both "to subdue a *refractory* and powerful *state*" and to deal independently and equally with the warring powers of Europe. But a potent standing army was just the beginning of Hamilton's plans for strengthening the union. He wanted also to extend the judiciary, to build a system of roads and canals, to increase taxes, and to amend the Constitution so as to subdivide the larger states.

Beyond the borders of the United States, Hamilton's aims were even more grandiose. He thought that the war with France would enable the United States, in cooperation with Britain, to seize both Florida and Louisiana from Spain—in order to keep them out of the hands of France, he said. At the same time he held out the possibility of helping the Venezuelan patriot Francisco de Miranda to liberate South America. In all these endeavors, he told Rufus King, the American minister in Britain, in August 1798, America should be "the principal agency," especially in supplying the land army. "The command in this case would very naturally fall upon me—and I hope I should disappoint no favorable anticipation." (Unfortunately this revealing letter is not included in the *Library of America* volume.) More than anything, Hamilton wanted some of the honor and glory that would come to the United States as it assumed its rightful place in the world as a great power.

All these extravagant dreams collapsed with President Adams's new peace mission in 1799 and the end of the quasi-war with France. Many Americans, including the president, thought that Hamilton and the High Federalists had been bent on establishing a regal government allied with Britain, with Hamilton as its head. There is no evidence for such a view, but Hamilton's plans for an imperial America were certainly out of touch with the realities of his world in 1800. Two centuries later, however, these plans do not

seem so bizarre. Hamilton would be right at home in our present-day United States and our present-day world. He would love our government's vast federal bureaucracy, its sprawling Pentagon, its enormous CIA, its huge public debt, its taxes beyond any he could have hoped for, and especially its large professional military force with well over one million men and women under arms spread across two oceans and dozens of countries. America has at last become the kind of superpower of which Hamilton could only dream. ■

Who He Was

By PAULA FREDRIKSEN

The Changing Faces of Jesus by Geza Vermes

(Viking, 324 pp., \$25.95)

Providential Accidents: An Autobiography by Geza Vermes

(Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 258 pp., \$26.95)

THERE WAS A time in the West—it lasted until the Renaissance—when what Christians in church believed about Jesus and what professors in universities taught about Jesus corresponded more or less closely. Ecclesiastical creeds and councils set the context for interpretation, which was straightforwardly theological. Jesus was the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, who for humanity's redemption had come down to earth, taken on true flesh, died for humanity's sins, been raised bodily on the third day, established his church, and ascended (in his raised body) back to heaven.

The supporting roles of various of his contemporaries were equally clear. The poor and the outcast loved him. His apostles absorbed his teachings, and they brought this saving knowledge, along with the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, to the Gentiles, who received them gladly. But the Jews whom Jesus first called rejected him: they were too

attached to their own rules and rituals, infuriated by his new teachings, and loathe to share redemption with the Gentiles. Eventually they prevailed upon Pontius Pilate to kill him; confronted with the evidence of his resurrection, they denied him; and faced with the church's success among the Gentiles, they cursed him. Yet the church triumphed, just as the Old Testament had always said it would.

During the Renaissance, learned opinion started to shift. The ancient manuscripts of New Testament writings that scholars began to retrieve and to study revealed surprising differences between the received biblical text and the readings in the earliest witnesses. References in canonical first-century letters to fourth-century doctrines (such as the Trinity) began to look suspiciously like later additions. Eventually textual critics would notice that some stories about Jesus (such as his encounter with the woman at the well) floated around in different manuscript copies of a particular gospel, and even between the manuscripts of two different gospels.

