

Chapter 1 : Yoel Hoffmann : The Shunra and the Schmetterling : Book Review

Lively images of the cat (shunra) and the butterfly (schmetterling) chase and play through the memories of a poetic child as Yoel Hoffmann, one of Israel's most celebrated writers, recreates childhood and the coming of age.

The urge to translate is akin to the critical urge—both are zealous expressions of the desire to read even more thoroughly, and both urges seize a reader, oddly, when she finds herself before what is intriguing and inscrutable. If I could somehow get under the skin of these words, she thinks, I could understand and become one with the splendid mystery of this. In a similar respect, I love the way his Hebrew rides itself, as it were, even as it rides the reality it treats, revealing mysteries in both—the language and the reality—and taking one deeper into both. And yet I fear that some sort of description of the more prosaic variety is still in order. Mine is a sketchy predicament indeed for a reviewer: Cryptic, mysterious even, and lovely. A metaphorical image to describe novels that describe real life. His brilliant, hermetic style is the result; he writes as if words held power—the power, yes to tell stories, but more, to reveal universes. The experience of reading Hoffmann is intense, urgent, slow, dreamy, because you are in effect being invited to observe the world alongside him as written art. No one can make a Bernhard. At times, Bernhard himself is seized with wonder. How, he asks himself, from a speck of matter the size of a mustard seed have I become what I am a complex unique creature? My right hand was in the Atlantic. Five fingers on the ocean floor. Ancient fish surrounded the hand, like extremely religious Jews. The veranda of the world itself—whose heart is an electric light bulb. The veranda is untethered to a place; it is inhabited by phantasms, conjured out of oblivion, and set in a world without end—a world of memories enlivened by the narrator. The mystical veranda is illuminated its blood pumped by the mundane light of an electric lightbulb. It is one of his private symbols and as such seems to insist that illumination begins with and is a creation of man, like the light bulb itself. The writer stops time through observation. Each character seems dogged by his soul, as if there were always a double consciousness in play—that of the character and that of the narrator seeing and remembering the character. From that first grasping for the memory of an eternal veranda, we have surely left behind the gentile land of madeleines. The elements of memoir pile helter skelter: My mother in her various outlines and my father in his single outline are, trust me, sufficient. The mother, however barely sketched, is multiform, the father, monolithic—in memory, if not in fact. Time, the protagonist of a memory story, shifts and slithers rather than moves forward: This is also the story of a young Israel, a country whose immigrant citizenry arrived on the wings of Zionist idealism and that was quickly flooded with European Jews fleeing for their lives. The landscape of early Israel that Hoffmann so carefully paints has its own childlike innocence, and that innocence itself joins the ranks of the ghosts who populate these tales. Moskowitz came to Palestine, the Land of Israel. He was a young man at the time and the paraffin stove he saw in Jaffa took his fancy. He liked everything made of brass. But the white shoes he brought with him from Romania became covered with dust and the soles came apart from the soft leather of the uppers until there were gaping holes where the toes were, like mouths. Indeed, in this charged moment it would seem that any artwork from Israel about Israel must bear a political message. But the past is purer only because it has been polished by time. Autumn yields rain, and spring, the fragrance of grass, as in a banal song. Innocence is a figment in the present, and there is no room left for mystery: The dead babies she gave birth to like a blind typesetter who brings to light combinations of letters according to the smell of the lead. Two or three weeks before she died. She saw the soul of the carp. And the soul of the birds. And the soul of her brooches. And of her porcelain cups. And of her iron. And the soul of the ginger, the vanilla, and the playing cards. And she knew oh, yes, she knew! There is no division. Only the directions are reversed. The novel is set in paragraphs, one to a page. The first phrase of each new paragraph is anticipated on the page before—a nod to the poetic line break as well as a tribute to how meaning builds through association and how stories depend on forward movement, all central ideas to this complicated tale. In this novel about mourning in the years of the Holocaust the personal tragedy at the center of the story trades beats with news of the war, so the reader is never far from the idea that lives have a backdrop, which is Life: In that year the Atlantic Ocean fills up with an infinity of sounds. Igor Stravinsky sails across. Arnold Schoenberg

