

THE RHETORIC OF EXTERMINISM
Edmund Wilson's *Israel and the Dead Sea Scrolls*

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A renewed interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls drew me back to Edmund Wilson's pioneering study which is still so often referred to in continuing discussions of the subject.¹ An admirer of *Axel's Castle* and aware of the political correctness of the author's *Apology to the Iraquois*, I was not prepared to find a crippling bias in this book. The surprise is increased by the author's disarming truthfulness about his linguistic limitations and his candor about his non-partisan stance. Since he professes himself neither Jew nor Christian, one is prepared to find him free of the biases which have delayed the translation and given rise to opposing theories of dating of the scrolls. Indeed, on the surface, a ration and objective spirit seems to pervade Wilson's discussion of the scrolls themselves. Wilson really does not care that "ignorant" Catholics might find their traditional faith disturbed by new information about the historical Jesus, for example.

In his dispassionate discussion of the scrolls, however, an even deeper and more serious bias reveals itself, disturbing in that its source is such an eminent American critic. The author identifies himself (and not so subtly, the reader) in the equation of modern Israel with the embattled "Children of Light", who died on Masada rather than submit to the Romans, and against the "Children of Darkness", a role now occupied by the Arabs, especially the Palestinians.

I am talking about Wilson's admiration for everything Israeli and his contempt for everything Arab. This bias shows from the start in his

¹Farrar Strauss and Giroux, *Israel and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York, 1982.

reservation of the term "Palestinian" for the Jewish community of pre-1948 Palestine, rather than for the Arab community for which the term has been commonly used since 1948. Because of Wilson's reputation and the influence of his early discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls, this peripheral vision may be assumed to have had enormous effect in shaping American public opinion.

At the outset we are impressed with the Herculean effort, made by the author at an age when acquiring new languages is no longer easy, to master Hebrew. And his immediate excitement on reading Genesis is infectious: we are prepared to believe with him that "Genesis is wonderful" (p. 12). From this study he draws conclusions in praise of the genius of the Jews: "... The earliest examples of that specialty of the Jewish genius—the development of the moral consciousness, of man's relation with God" (p. 13). Later, Wilson undercuts this apparent credulity by saying he can't use the word "God" since it involves myth (p. 388). In his discussion of Jewish belief as it is reflected in the Old Testament, however, he seems to have no trouble in using the term uncritically. This ambivalence becomes important when Wilson discusses the relative claims to authenticity of "Holy Places", sacred respectively to Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Palestine.

In interpreting Old Testament texts, Wilson follows the lead of the Israelis themselves who (as March Ellis points out in *Beyond Innocence and Redemption*)² regard their servival as the highest moral good to which all other principles must be sacrificed. For example, Wilson interprets the story of the incest of Lot with his daughters as justified by the primacy of the "will to survive." He speaks of the "emphasis on family," "race survival," and "*consecrated seed*" (p. 19) (emphasis mine). Lot's daughters' incest is justified, in this reading, by "the desperateness of the situation...the fierceness of the will to persist" (p. 20). We will have occasion to return to this valuation of value because Wilson approves the whole Israeli enterprise and sees it affirmed by biblical texts because it puts him in touch with "one of the greatest human forces for the tenacity and authority of our race" (p. 382). Leaving aside for the moment his peculiar notion of "race," we should notice that Israel fills Wilson's need to be associated with power ("tenacity and authority") rather than goodness or morality. He has told us he is neither Christian nor Jew: he did not say he was not Israeli; but it is through his acceptance by and identification with Israeli scholars and soldiers with their New York addresses and their dual citizenship, that he experiences and exults in his own personal power. As a scholar, this identification takes place as, awed by the military power of the Israeli state, he accepts the interpretation of Israeli authorities like the archaeologist General Yigael Yadin whereby that

²March H. Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israell Power: Creating a Moral Future for the Jewish People*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1990.

state is given validation (in my opinion, spurious) through the unfolding of Scriptural texts in the scrolls.

Thus, he has fused present-day Israeli military men with figures in the scrolls, repeatedly attributing to them the superhero status he finds in Biblical texts: for example, when he discusses Jacob who wrestles with God and thereafter walks with a limp (Genesis 32: 24-29), he compares him to Prometheus. It belongs to the Jewish experience, Wilson concludes, that the Jew has won, "at a maiming cost, some share in the power of God" (p. 25).

