

## When Memory Comes by Saul Friedländer

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 186 pp.; \$9.95)

## The Generation of 1914 by Robert Wohl

(Harvard University Press; 307 pp.; \$17.50)

## Reviewing the Forties by Diana Trilling

(Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; 272 pp.; \$9.95)

### Martin Green

These three books all deal with the theme of remembering, though only one tackles that theme head on. That one is Saul Friedländer's, as his title would indicate; he has written a meditation on the events of his own life, which is at the same time, partly because the author is a historian, a meditation on modern history. Robert Wohl's book, on the other hand, is a work of intellectual history; his "generation of 1914" did try to place themselves in others' memory, to differentiate themselves from previous generations, and so constituted themselves subjects as well as objects of remembering; but still, when we turn from Friedländer's book to Wohl's, we change our expectations to suit a very public form of memory. Diana Trilling's 1940's fiction reviews were, when they were written, as immediate a response to as contemporary a stimulus as could well be imagined; but the publisher, by means of the title, the cover, the blurb, and the introduction, has called us to read them now rememberingly.

They are then quite different kinds of books, and must be considered separately. Mr. Friedländer has written an elegant and moving memoir of an extraordinary life. As he says, "I was born in Prague at the worst possible moment, four months before Hitler came to power." (Power in Germany, that is.) His family, being Jewish but unpolitical, got out of Czechoslovakia only just before the Germans got there, and went to Paris. There his father, who had been an insurance lawyer, learned various new trades, like cheese-making, which might win him a visa to Canada or the USA; his mother became a beautician. When

the Germans invaded France, the Friedländers went south and made an exiguous living under Vichy until that regime decided to send all its Jews into concentration camps. Then the parents got the boy (their only child) into a Catholic boarding school, and they themselves set off to cross the frontier into Switzerland, failed, were captured, and disappeared. The boy became a Catholic, took another name, developed a vocation for the priesthood, and was generally swallowed up in his Pétainist boarding school until the Liberation. Whereupon the school disgorged him, he learned again to be a Jew, went to the Lycée Henri IV in Paris, became a Communist and a Zionist, and at fifteen, pretending to be seventeen, joined a boatload of immigrants to Israel.

That was 1947, and he has remained a citizen of Israel ever since. Now a professor of history at Tel Aviv University, he has written *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, *Hitler and the United States 1939-41*, and *History and Psychoanalysis*. Because of that professional interest in history, he has dozens of interesting things to tell us about his experiences; on the role of German military songs in forming the consciousness of even Jews in Germany (and in Czechoslovakia), and those songs' role in the assimilating process Jews underwent and then had to undo. These historical details and insights are related with great literary skill to both the autobiographical narrative (quite lightly touched in) and the contemporary (1977) events in Israel that provoked and interline that narrative. Perhaps there is a little too much skill; at least I

felt at the end that I was not as moved by the whole, and not even as clear about its purpose, as I had been about the parts. Professor Friedländer is troubled about certain issues in the development of Israel, but he is not very definite about what they are or about where he himself stands. They are used in this book to explain (for us) and to arouse (for him) the troubled retrospective brooding which is the substance of what he offers us. But in his own life we gather that those issues are the substantial thing, calling him to action, and these memories are peripheral—the furniture and comfort of his mind. It is therefore, in some sense, a slight book, though a most interesting one, and beautifully written.

Mr. Wohl, on the other hand, is essentially substantial. He devotes equal space to five countries, during 1900-1930: England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. His method is primarily biographical; in each case he describes several years in the careers of a few men of ideas: in Spain, mainly Ortega, in England, mainly Rupert Brooke, in Italy, Papini and Gramsci, in France, Massis, Montherlant, and Drieu la Rochelle, in Germany, Jünger, Unruh, and the Jugend movement. Each country is treated individually, and each chapter is suffused with the atmosphere of that particular culture.

But besides being a survey, this is also the discussion of an idea—the idea of "generations." Besides the biographies of the men who embodied their generation, it discusses the theorists of "generationalism," like F. Mentré in France and E. Gründel in Germany. In all these countries at this time young people felt they belonged to a new type, essentially different from their elders. Wohl sets out to ask both what facts this feeling corresponded to ("to rescue the generation of 1914 from the shadowland of myth and restore it to the realm of history") and what philosophy of history this theory implied and belonged to. To this latter question his answer, given in the last pages of the book, is firmly disapproving. Generationalism demoted the mind, and at the same time exaggerated the importance of literary intellectuals; it suggested a biological determinism, and obscured the importance of social divisions.

Unfortunately, the reader sees this conclusion coming all the way through the book. The writer clearly cannot take

the idea seriously, and so the pages he devotes to it seem a waste of time. Moreover, the design and content of whole chapters is determined by this idea: They are parallel or symmetrical only in terms of generationalism. In other terms, England's equivalent for Spain's Ortega would be Wells or Shaw; it is only the generation idea that yokes Ortega with Rupert Brooke.