sails across. And Bernhard pictures to himself the Messiah coming from Lisbon to the sound of air-raid sirens. German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and occasionally Arabic words fly through the air. Ashkenazi war refugees struggle to speak Hebrew, argue about psychology and German philosophers, and congregate in the pastry shops and coffeehouses built in imitation of home. The Jerusalem that Bernhard inhabits is every bit a mishmash of cultures, and he wanders the city, going to movies, visiting with his friend Gustav the plumber, guiltily courting the widow Elvira, eating kefir with a long-necked spoon, marking the time with his grief, grasping for solace or understanding. The effect is entropy. The great body collapses and the earth trembles. More labels spring to mind, formalism and symbolism among them. The symbols of light bulbs and lizards and flight that recur throughout the novels build a distinct, encrypted vocabulary, rich enough to keep us curious rather than keep us out. The slow, pitch-perfect descriptions of a gesture or a moment more than serve to make stones stony exactly as the Russian formalists intended. This is literature of revelation, of epiphany—“if epiphany is a ruthless, all-seeing, feral creature instead of the willowy Greek virgin in a nightgown I always and inexplicably imagine her as. Katschen distinguished between those who were nicht krank and those who were krank. The bodies of the nicht krank were tense while the bodies of the krank were limp. Left in the care of his elderly Uncle Arthur and his Aunt Oppenheim, Katschen spends his days tagging along. His imagination becomes his truest companion. Life is not gas, not amoeba, not fish, not with legs, not monkey. Katschen hear the music of Liszt and understand life. Max with woman—“Max understand. But Aunt Oppenheim intervenes and persuades Arthur to send the child to a kibbutz, which he escapes from within minutes—“following a cow across a field. But I said this was a story about seeing, and so it is. If he is also pained by the sights he sees with the eyes that remain open—“he closes both eyes. But the Cyclops never closes his one and only eye. The sight he saw with this eye was not clear, but it held a kind of transparency missing from the sights he saw with his other two eyes. When Katschen looked in the mirror he could not find the eye in his forehead, but when he closed his eyes again he knew for sure that the eye was there. Since that day, Katschen knew that he was a Cyclops and would look at people to see if they had an eye in their foreheads. Katschen trails after the cow, gets lost in the forest, and is rescued by an Arab shepherd who shelters him for the night and brings him back to the Jews. Katschen contemplates crawling into a cabbage patch, hoping that way to be reunited with his mother, and a Yemenite Jew tries to teach him the story of Creation. At the police station he is subjected to a hilarious round of psychological evaluations. Then he is told that his Uncle Arthur has passed away and his Aunt Oppenheim has gone back to Vienna, so they take him to his father, Ernst, in the asylum. Small and important or big and worthless. At first, as they wander the streets, Ernst is a Cyclops too. He wrote largely about aesthetic ideas that could be comprehended. This seemed perfect to me. How else do you describe a writer who seems to be inventing writing as he goes, as if there were no rules in fiction, no tradition to embrace or reject, as if there were no other way to write his stories and no stories more urgent to tell? I asked Peter Cole about the anecdote. He seemed dubious but offered to check it out with Hoffmann—“who enjoyed it thoroughly, every last fictitious word of it. Reading, like writing, is an act of faith, a giant leap of faith. With Hoffmann that leap feels more like a dizzy tumble. Unencumbered by notions of what a novel should be or what things in a novel are supposed to mean, the reader lets go, free-falling into alertness. Is this perhaps what it means to read? Minna Proctor is the editor of *The Literary Review*. This essay originally appeared in *Bookforum* in the summer of

Chapter 2 : Yoel Hoffmann | LibraryThing

Shunra is Aramaic for cat. Schmetterling is German for butterfly. In Yoel Hoffmann's new book, these and numerous other creatures, cultures, and languages meet in a magical shimmering hymn to childhood. Hoffmann traces his hero's developing consciousness of the ways-and-wonders of the world as.

Trials of the Diaspora: Oxford University Press, pp. To rid Europe of its Jews, states Longerich, was not only central to the whole National Socialist movement, but was what gave it its distinctiveness. Therefore, he says, it is pointless to select a single order for a Final Solution, but rather to understand that the escalation from persecution to genocide involved a highly complicated series of decisions that emanated from the Nazi leadership, but whose implementation was left to the interpretation, if not imagination, of the actual perpetrators. Longerich notes that the reliability of those countries allied with the Nazis following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June was determined by their participation in the mass killings of Jews, or willingness to deport their Jews to the death camps. Did the councils in the ghettos make the deportation easier for the Nazis by implementing their demands for the roundup of Jews to be shipped to Treblinka and the other death camps? The charge of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis in their own demise, however, did not relate only to the Jewish councils. Others, however, view Kasztner as a hero who saved 1, Jews by bargaining with Nazis, such as Eichmann and Kurt Becher, as part of a larger plan to trade money and goods to the Nazis for the lives of Hungarian Jews. Such negotiation, however, was doomed to fail because the Allies were bent on the policy of unconditional surrender, which excluded the possibility of bartering with the Nazis. There he was labeled a traitor who collaborated with the Nazis as well as accused of choosing only those close to him as passengers on the train. In a trial, the judge ruled against Kasztner; soon after his assassination in , the verdict was overturned by an Israeli appeals court. His book focuses on the factory slave-labor camp, one of the most understudied and least-known phenomena of the Holocaust. Browning examines the Starachowice labor camp from the perspective of its survivors. A small, obscure camp located in the Radom district of the General Government in Poland, Starachowice was critical to munitions production for the German war effort. Thus the Jews employed for slave labor were able to survive so long as they were able to work, despite the ever-present threat of arbitrary killing. Browning not only unsparingly depicts the arbitrary cruelty of Nazi camp leaders but also relates the testimony of survivors who expressed their condemnation of fellow Jews who were seen as receiving preferential treatment in the camps or who held positions of authority first in the Wierzbnik ghetto and later at Starachowice. This may have occurred when camp survivors were deported to Auschwitz following the dissolution of Starachowice. Based on inconclusive survivor accounts, Browning describes the brutal revenge murder against the Jewish head of the Starachowice camp and his son in a crowded cattle car headed for the death camp. Browning concludes his invaluable study by noting that the Jewish prisoners at Starachowice, rather than abandoning any notion of moral obligation to their fellow Jews, substituted a hierarchy of mutual obligation: If anti-Semitism was the distinctive characteristic that propelled Nazi Germany, what was the attitude toward Jews in the Allied countries? This policy included refusing to bomb Auschwitz, because any such raid would represent a diversion of military equipment and personnel to nonmilitary purposes. Other officials made the argument that the Jews should not be treated as a special case, lest the British public conclude that the war was being fought on behalf of Jewish interests, thus increasing domestic anti-Semitism. From the Evian Conference in to the White Paper of to the Bermuda Conference of , this was always an unacceptable alternative, lest it alienate the Arabs. It was not only the Nazis, therefore, but also Allies, such as Great Britain, that prevented those, like Kasztner, from successfully negotiating the rescue of European Jewry. Exile Editions, pp. Sometimes, darkness falls, sometimes transcendence lifts, but in each case, tenderness always lurks just around the edges. A shell-shocked Catholic war vet takes on a job at a Reform synagogue, helping to prepare the sanctuary for the High Holidays. While polishing the lectern, he uncovers or thinks he has uncovered an image of the Virgin Mary. Word spreads and soon the synagogue is inundated by Catholic worshipers eager to pray at the site of a shrine. Sporting a suicide belt stuffed with explosives, he demands to know who, in fact, the true God is. His hapless teacher tries to explain but his