Like all readers of the Old Testament, Wilson comes up against massacres committed by the Jews, like that recorded in Genesis of the entire tribe of Sechem, suitor of Jacob's daughter Dinah. Pretending to agree to the engagement of the uncircumcised infidel to their sister, the sons of Jacob invite Sechem and his men to undergo circumcision, ostensibly in order that the marriage may be carried out. While all Sechem's men are disabled by the surgery, two of Jacob's sons annihilate them, plunder the city, devastate the countryside, and enslave the women and children (pp. 24-25). Wilson of course acknowledges that "such stories are far from edifying" but he justifies them as follows: "... yet, in the narrative of the Bible, their savagery has the effect of setting off the strong purposes, the flashes of revelation, that represent the *emergence of the moral sense*," etc. (pp. 25-26) (my emphasis). Wilson avoids the even less edifying stories of massacres of whole peoples (including suckling babes) at the express command of Yahweh like those in *Samuel I and II*, though it seems likely that he could have reconciled his highly selective moral sense to these as well.

The prejudice of Edmund Wilson is not simply pro-Jewish, anti-Arab: it is more discriminating than that. He is anti-Arab simply, but his pro-Jewishness admits of degrees, distinguishing among several types within the larger Jewish category. Oriental Jews are lazy, and the ultra-orthodox Jews of *Naturei Karta* live in "squalor" and are furthermore non-military, refusing to serve in the IDF, disapproving of the use of violence to acquire the Promised Land. It is the Askenazi or "Westernizing" Jews who are his hosts and role models, and whose prejudices he adopts. Wilson finds the "squalor" of the ultra-orthodox Jews of Mea Sherim repulsive and "unusual" in Israeli Jerusalem (p. 55). By the time he is leaving Israel on the eve of the Six-Day disaster, though he had found it "charming" to read about these people in the Nobel Prize-winning book of Israeli author Agnon, he finds them with their side-curls "spindling and pale," and "queerly incongruous with everything now happening in Israel" (p. 367). And of course what is happening in Israel is ethnic cleansing, the violent subjection and dispossession of people in a military operation of which Wilson totally approves and with which, by the end of the book, he totally identifies.

Like his comments on the ultra-orthodox of Mea Sherim, his discussion of the Oriental Jews also occasions negative stereotyping. He speaks of the problems created by Moroccan and Algerian Jews brought to Israel "to save them from the reprisals of the vanquished Arabs" but who have turned out, he says, to be riffraff, "the only Jews in the world who are not willing to work..." (p. 106). It is now common knowledge that Jews were recruited from all the Arab countries not necessarily for their own protection but in order to swell the numbers in the Israeli state and therefore justify their disproportionate claim to Palestinian land. In some cases, like that of Iraq, Jews were recruited by means of bombs planted in Baghdad synagogues by Israeli terrorists, *agents provocateurs* bent on creating the illusion of danger from "the vanquished Arabs." If these recruits were "unwilling to work" when they arrived after sometimes rough persuasion in the Jewish homeland, perhaps their hosts got what they deserved. This is surely a bizarre case of *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (cited by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*) in which the author S.H. Alata notes that this myth arose from the false consciousness of colonialists "unwilling to accept that the natives' refusal to work was one of the earliest forms of resistance."³

However, to be fair to Wilson, he finds an exception to the "laziness" of the Oriental Jew in his "chamber maid," though this exception does little more than prove the rule. This young lady was "good-looking and very active, of a dark and African appearance," he records, "a Moroccan who spoke French... I thought she must represent the *better breed* of the North African immigrant" (p. 347) (emphasis mine). This disgustingly racist remark sounds like marveling at a talking dog or appraising an interesting breed of cattle. Even Jewish tourists who visit Israel for special occasions Wilson compares unfavorably to Israeli Jews: wealthy bourgeois Jews at the King David Hotel are "pale and fat," compared to the Israeli Jews whose skins are "darkened by the Eastern sun" (p. 340).

By 1967, Wilson is so identified with the military that he exults like a school boy in the fireworks of the Remembrance Day celebration (clearly a military display) calling them he "most splendid and explosive I have ever seen" (p. 337). He does not care, perhaps, to know that massacres continued throughout the area, that, within a few days of this thrilling celebration, the triumphant IDF would drive out the Palestinians from the Old City to make parking lots for the Wailing Wall, that their old domed houses would be bulldozed and, that they themselves would be napalmed as they fled on foot or in buses toward the Allenby Bridge. (See the account of AFSC

³Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Random House, 1994.