This new knowledge in effect eroded confidence that the texts in the church's Bible corresponded very closely with whatever the original versions of those

PAULA FREDRIKSEN is the author, most recently, of *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (Knopf).

texts might have been: too many generations of pious copyists, anxious to "correct" what to them might have seemed like defective recensions, stood between the first Christians and their modern readers. Then Luther, and the Protestant Reformation, complicated these interpretive issues by altering their theological context. In his commentaries, "good" Jews (that is, the Christian ones) and saved Gentiles put their faith in a Christian message that looked surprisingly close to Luther's own, while the ritual-soaked church of Rome appeared increasingly like their Jewish opponents, the Pharisees. At this point, too, the canon of the Old Testament split between Roman Catholic communities and Protestant communities. The Catholics kept the larger, traditional collection of Old Testament writings based on the Greek Septuagint; the Protestants, more caught up in Renaissance scholarship, accepted as Scripture only those works for which they had a Hebrew original.

The Enlightenment intensified all this activity when scholars, freer from doctrinal constraints than ever before, began to apply the fledgling standards of critical historical research to the texts of the New Testament, investigating them as they would any other ancient documents. In consequence, the differences in tone and in content between the gospels emerged with increasing clarity, and this discovery called into question their status as historical witnesses to the life and the times of Jesus. The evangelists in their individuality came to be seen more as creative interpreters of traditions from and about Jesus, and thus as witnesses first of all to their own communities and their own historical periods, rather than as historical witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth himself, who had lived and preached (in Aramaic, not in Greek) some forty to seventy years prior to the composition of these gospels. The Jesus of history began to assume features distinct from those of the Christ—or rather, the Christs—of faith.

THE LINGUISTIC GAP between Jesus and the earliest documents about him highlighted another difference between him and later Christian tradition, a difference that was very significant theologically: Jesus would have been familiar with Semitic-language versions of the Jewish Bible, whether Aramaic or Hebrew, whereas Paul and the evangelists all drew upon its Greek version, the Septuagint. Where these two textual traditions diverged sharply—say, in the rendering of Isaiah 7:14, where in the Hebrew a "young girl" (*'aalmah*) gives birth to a child, but in the Greek the new mother is a "virgin" (*parthenos*)—scholars hesitated to attribute to the historical

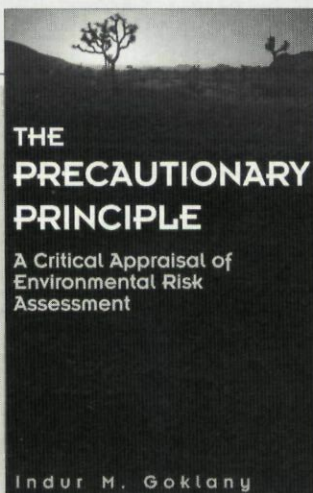
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Jesus what would have been possible, so to speak, only in Greek. The gap between history and theology widened.

Into this breach stepped liberal Protestant scholars. In quest of the historical Jesus, they focused on the meaning of a central phrase frequently on his lips in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: the Kingdom of God. Jesus had used this phrase, these questers maintained, as a moral metaphor: by invoking the Kingdom, he had meant "love one another," and

nated the "intertestamental" period.

These esoteric and less familiar writings—the Assumption of Moses, the Psalm of Solomon, the Sybilline Oracle, Enoch—also contained the phrase "Kingdom of God," and they certainly did not use it to stand as a timeless moral metaphor. The Kingdom that these texts proclaimed was an energetically desired and anticipated historical event. Various end-time scenarios crowded their pages. The righteous would suffer, but then they

dom. The apocalyptic themes in the earliest Christian message sounded with increasingly clarity. This trajectory of research culminated in the early twentieth century with Albert Schweitzer's great work *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which appeared in 1901. Schweitzer argued—shockingly, for the time—that Jesus himself, like many of his contemporaries, lived in the expectation of the imminent end of the world. To understand New Testament Scriptures, he asserted, the historian must place his subject, whether Jesus or Paul, within his own historical context of a "thoroughgoing eschatology."

