

This is the tale of the fifteenish Young Girl's getting involved with a rich thirty-something Chinese merchant, though she hates the Chinese in Indochina, where her impoverished widowed mother and two brothers are stuck. The daring, doomed clandestine affair will have to end when the girl's family returns to France, or even sooner, when the businessman will have to marry an equally wealthy Chinese girl in a prearranged, loveless match. The movie, like the novel, contains some interesting insights into cultural differences, and the feel of life in prewar Saigon and environs is persuasively re-created *in situ*. But this remains a piece of queasy erotica in which the now old, ugly, and egomaniacal Duras narcissistically exalts her youthful self.

Annaud made the film in English, with an eye to the box office. He cast

as the Young Girl the sultrily sullen nymphet-like Jane March, who, with the help of creditable acting and five body doubles, manages to be quite a hot little number. The Hong Kong action-movie star Tony Leung, with only two body doubles and dubbed by a more high-class British voice, is less appealing. People whose own fantasies tap into *The Lover's* central situation—involving a secret apartment for torrid yet seemingly affectless trysts—may enjoy this; others won't.

The minor characters are, as in the novel, preposterous caricatures; the once great Jeanne Moreau supplies the narration (in good English, the language of her mother, though even she trips up on the word *recognize*, a veritable *pons asinorum* for foreigners); her voice, however, sounds even older than the old Duras's it is supposed to represent. Ah no, Annaud! □

velvet chair sat on a platform to the right of the ark, empty.

Hasidism is a mystical movement that arose in Eastern Europe in the early eighteenth century, in reaction to rabbinical aridity and frustrated messianic hopes. Lubavitchers trace themselves to a Hasidic rabbi, Shneur Zalman, whose son moved to the Russian town of Lubavitch in 1814, whence the name of the sect. The sixth *rebbe* survived Soviet prison and the Nazi bombing of Warsaw, and came to the United States in 1940. Ten years later, his son-in-law, Menachem Schneerson, became the seventh *rebbe*.

"Democracy and freedom are not a cauldron of assimilation," Schneerson said early in his tenure. Instead, they offer "the opportunity for the Jew to fulfill his life's destiny." That destiny is to obey the 613 commandments of the Bible (as, needless to say, the Lubavitchers read them). Lubavitchers believe that in every Jew, however secular or religiously liberal, there is a "spark" of religious Orthodoxy. So they cruise city streets in vans gaily blaring Hasidic music; run ads in papers urging Jews to light menorahs; start Jewish day schools in places as far-flung as Kinshasa.

One Lubavitcher I spoke with recalled the territory he had covered as a Jewish circuit rider four decades ago: Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Canada, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic. One of his sons had just returned from a trip to Bangkok, Manila, Singapore, and Tokyo. The Lubavitchers bring an all-American flair to these activities. They may have come from Russia and be headed for Zion, but their PR is pure Madison Avenue.

For the last year or so, the Lubavitchers have been bearing an additional message, vouchsafed by the *rebbe*: the Messiah is coming soon. All Orthodox Jews are supposed to believe that the Messiah will come, and to pray for the event, but the Lubavitchers would seem to be on an accelerated timetable. Schneerson, one young Lubavitcher put it, "has told me Moshiach is coming. He has never told me anything false."

He has also never said that he is the Messiah-in-waiting, though the inference arises from the devotion Lubavitchers accord him. In every generation, Orthodox Jews believe, there is a potential Messiah, and in this genera-

MANNERS IN BROOKLYN

Great Expectations

RICHARD BROOKHISER

IFIRST SPOTTED Menachem Schneerson, the *rebbe* or leader of the Lubavitcher sect of Hasidic Judaism, on late-night cable TV. Tapping through the preachers, the pundits, and the shows of yesteryear, one would suddenly come upon a keen-eyed, thick-bearded old man in a black coat and fedora, speaking in Yiddish to a dense crowd of men, similarly dressed. Sometimes his listeners burst into song, which he encouraged with go-team shakes of his arm: when they stopped, he resumed. It looked live, from nineteenth-century Russia. In fact, it was all happening in Brooklyn. Only in America.

Rebbe Schneerson has not led such a meeting in years, and a stroke this spring kept him from public appearances for six months. Meanwhile, the Lubavitchers keep on with their daily lives: working to bring Jews back to Orthodox practice, and awaiting the coming of the Messiah, perhaps (they suspect, and opponents denounce them for it) in their own neighborhood.

Rebbe Schneerson and many of his followers live in Crown Heights, a

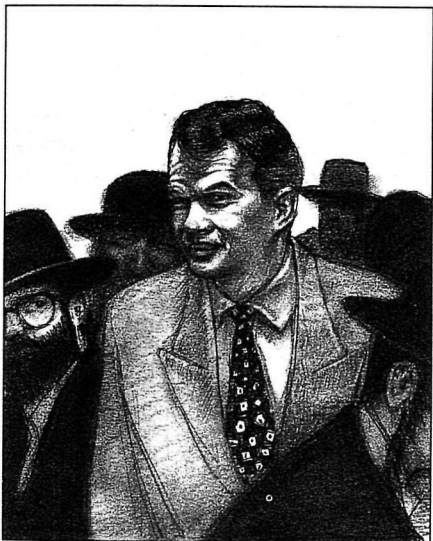
Brooklyn neighborhood that has become mostly black. In August 1991, it became a mini Los Angeles when a driver in Schneerson's motorcade struck and killed Gavin Cato, a Guyanese boy; three days of rioting ensued, and Yankel Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old Lubavitcher from Australia, was stabbed by a black mob. The dying Rosenbaum identified Lemrick Nelson Jr., a black teenager, as his killer. A year later the side streets were quiet and neat. A banner spreading across one of them declares that MOSHIACH [Messiah] IS ON THE WAY—BE A PART OF IT!