representative Alfred C. Forrest entitled *The Unholy Land*⁴ who documents the use of napalm from personal interviews with surviving victims in Jordanian hospitals; also *The Dispossessed* by David Gilmour, *The Palestinians: Victims of Expediency* by Desmond Stewart, *The Question of Palestine* by Edward Said.) He may also have wished to be spared the details of what happened when Israel was forced by UN resolutions and world opinion to open the bridges to allow the refugees to return. When it ostensibly complied, returning refugees were sorted by area and those from certain parts of Palestine were simply taken out and shot—part of a policy of ethnic cleansing that was already well under way: as Rabin had purged Lydda and Ramle in 1948, the total destruction of the three villages in the Latrun valley (Yalu, Emmaus, and Beit Nuba) was soon to take place. As Palestinian historian Saleh Baransi of Tayibeh told me later, "every village had its massacres."

Wilson does not actually sidestep all instances of terrorism by Israel, and he even calls it by its correct name. The instances he cites like the blowing up by Menachem Begin of the King David Hotel with a loss of 91 lives he justifies by noting the irrationality of British policy: He also cites Old Testament precedents for illegal ways of getting land, and acknowledges contemporary theft of Arab land and houses. British policy and Nazi persecution, Wilson claims, made these methods "in those days as justifiable as anything of the kind can be" (p. 77). Even when he confronts his Israeli friends with outrages like the massacre at Nahhalin, he accepts answers such as "the Arabs ... had been making themselves a nuisance with their continual shootings and thefts" (p. 78) which has the effect of minimizing and demeaning the character of Palestinian resistance, reducing this life-and-death struggle to trivial annoyance. Displaced Palestinians were often shot dead in "cross-border raids," when they returned clandestinely to their villages to try to bring grain or sheep to feed their starving families, an irritating occurrence here called "theft."

This contempt for Arabs and Arab culture pervades the book. Wilson is shockingly open about this prejudice. He says early on: "It is not that a certain contempt for the Arabs is not natural for anyone trained in the West, nor is it that any ruthlessness of Israel is not matched by the *infantile spite* of the Arabs and the rather *stupid obstinacy* of the Arab refugees in Jordan, who have refused the offers of UNRWA to accommodate them in other localities and continue to insist on returning to their villages and farms in Israel" (pp. 78-79) (emphasis mine). Elsewhere Wilson speaks of the Arabs making it difficult to cross into their territory "in their somewhat *childish desire to behave as unpleasantly as possible*" (p. 90) (emphasis mine). What other ethnic group in 1967 could have been spoken of in literate America with such contempt and such inhuman lack of compassion, their

⁴Alfred C. Forrest, *The Unholy Land*, McLelland and Stewart, 1971.

determination to return to their homeland ridiculed and dismissed? I find unacceptable Wilson's bland assumption that his egregious prejudice is shared by "anyone trained in the West" but to the extent that he is right, it is a measure of Western participation in both anti-Arab bigotry and the tenets of Zionism. It also explains (as I will discuss later) how such widespread attitudes helped to make possible the terrible destruction of the Gulf War.

The finale of the book, written in May 1967, "On the Eve" of what Wilson regarded as a glorious military victory, brings the anti-Arab and pro-Israeli sentiment to a very frenzy. The section consists in an extended comparison between the virtues of the Israeli character and institutions and the deficiencies of Arab reality. His thesis: "Jordan is retarded and static, but Israel dynamic and purposeful" (p. 346). The opening essay entitled "Tattoo" displays total sympathy with the growing truculence of Israeli military ambition—Wilson's boyish enthusiasm for the fire-works in the Remembrance Day maneuvers has already been noted—but this section also contains examples of some particularly disgusting anti-Arab stereotyping. One of the horses in the British-style parade fell as it left the platform, breaking its rider's leg. Wilson's description is worth quoting in full: "In going back through the gate, one of these horses slipped and fell and broke the rider's leg—no doubt to the malicious satisfaction of the Arabs, who pride themselves on horsemanship" (pp. 334–335). This strikes me as gratuitously mean, especially since it is purely imaginary, no objective evidence for this malicious glee having been offered. He described the light-show performed by soldiers wearing colored lights in the darkened arena which, like the fire-works, seems to have thrilled Wilson's susceptible sensibilities; he remarks, "Everybody specially clapped" (P. 335). President Shazar's speech, which Wilson cannot understand is, nevertheless very positive because, the author observes, "a speech in Hebrew always sounds dynamic" (p. 336).