Compelling as this reconstruction might have been historically, it was hopelessly awkward theologically. What religious meaning could twentieth-century Christians make of a first-century apocalyptic mission whose central message—"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand!"—had proved to be so wrong? As another liberal scholar mused, "Jesus preached the Kingdom, but it was the Church that came."

The heart of this energetic scholarly activity during this time was Protestant Germany. The Roman Catholic Church, already traumatized by European culture's lurch into modernity, was having none of it. Papal mandate all but obliterated any serious Catholic biblical scholarship from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. Catholic scholars who did persevere in attempts to effect a reform and to press for intellectual freedom left the church, or were intimidated into silence, or were excommunicated.

In the 1940s, Pius XII cracked the door open a bit, acknowledging in an encyclical letter the existence of literary forms in the Bible. (Non-Catholic biblical scholars, by contrast, had for well over a hundred years used distinctions between different literary forms as a way to distinguish the different traditions, writers, and historical periods embedded in—and so disguised by—Scripture's continuous narratives.) More changes of ecclesiastical attitude eventually followed, and nowadays Catholic scholars are free to be as rigorously critical as any of their non-Catholic colleagues. But a scant fifty years ago things were otherwise.

IRONICALLY, AND AGAIN in the 1940s, Pius's church took a step, unknown to him, that would issue in some of the most daring, original, and historically imaginative critical work of twentieth-century biblical scholarship. In a corner of Hungary, for the course of the war, it sheltered a young and formerly Jewish seminarian from the anti-Semitic murders raging all around him. That



Ruins of the ancient synagogue at Chorazin, the Galilee

"feed the hungry," and "be kind to widows and orphans." By preaching the coming Kingdom, the great nineteenth-century scholar Adolf von Harnack explained, Jesus had really been teaching "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." This pleasing message, immediately meaningful to Harnack's modern readers, just happened to coincide with the theology of liberal Protestantism.

For these scholars, Jesus stood within the great prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. These holy men too, they thought, had urged ethical action over ritual performance, prayer over blood offerings, faith over works. But then other scholars started to take their investigations further afield. Turning from the Old Testament canon, they studied instead those Jewish writings from the period much closer to Jesus's own lifetime, from 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., which they design-

would be vindicated. A great battle between good and evil would ensue, to be led perhaps by an archangel, perhaps by the Lord's messiah. Exiled Israel, all twelve tribes, would be gathered up into the land, and to Jerusalem. (By the time these writings were composed, ten of the twelve tribes had long since vanished, so the expectation anticipates a great miracle.) The dead would be raised. Gentiles would abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel. The strong theme that was central to all these writings, in brief, was apocalyptic eschatology: the conviction that God was about to intervene definitively in history, and vanquish injustice, evil, and death forever, and establish his kingdom of peace.

Scholars placing the New Testament writings within the interpretive context of these apocalyptic ones discovered a new Jesus, a new Paul, and a different King-

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young seminarian was Geza Vermes.

Professor emeritus of Jewish studies at the University of Oxford, author and editor of an essential multi-volume study on Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, nonpareil translator and scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Vermes has had a very long and very distinguished career as one of the world's pre-eminent historians of ancient Jewish biblical interpretation. In the early 1970s, he embarked on a related but very different trajectory of research. As a result, he has produced also a groundbreaking series of studies on the historical Jesus. His earlier trilogy—*Jesus the Jew* (1973), *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (1983), *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993)—replete with footnotes and polyglot references, was critical as well as synthetic: that is, besides offering his own interpretations, Vermes addressed, assessed, and criticized the arguments of other scholars in the field. His expertise in Semitic languages and Jewish history opened up new perspectives on traditions about Jesus in ways that both challenged and refreshed how other students of this elusive figure thought about the Gospels as historical evidence. But Vermes's clear and graceful English (his third vernacular!), as well as his great subject, also invited the general reader into his pages; and indeed these works—especially *Jesus*

the Jew—have enjoyed wide popularity outside the academy.