Schneerson's office is in a gabled brick house on Eastern Parkway; the room made famous by cable is the basement of a run-down apartment building next door. The Friday night I went there to see a service, it was packed with hundreds of dark-clothed worshippers. In a brown suit and a yellow tie, I looked like Charles II. Women watched from behind the darkened window of a gallery reserved for them. The cantor kept the service moving along, but members of the congregation went about their prayers at their own tempo, with the hum of an orchestra tuning up. The Rebbe's red

Mr. Brookhiser, an NR senior editor, is a columnist for the New York Observer.

tion, Lubavitchers believe, who else could it be? Yet "at the end of the day," as one Lubavitcher told me, "it doesn't matter who is Moshiach, but that he come."

Schneerson himself is good at deflecting even normal forms of praise. I watched several hours of videotapes of a function he performed until his stroke, giving away dollar bills which were then to be given to charity. Thousands showed up for bills and blessings, Hasids and non-Hasids, kids in Purim costumes, old men on crutches, and dozens of American and Israeli politicians. I don't know Hebrew, so I couldn't understand the Israelis, but I assume they were as unctuous as the Americans. I'll take messianists over pols any day. One oily Brooklyn as-



semblyman told Schneerson to his face that he was "amazing." "What good does it do the community if I am amazing?" Schneerson replied.

What should we think of this? Christians, who as far as the Messiah goes are more interested in the ideas of certain dead Jews than in those of any number of live ones, need not think anything in particular. Jews have a thornier problem, though the Lubavitchers' belief that the spark within every Jew can be fanned one commandment at a time keeps them just within the big tent of intra-religious civility. Since their attitude is not "all or nothing," but "all, meanwhile something," many a Jew feels grateful to them for having been impelled toward something, even if he does not expect the Messiah soon.

As Americans, we should have no problem at all. American history is lit-

tered with people who expected the end of the world, or the arrival of a new one. The Mormons did; so did the Puritans; so did Columbus. Even the Founding Fathers, those bewigged Deists, put NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM on the Great Seal of the United States, under a winking Illuminist eyeball. We can probably handle one more new world on Eastern Parkway.

Last month, a jury found Lemrick Nelson not guilty of the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum. The defense argued that the cops were under community pressure to find a victim, and any defense lawyer with a black client who can concoct a theory of police conspiracy has an even chance of convincing a New York jury these days. When the verdict was announced, crowds of peaceful but angry Lubavitchers filled the streets of Crown Heights. "Jewish blood is not cheap," Rosenbaum's brother told TV cameras. Until the new world arrives, the old one can lay heavy on its children. □

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Sex, by Madonna, with photographs by Steven Meisel, edited by Glenn O'Brien (Warner, unpagged, \$49.95)

MADONNA'S latest commercial venture comes sealed in a Mylar bag and bears a small notice on the back warning that it is for "adults only." Nevertheless, teenagers will surely manage to get hold of it, and frankly it's hard to imagine a more effective way of discouraging them from exploring their sexuality than Steven Meisel's scary photographs of an underworld of leather, chains, tattoos, and nipple rings. Madonna wants to convince us that the S&M fantasies depicted in these pages are ones we could all share, if only we were not so uptight. In an interview in *Vogue* she stated, "I know from first-hand experience that narrow-minded people who are exposed to my lifestyle do change." Madonna's need for public approval of the choices she has made in her intimate life ("Justify my love?") accounts for the defensive tone of this volume. In the end, *Sex* is not about sex, which even in its kinkier forms requires a certain give-and-take, but about the total control conferred by unlimited money, whether its object is to get peo-

Call for thought-provoking books

THE ROAD TO SERFDOM

F.A. Hayek

THE 1944 classic, well-reasoned, graceful and forceful warning to free nations that "social planning" is incompatible with democracy. As relevant today as when it was written. "A grand book....I find myself in agreement with virtually all of it."—John Maynard Keynes
\$9.95 pb. (U. of Chicago)

MONEY MISCHIEF

Episodes in Monetary History

Milton Friedman

In a book vital at a time when politicians talk about "change," Nobel Prize Laureate and bestselling author Friedman demonstrates through historical events the mischief that can result from misunderstanding the monetary system.
\$19.95 (Harcourt)

IMPOSTORS IN THE TEMPLE

Martin Anderson

"Anderson's book is a penetrating, insightful analysis of the inner workings of the academy. Add Anderson's name to the list of important voices who are insisting that American higher education get its intellectual house together."—William J. Bennett, former Secretary of Education
\$22.00 (S&S)

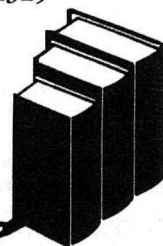
Call 1-800-255-2665

Worldwide 1-203-966-5470

Fax 1-203-966-4329



59 Elm Street
New Canaan
CT, USA 06840



Copyright of National Review is the property of National Review Inc.. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.