

ONE HUNDRED NIGHTS IN OLD JAFFA

a novel

Tel Aviv, Yachdav, 1938; reissued in Tel Aviv by Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Sifriat Poalim, 1983. 192 pp.

Translation © the Author



Menashe Levin

The Author

Menashe Levin was born near Warsaw in 1903. He made his home in Tel Aviv from 1925 until his death in 1981. A former yeshiva student, he became a playwright, poet and prose writer. He taught himself French, becoming the country's leading translator, although he never visited France. His translations include works by Balzac, Flaubert, Malraux and Voltaire.

Books Published in Hebrew

**One Hundred Nights in Old Jaffa*, Yachdav, 1938; Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Sifriat Poalim, 1983

Three Angels in the Snow, Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Sifriat Poalim, 1983

Watermill in Spring, Sifriat Poalim, 1987

Samson and Delilah (play), Alef, 1985

Manuscripts Available in Translation

**One Hundred Nights in Old Jaffa*

French: Translator: Michel Elial

Italian: Translator: Gaio Sciloni

Selected stories available in English.

Synopsis

Menashe Levin's major work is a kind of narrated film script set in Jaffa and New York and even briefly on the moon. Its cast of dozens includes an Arab goldfish vendor, a Macedonian belly dancer, a bewitched donkey, Professor X, Don-Quixote, the Devil, the Devil's wife, Josephine Baker and the hero, Musta. There are many ingredients in this witches' brew, one of them being a slapstick meditation on the wear and tear of art by its consumers. Professor X presents a catalogue of aesthetic artefacts that are now so much junk: "Here is the apple that the snake knocked out of Eve's mouth: through a microscope you can still see her teeth marks on it ... Here is the heart of Sheherazade, as soiled from love as an old playing card...." Each chapter is a story that begins in a different Jaffa alley (hence the title), and is ostensibly a celebration of the exotic in the town. The book quickly leaves behind the locale to tell of gypsy guitarists, blue circus horses and ostriches that were winged camels whose feathers have fanned the queens of Asia and the sad Romantics of Europe. Interconnected by the characters, the various narratives are a profane parody of literature itself, calling great figures to account and causing what has been called "out-standing mischief in fiction."

About the Book

"While older men were still writing about Jewish life in Eastern Europe, and colleagues ... were making poetry of the new world emerging in Palestine, Levin was composing stories about ... watching Tarzan movies in Tel Aviv that had snakes 'wriggling in air as though in a symbolist painting,' or a 'biblical lion that tears through the jungle, eclipsing the moon,'" writes translator Hillel Halkin. "A revolutionary who fought free of tradition and broke all the rules, he paid the price in vicious reviews," wrote Gershon Shaked. Ten years after his death, Menashe Levin's work is garnering the

accolades it did not receive during his lifetime. According to Hillel Halkin, "Menashe Levin was a unique figure on the Hebrew literary scene. An often brilliant writer whose ... body of fiction has yet to be properly assessed, he was influenced not – as were most of his contemporaries – by the Jewish classics and the Russian Romantics, but by the French Dadaists and Continental Expressionism." "There is no social message in this book." [Shaked] "The form is the message. The exotic descriptions ... are merely the launching pad for fantasy and parody. Here, Levin ... connects the traditional narrative to the modern world: Einstein, Picasso and Chaplin stand side by side with Sheherazade and Sancho Panza... This superb futuristic mesh turns parody into an end of its own. ... Levin blurs the border between entertainment and reality ... and creates cinema."

Halkin concludes, "It is time to give Menashe Levin ... the wider audience he deserves. To read [his lines] is to watch a master at work."