With the recent publication of *The Changing Faces of Jesus*, Vermes sums up the arguments and the conclusions of his three prior publications, and also widens the scope of his inquiry beyond the Gospels to include other documents in the New Testament. And he has done so with the general reader particularly in mind. No academic apparatus or learned infighting with other scholars clutters these wonderful pages, on the correct assumption that the reader who wants to see Vermes's interpretations developed on that level will know where to find them. Instead, with grace, wit, and vigor, he fluently conducts his tour of these texts, which he organizes into six chapters along a gradient (these are my characterizations, not his) of least Jewish, and therefore least historically plausible—the Gospel of John—to more Jewish (that is, presenting more recognizably Jewish themes and traditions) and therefore containing more historically reliable information—the three synoptic (“seen-together”) Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. His penultimate chapter introduces Vermes's reconstruction of the Jesus of history; and his concluding chapter is a very brief summary of the transformation of Jesus's original message in the Gentile, Greek-

speaking world together with a keenly observed assessment of scholarly work on Jesus in the past half-century, and of the unfortunately formative effects of Christian anti-Judaism on each. And then, with artistry and with an appealing chutzpah, Vermes brings the whole to a close by relating a dream vision of a returned Jesus who addresses first the Jews, then masses of assembled Christians (“not quite as big [a crowd] ... as the one which recently greeted the Pope in Cracow”), and finally the lost and the lapsed.

Vermes's great contribution to the late-twentieth-century quest for the historical Jesus has been to construct another interpretive framework within which to place and sort through the later Christian traditions about him. To do so, he worked especially with those sources that are linguistically and culturally (and, where possible, chronologically) close to Jesus. These are the Hebrew and Aramaic traditions preserved in various Jewish writings: *targumim* (loose translations of Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic); the Mishnah and the later Talmuds (rabbinic explorations of the meaning and the range of application of biblical law); rabbinic commentaries on the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch), which contain much material of a legendary nature; the Dead Sea Scrolls; intertestamental apocrypha

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American Jewish History: Personal and Professional Reflections on a Discipline Path Towards Scholarly Acceptance

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and pseudepigrapha in various languages; and, in Greek, the work of Jesus's Jewish near-contemporaries Philo and Josephus.

Vermes constructs his image of Jesus by appeal to these texts. The premise from which he begins is historically unimpeachable: that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and his mother tongue was Aramaic. Beneath the *koinē* ("common," that is, non-literary) Greek of the synoptic Gospels, this linguistic layer of Aramaic can still be glimpsed—and occasionally it even comes to the surface. (Commanding a dead child to rise, the synoptic Jesus orders: *Talitha cumi*, or "Little girl, get up!" And his cry from the cross—the first lines of Psalm 22—Mark gives not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic: *Eloi, Eloi, lama*

sabachtani? or "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")

Vermes regards the synoptic evangelists' portraits of Jesus as the most reliable, and so he peoples his presentation with other Galilean holy men renowned for their ability to work nature miracles or to cure the ill even from a distance—and (a related expertise) to exorcise demons. Unschool, perhaps illiterate, these men were remembered in later tradition for their piety, their extreme material poverty, and their powerful prayer. Sometimes their fellow Jews referred to such *hasidim* ("pious ones") as prophets, even as "son(s) of God," while a *hasid* might invoke the deity in Aramaic as *Abba*, "Father." Once, according to a Talmudic story, a "voice

from heaven"—that is, God—even proclaimed one of these miracle-workers his son.

By the end of Vermes's book on Jesus, the constant cameo appearances of these charismatic Galileans indeed work a small miracle. The intractably theological titles for Jesus such as "Son of God" and "son of man," and the miraculous deeds attributed to him, all of which in Christian tradition serve to indicate Jesus's unique status as God's Son, are shown to be native to Jewish—and especially to Aramaic and Galilean Jewish—streams of thought. In that context they express not a super-human subject's metaphysical status, but a human subject's moral status as a pious man responsive to the needs of his fellows, and whom, on that account, God particularly loves. To move closer to the Jesus of history—"the real Jesus," as Vermes calls him—the angle of approach should be calculated, he urges, with or from these native Jewish traditions.