In fact, amongst Englishmen it is Kipling of whom I at least am most reminded by some of the most interesting things Wohl turns up in Europe; for instance, "The Young People of Today," an influential survey made in France in 1912, which characterized the mind-set of men young at that time. The previous generation of Frenchmen had been, in the opinion of this one, pessimistic, self-doubting, morally flabby, overly intellectual and introspective, relativistic, incapable of energetic action, etc. The young man of 1912, on the other hand, had "exiled self-doubt"; airplanes, automobiles, and football attracted him more than books. In politics he was a pragmatist, but a patriot. One of the heroes of this generation was Ernest Psichari, the grandson of Renan (epitome of that older generation) but himself a soldier who had volunteered for the colonial artillery and found his salvation serving in Africa.

In Germany, Ernst Jünger felt homeless and stifled in the narrow and finely ordered world of his parents and his class. Africa became the focus of his dreams too, because there one could lead "a virile, heroic, and autonomous existence." But in fact he found what he needed in the Great War; a transition that Wohl finds strange. "How could an individualist who had fled custom and complacency and questioned hierarchy and discipline when they presented themselves in the form of the father and the schoolmaster resign himself happily to the factory-like slaughter of the Western Front?" Any reader of *Stalky and Co.* could explain.

And in Spain in 1913 Ortega called on the young to make a revolution of competence--to replace rhetoric by knowledge and to replace ideology by technical expertise. *Vital* Spain, he said, was represented by young men who refused to join the political parties and the mediocrity of official Spain. They would enter politics as doctors and economists, as engineers and professors, as poets and industrialists, not as parlia-

mentarians. Nationalism and socialism must fuse in a politics of vitality. A dozen Kipling essays express the same idea.

But the collective memory we call memory has its lapses, its Freudian censorship, like individual memory. Kipling has been censored out of our minds, and without that giant signpost, it seems, it is hard to explain even the German, French, and Spanish generations of 1914.

Diana Trilling's book is a collection of the reviews of new novels that she wrote weekly for *The Nation* from 1942 to 1948. It reads remarkably well; I cannot imagine that many such compilations of other reviewers would stand up so well to modern scrutiny. The style and the principles of taste are vigorous and plain, but not without sophistication and surprises. Mrs. Trilling was genuinely ahead of her readers—one would guess—and was genuinely educating the liberal imagination.

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*Three exercises in remembering: a "meditation on modern history," a "work of intellectual history," and an "entrepreneurial publishing venture."*

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One is of course bound to think of her husband's work when one reads hers, simply because one knows his better, and so her reviews are bound to read like first notes toward *The Liberal Imagination* or *The Middle of the Journey*. When one puts the two oeuvres together, one gets a sense of "the Trillings" as a joint operation, which found two kinds of expression. One does not feel, I mean, a need to assign a priority. There is not in this book—it would be surprising if there was in a collection of reviews—evidence of a distinction of mind to challenge Lionel Trilling's. But one can perhaps see his distinction as to some degree a function of their relationship; I mean, one is bound to guess that some allotment went on, she to make the blunt statements and aggressive judgments, he to make the philosophically modulated declarations of principle. That distinguished manner has at times seemed a little exaggerated; his sentences have sometimes seemed to have too lingering

a movement, turning to watch themselves admiringly as they move down the page. Now we can perhaps put them together with Mrs. Trilling's brisker bustle and make a whole out of the two.

And one of her reviews seems to me as suggestive as anything (of equal length) of his. This is a 1943 review of Eudora Welty's *The Wide Net*, in which she complains that the author "makes a ballet out of words" and "sacrifices the meaning of language to its rhythms and patterns." She says this attitude to narrative "breeds exhibitionism and insincerity" and regrets the decay of the idea of sincerity. But what is most interesting is that this leads to her to discuss Katherine Mansfield and the cult of sensibility, which she regards as ultimately responsible for these attitudes—which are especially common among women writers. And this leads her to discuss Salvador Dali and his designs for ballet and for Bonwit Teller.

For she sees a myth of modern femininity served by all these people, which she evokes with the Bonwit Teller slogan, "Have you that cherished look?" and which is also served in its different way by "current female writing, including Miss Welty's." The following week, reviewing Sylvia Townsend Warner's short stories, she returned to Katherine Mansfield and her cult of sensibility, insight, and pity at the expense of "the broadly conceived and fully stated." I find it hard to think of any other four-page review that yokes together so many disparate figures and adumbrates such a sweeping idea, with so many applications to literature, femininity, and the history of taste.

So here we have three exercises in memory: an individual's autobiography, an academic historian's survey, and an entrepreneurial publishing venture. And of the three, I'm bound to say it's the last, with least impressive cultural credentials, that gives the reader the most vivid sense of the past. [VVV]