words fall on deaf, deeply tormented ears. Translated from the Hebrew by Peter Cole. New Directions, pp. At most, he says, he will be able to gather up a hundred of these pearls. He is the author of nine books, six of which have been published in English by New Directions, and his name has been mentioned in connection with the Nobel Prize as an avant-garde Israeli alternative to mainstream authors such as Amos Oz and David Grossman. Adding to his outside-the-box persona, he is currently a professor of Japanese poetry, Buddhism and philosophy at Haifa University. This book, written in an impressionistic style, will likely frustrate the casual reader. And yet, there is a story line. Suffice it to say that in this curriculum vitae, neither the facts nor the chronology nor the geography is clearly delineated. This desire to expand the space of the narrative by contracting it may explain the over sets of parentheses in the book. After studying Japanese in Israel under the tutelage of the unlikely named Mrs. Piatelli, and after studying Zen Buddhism with a Japanese monk living in East Jerusalem, Hoffmann goes off in with his family to study Japanese philosophy in Osaka or is it Kyoto? For Hoffmann, writing cannot take place without the ubiquity of the Holocaust in every word he writes. Jewish Lights, pp. Though his authorship is challenged, the story of his dying from wounds inflicted when he refused to convert is compelling, and the poem is beautiful. When Rabbi Amnon dies, he is returning his self to its source teshuva , pouring out his self before God tefila and making himself the gift to God tzedaka. She observed him at work, noting his artistic discipline and exactitude as well as his whimsical talent for friendshipâ€”to say nothing of his passion for chocolates. A veteran lecturer on Chagall, she lists a valuable chronology of his works and an extensive bibliography.

Chapter 3 : THE SHUNRA AND THE SCHMETTERLING by Yoel Hoffmann , Peter Cole | Kirkus Reviews

Shunra is Aramaic for "cat." Schmetterling is German for "butterfly." In Yoel Hoffmann's new book, these and numerous other creatures, cultures, and languages meet in a magical shimmering hymn to childhood.

Chapter 4 : The Shunra and the Schmetterling by Yoel Hoffmann

"The Shunra and the Schmetterling" (reviewed by Mary Whipple JUL 24,) "I give my father's father the cat. My father's father releases white butterflies into the space of the home, and the old cat chases them as though in a slow-motion movie.

Chapter 5 : THE SHUNRA AND THE SCHMETTERLING - The Deborah Harris Agency

A poetic little slip of a thing that holds the world, decades, entire lives, sorrows and beauties all as if in a pair of cupped hands. The title is from Aramaic for "cat" and German for "butterfly," a suggestion of the elusiveness of what Hoffmann (The Heart is Katmandu, , etc.) tries to.

Chapter 6 : State of Suspension: Yoel Hoffmanâ€™s Israel ||| from Bookforum | The Literary Review

The Shunra and the Schmetterling by Yoel Hoffmann, Peter Cole, Chfc, Lcsw (Translator) starting at \$ The Shunra and the Schmetterling has 1 available editions to buy at Half Price Books Marketplace.

Chapter 7 : HOFFMANN, Yoel - The Deborah Harris Agency

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