BUT WHAT OF those other writings in the New Testament's core canon, the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul? On these two sources, the Jewish Aramaic traditions provide much less purchase. What, then, can the Fourth Gospel and Paul tell us about "the real Jesus" and about that sole conduit for such historical knowledge, his earliest disciples' proclamations about him? Not much, says Vermes; and in a sense he is right. The hero of John's Gospel is a mouthpiece for the evangelist's theology: it is difficult to place the Johannine Christ's *bel canto* soliloquies on his own divine nature in a realistic rural early-first-century Galilean setting. And Paul specifically says that he never knew the human Jesus. For the purposes of Paul's message, what needs to be known about the human Jesus is his death, which is the necessary prelude to his resurrection and to the resurrection of the dead and transformation of the living to take place shortly, says Paul, when Christ returns.

Material from these sources that might supplement or enrich what we otherwise possess from the synoptic Gospels—Jesus's teaching regularly in Jerusalem, as John portrays; or Paul's claim that he, and also the Gentiles whom he had baptized, were empowered to do "works of power" and charismatic healings, to prophesy, and to discern between spirits, much as the synoptic Jesus does—Vermes for the most part lets pass by. Those traditions in John and Paul that stand in strongest contrast to Vermes's reconstruction of Jesus's Jewish and Aramaic message, such as those that claim an extremely elevated theological status for Jesus relative to God, Vermes attributes to Gentile, thus pagan,

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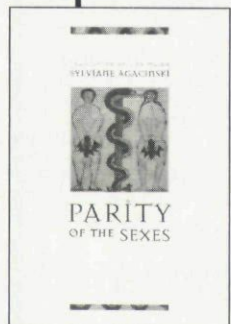
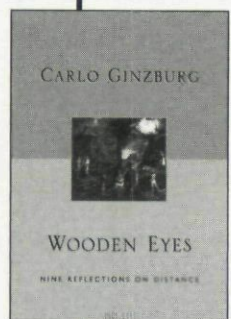
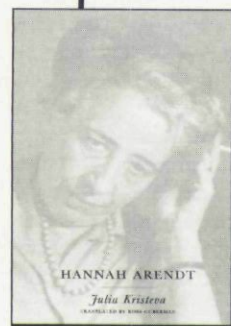
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culture—in John's case, a native culture; in Paul's case, the culture of those whom he addresses.

Christianity as a religion, Vermes explains, is thus the result of a Jewish-Gentile hybrid, which spread in an increasingly Gentile and pagan environment, inevitably acquiring non-Jewish elements as it grew. The Hellenistic synagogue, home to Greek-speaking Jews (such as Paul), to the Septuagint, and to those Jewishly sympathetic Gentiles who were familiar enough with biblical stories to understand the religious significance of the Christian message—Jesus as the son of David, or the seed of Abraham, or the shoot of Jesse—scarcely figures in Vermes's account. He seems to envisage a one-generation transition to the new faith.

The movement, in this view, was rapidly mutating, and it soon lost its appeal for Jews. Its Gentile members, offended by the Jews' rejection of what they took to be the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, became increasingly anti-Jewish themselves. The Jews may have rejected the church; but in the view of the (now Gentile) church, God had first rejected the Jews and put Gentile Christians in their stead. For all these reasons—the centuries of anti-Judaism in Gentile Christian theology, the blends of pagan and Jewish thought found variously in the Greek New Testament documents ostensibly about Jesus, the necessary compromises with pagan culture made by Paul when trying to take the message to the Gentiles—the features of the Jewish Jesus, Vermes concludes, have been obscured. Until fairly recently, they would even have been denied.

