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connecting the book's chapters. Shapira brings abundant evidence of Brenner's depression, but also points out that Brenner's functioning is inconsistent with his depressive tendencies. Indeed, it is doubtful whether this personality trait can sufficiently explain the behaviors that Shapira ascribes to him, whether explicitly or implicitly—a pessimistic attitude vis-à-vis the achievements of Zionism and the future of the Zionist movement, writing that emphasizes bereavement and failure, strange eccentric behavior, shying away from women, difficulty in intimacy and in close relationships with others—and it certainly cannot explain Brenner's literary and journalistic strength. Brenner seemingly exhibited, in a refined manner, a sort of “holy depression,” or as the pioneers of the Second and Third Aliyot preferred to term it—a type of “holy despair.” Despair appears in Hebrew revival literature as both a destructive and constructive force (as it similarly does in the literature of the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century). Undeniably, doubt, depression, and despair were not personality traits unique to Brenner, but rather a significant part of the generational ethos and that of its literary convention.

Indeed, it is only in the book's closing chapter that Shapira reveals the significance that Brenner and his contemporaries ascribed to his personality traits. She identifies the Russian “holy fool” model of *Yurodivi*, which sheds new light on events in Brenner's life. Whether this model is the most applicable and successful in describing Brenner may be the subject of a detailed discussion (especially in light of the fact that the term does not feature in either his writings or in those of his eulogizers). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Brenner accorded great significance to “the ways of the abyss of madness, the doubts and the exertion of mental fortitude.” (*Collected Writings of Brenner* [Hebrew], 3:657. In the original context this was written with regards to Nietzsche.)

In any case, this is a powerful conceptualization, and I would recommend that the reader begin with the final chapter and thereafter turn to the in-depth study of the details of Brenner's life that have, for the first time, been so extensively and spectacularly explored by Anita Shapira.

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Marc Shapiro. *Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History*. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015. 347 pp.
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Readers familiar with Marc Shapiro's wildly popular blog posts will confront a familiar product when they open and read this book. As they do in the blog, they will find here an encyclopedic knowledge of the subject, a willingness to enter into the smallest detail and follow the most interesting and sometimes

convoluted tangents, citations and evidence amazing in their breadth and depth, and an exuberance and passion rare from someone steeped in scholarship like Shapiro. What makes this book a different reading experience from the blog is the fact that the readers cannot comment, ask, prod, and add to the text as they commonly do on the blog. A book by its nature is expected to present a complete set of ideas, which once edited and printed make their statement and rest their case.

What is the case that Shapiro wants to make here? It is that the Orthodox Jewish world has an ideological and religious agenda that trumps its concern with objective facts, and that when faced with the choice of presenting the facts of history or maintaining their beliefs and heroes intact, they opt for the latter, claiming that if that “means we have to do without a real history book,” so be it, “we can do without. We do not need realism,” as Shapiro quotes the late Orthodox rabbi Shimon Schwab. Instead of the truth that comes from the unvarnished and “unimproved” facts, Schwab, speaking for most of those Shapiro writes about in this book, concludes: “we need inspiration from our forefathers in order to pass it on to posterity” (3). Implicit in this view is that those who come into contact with the uncensored truth are not sufficiently rooted in their beliefs and have not intelligently worked through their ideologies in order to be able to handle facts that may appear to contradict them. It is a kind of top-down, effectively patronizing view that those who censor the facts know better who the real heroes are and what the Orthodox can handle, and have rightfully taken it upon themselves to create a barrier to the direct encounter with the facts by the faithful. It is a view that claims a kind of benevolent dictatorship that all ministries of “truth” (read: censors) commonly assert, but Shapiro unmasks it as nothing less than an act of suppression and dishonesty. The fact that it comes from a group of people who claim moral superiority, a holier-than-thou identity, who are quick to label sinners and saints, is germane to the project. For one cannot read this book and be committed to the truth without ending up furious at the very censoring authorities that act with so much contempt for the truth and those whom they claim to be protecting.

To the counterclaim that after all “everyone has a bias,” including academic historians, Shapiro responds that “obviously, unconscious bias and distortions abound” in all writing, “but ‘Orthodox history’ is an entirely different category,” in that it “resembles the ‘official’ histories found in the [former] Soviet Union, or those commissioned by other communist governments or dictatorships” (9). Thus, if some important rabbi is found to have taken a position that contradicts the party line on what today is considered to be properly Orthodox, or behaved in a way that seems at odds with the accepted standards for Orthodox behavior as commonly defined, “outright distortion is permissible,” or at the least simply wiping the record clean if the censors deem “the harm or embarrassment that can be caused to someone ... rates much higher than the needs of the historical record or journalistic objectivity” (10). That “harm” is defined subjectively by the censor, who may even be protecting his own views.

To be sure, the Orthodox world is increasingly rigid and conformist in its attitudes, as well as fundamentalist and Manichean in its outlook—i.e., anyone not with us is necessarily against us—such that few are willing to challenge the

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ensorship, even if they are not even certain of its reasoning, for fear that they will be excluded, banned, and themselves become subject to censorship. Hence biographies must become hagiographies. The heroes must remain heroes and the villains remain villains. Nuances in behavior and thinking that are part of the real world disappear, and all holy men always act holy, however that may be defined.

Regarding the latter, Shapiro offers two extended chapters on Orthodox rabbis—Samson Raphael Hirsch and Abraham Isaac Look—whose nuanced lives and beliefs have been particularly subjected to such Orthodox censorship. He makes clear that they are not unique—even Maimonides has been treated the same way—but they are exemplary. This means that a variety of writers have “taken liberties” with not only what these men wrote and did, but have even been willing to distort their legal decisions when it comes to Jewish law. The fact that Shapiro demonstrates that even Halakhah—to which he devotes a full chapter, although it is referenced throughout the book—is subject to censorship and distortions, of course raises questions about one of Orthodoxy’s core principles. Orthodoxy has from the outset distinguished itself by its scrupulous fidelity to Jewish law, in contrast with other Jewish groups and denominations whom the Orthodox have claimed take liberties with this law or ignore it altogether. But what Shapiro shows is that when there are nuanced and even more permissive positions in that law taken by otherwise respected rabbinic authorities from Maimonides on down, some Orthodox censors have taken it on themselves to hide, distort, or change those positions in ways that make a mockery of the Orthodox claims to be loyal to Halakhah. In shining the light on these crimes against the truth, Shapiro has done us all a service, but one suspects, he will soon (if he is not already) be censored by these very Orthodox.

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Kim Wünschmann. *Before Auschwitz: Jewish Prisoners in the Prewar Concentration Camps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. 376 pp.
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In November 1938, Moritz Carlebach met his long-lost son Emil in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Emil, who was a Communist, was arrested in 1934 and spent the next eleven years in concentration camps; his father, a businessman in Frankfurt am Main, was arrested during the Kristallnacht. With help from the Communist underground in the camp, Emil arranged for his father to be sent to the sick bay, a relatively protected place. When father and son, scions of an eminent family of rabbis, stood face to face, Moritz’s first reaction was to reproach Emil for getting himself to such a place. Emil replied: “You don’t seem to notice that you are here yourself?” Their encounter is illuminating in portraying two types of German Jews in the prewar concentration camps: the political leftist