BUT THESE DAYS a recognizably Jewish Jesus no longer startles or offends. Indeed, as Vermes notes, "the Jewishness of Jesus is now axiomatic ... [even for] those New Testament scholars who can only pay lip service to it." In this regard, he says, New Testament studies have changed significantly since 1973, when even the title of his first book on this highly charged subject, *Jesus the Jew*, shocked some in the Christian world. And the field is drastically changed; indeed, it is "almost unrecognizable" from "the perspective of 1945"—the year before the young Vermes, released from the necessity of hiding by the end of the war, began his advanced academic training in Louvain as a novice residing with the Fathers of Notre-Dame de Sion, a nineteenth-century order founded specifically to pray for the conversion of the Jews.

His concluding evocation of the year 1945 recalled to me the poignant closing line of his prologue, wherein Vermes remembers his parents, Ernest and There-

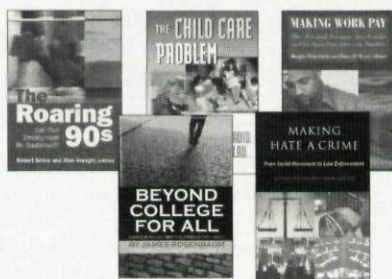
sia, both murdered in Hungary in 1944, "innocent victims of the evil and madness called anti-Semitism." Vermes's life and work have thus spanned the two poles of the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition both at their most violently alienated—the Shoah—and at their most irenic and cooperative—the current quest for the Jesus of history, conducted both by interfaith groups in churches and synagogues and by historians in the academy.

In *Providential Accidents*, his autobiography, Vermes provides a more intimate view of the twists and turns by which he entered the church, survived fascist Hungary and the Nazis, studied in Louvain and Paris, entered British academic life and a life outside the church, came to Oxford,

fought for almost forty years for free access for himself and other scholars to the treasures of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and came to search for the historical Jesus. It is a truly gripping narrative. It begins as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, wherein Vermes relates his progress through Hungary's Catholic schools. Forbidden entrance to university by the anti-Semitic legislation of 1941, the sixteen-year-old Vermes "opted for the Catholic priesthood: with its six-year curriculum, this seemed to provide the only real prospect for higher education." This decision saved his life.

After the war ended, Vermes found himself in the study of a professor of Scripture, whose books lay scattered in heaps in the wake of the Soviet army. Attempting to

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bring order to this chaos, Vermes picked up and saw, for the first time in his life, a Hebrew Bible. It was a transforming moment. "This filled me with fascination, and an irresistible urge to learn Hebrew," he relates. This accidental encounter set him on the path to becoming who he is. And, of course, given his personal choices, his family, and his times, this decision to learn Hebrew had a certain poignancy. One of his uncles, seeing the young seminary hard at work on a Hebrew grammar, wryly remarked: "I see you're now busying yourself with what you should have learned as a child."

HIS MEMOIR is also a love story. Its prologue begins with this heart-stopping sentence: "Shortly before midnight on 9 June 1993 I realized that my wife was dying." Pamela Vermes brought Geza Vermes into a new life. They met in 1955, and eventually married, and collaborated in his scholarly publications, and together found their individual ways from Catholicism toward Judaism, she as a "religious agnostic" (her self-designation), he as a non-observant though highly identified Jew.

And Vermes's story is also in part an international thriller, especially with the high-level goings-on around the Scrolls. The full sordid tale of spite, scholarly selfishness, and undisguised anti-Semitism, which kept access to the Dead Sea texts restricted for decades to a tiny cartel, unwinds in his pages. Telegrams and letters fly between Jerusalem, Paris, Oxford, Washington, and southern California's Huntington Library; careers crash; scholarly hypotheses come and go like clay pigeons in a skeet shoot. It is all great stuff, especially because we know the happy ending: the scrolls—thanks in part to Vermes's efforts—are now open and available to all interested scholars.

But owing to who he is, when he has lived, and how he has written, Vermes's life story reads as well as a history of Jewish-Christian relations in the twentieth century (the worst century so far, as Diana Trilling once remarked), as well as a history of the academic study of those relations. His autobiography thus places his scholarship, and particularly his New Testament scholarship, in a larger context. Readers of both can see not only how Vermes's life informed his work, but also how the myriad cross-currents of Jewish-Christian relations must inform any such endeavor in the area of historical Jesus research.

A historian does not have to be Jewish in order to produce a Jewish Jesus: in 2001, thanks in part to the work of Vermes and scholars like him, a more or less Jewish Jesus is the one whom any

historian, of any religious orientation or none, pretty much expects to find. That churches and synagogues, separately and together, are exploring and making their peace with the Jewishness of Jesus—again thanks in part to the work of Vermes and scholars like him—is, I think, an even more significant cultural fact. It shows the beginning of a way forward out of centuries of mutual suspicion, resent-

ment, and—within living memory—much worse. For our culture, it is also the measure of recuperation from the shock of the Renaissance and the secularization of time and nature that followed in its wake, when the gap between history and theology (for Jews as well as for Christians) first started to make itself felt. We still live in that gap; but we need not be lost in it. ■

Immorality Play

By RUTH FRANKLIN

Flights of Love

by Bernhard Schlink

translated by John E. Woods

(Pantheon, 304 pp., \$23)

THAT BAD BOOKS are the books most widely read is an entirely mundane phenomenon of contemporary culture. Every week the major book reviews assess a dozen books in a variety of genres, of varying quality but deemed of sufficient significance or originality or beauty to merit a thousand words or so. With only a few exceptions, these books then vanish forever: good books get reviewed, but bad books get bought.

Once in a while, though, books of "literary merit" do take a spin on the best-seller list. These are often just bad books in disguise—*Corelli's Mandolin*, or *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. With regard to style, both of those books are credible imitations of the real thing; but unlike the "designer" handbags hawked on the street, what gives away these knock-offs is not their detailing but the absence at their core. Under the weight of all their trappings—pseudo-historical documents, lengthy digressions on esoterica, winking self-referentiality—they shudder with emptiness.

The best recent example of the disguised bad book is surely Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*. Schlink was a professor of constitutional law who wrote mystery novels in his spare time, but with the publication of *The Reader* in 1995 he erupted onto the literary scene in Germany and around the world. The book already ranks among the best-selling German paperbacks of all time, and around two million copies have sold in the United States alone, fueled largely by Oprah Winfrey's endorsement. *Der Spiegel* deemed

Schlink's book "one of the greatest triumphs of German literature since the novel *The Tin Drum*." If Günter Grass's epic was the quintessential novel of the wartime generation, *The Reader* was aimed squarely at the "second generation," the lucky but oppressed ones born later.

There is every indication that *Flights of Love*, Schlink's first collection of short stories, may fare similarly. Sandwiched between J. K. Rowling and John Grisham, it has been a presence on the German best-seller lists since its publication last year. German critics have praised Schlink as a "master of the craft" and his stories as "virtually perfect." One writer for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* has mordantly proposed that the stretch of highway between Frankfurt and Stuttgart be nicknamed "the *Flights of Love* Stretch," since it is the same duration as the playing time of the audio version of Schlink's volume. Oprah's vast flock will no doubt snap it up in its English translation.

Schlink's disguise is well-made. He is a master of appearances, but only of appearances. His books appear to have serious themes: in *The Reader*, the difficulties of the second generation in reconciling with the Nazi past; in *Flights of Love*, the jealousies and infidelities and sublimities of love affairs. Both books owe the entirety of their momentum to the machinations of plot, but the plot is spun charmingly and contrivingly enough that you hardly have a chance to discover that the characters are vacant, virtually without interior lives. Schlink's style is perfectly calibrated to appeal, spare enough to earn the intellectual-sounding description of

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