But it is in the section entitled "The Two Jerusalem" that Wilson's anti-Arab bias appears at its most virulent. Everything Arab is perceived negatively, so much so that when he is forced to report some positive note, he uses double negatives to convey it. The American School of Archeology is in East Jerusalem, and when Wilson has occasion to go there, he commiserates with the young Jesuits and nuns who require shots of whiskey to fortify "themselves against facing the dreary dinner—monotonous rice and lamb, accompanied by leathery Arab bread" (p. 342). He met only two educated Arabs, Wilson reports, but he does not tell his readers anything about either of them, going on instead to report an experience with an uneducated Arab—the night watchman at the school. This kind devout old man "did not know a word of English, but invariably shook hands and blessed one with an air of extreme benevolence," a phenomenon which Wilson finds so extraordinary yet so undeniable that he comments: "One has to remember that Muhammedanism, in spite of the fierceness attributed to the Arabs, inculcates, aside from its ritual, gentle virtues like the Christian ones"

(p. 342). Can Wilson be unaware that the term "Muhammedenism" is not merely objectionable to Muslims but inaccurate, suggesting as it does that the religion dictates worship of the Prophet as a God? Does he suggest that the ritual, however fierce it is, nevertheless teaches gentle virtues? Or that Muslims other than Arab Muslims are taught virtues? Why does Wilson become almost incoherent when he tries to account for a kind and devout Arab? Then, there is the condescension to his readers implicit in the "One has to remember..." as though no one literate enough to be interested in Wilson's subject could be expected to have the slightest idea about or the slightest interest in the nature of Islam.

The neighborhood of the American School, Wilson observes, has developed a commercial center in which clothing shops display "half-Europeanized dummies, with miniskirts but *slanting Arab eyes...*" (p. 343) (my emphasis). This is surely an anachronism, Arab eyes never, so far as I am aware, being "slanted" though around the time of American wars with far-Eastern countries—Japan, Korea, and Viet Nam—these enemies were prominently described as having "slanting" eyes. So, Wilson makes a peculiar identification between the "bad-guy" image of recent wars and the enemies of Israel. Notice the contrast with a description of an Israeli woman a few pages earlier. After having observed with distaste the "pale and fat" foreign Jews in the King David Hotel, Wilson goes next door to the offices of Air France and finds "*a beautiful young Israeli girl, as dark as any Arab, with black and high-powered eyes, her slim figure completely hidden by one of those sacklike dresses. She made no play with her beauty, and, when I looked at her, dropped her eyes*" (p. 340). Israeli eyes are black but beautiful, Arab eyes are "slanting."

Complaining of the offensively aggressive merchants in this quarter, Wilson notes their extortionate prices and their uncouth behavior. Forced to admit that there were some more refined types, Wilson finds it necessary to resort to the double negative to convey the experience: "Not that I did not find—in bookstores, for example—quite sober and dignified men, but to walk through that street was annoying" (p. 343).

Even automobile traffic is perceived more negatively on the Arab side of the city: the honking in East Jerusalem is "insolent" (p. 343) and makes crossing a street seem dangerous, but on the Israeli side, forced to admit that the "drivers are equally reckless", he adds immediately, "but they are subject to some traffic control (p. 346). The holy places in the Arab Old City (again the double negative) are "not of remarkable beauty" with the "exception of the Mosque of Omar," (sic., p. 344) and the tourists crowding around the textiles and jewelry in the old Suk at Damascus Gate only "pretend" to find them interesting (p. 344). Bedouin black tents are "coop-like cells" which suggest a "primitive and miserable standard of living," (p. 345) in contrast to the noble austerity suggested by the khaki tents of the Israeli volunteers

whom he has earlier described as rallying selflessly to the archeological study of Masada (p. 315).

Having declared himself at the outset neither a Christian nor a Jew, it is nevertheless worth noting that he consistently dismisses the claims of Christian sites to authenticity or historicity, yet he accepts the "consecrated" status of rocks which figure in Old Testament lore. So, for example, though he huffs about the admittedly muddled architecture of the Holy Sepulchre church in the Old City that "no well-informed person believes that these 'holy places' are authentic" (p. 344), yet he quite inconsistently huffs that the rock sacred to Jews could now be "in the hands of the Arabs." The rock over which the Umayyad Mosque is built was "believed by the Jews to have been, first, the rude altar to which Abraham came with Isaac, then the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, on which David was ordered by God to build the altar that later became that of the Temple...This monument is now in the hands of the Arabs, and it is the Moslems who worship there at the *consecrated rock of the Jews*" (p. 91) (emphasis mine). Again, this double standard of Wilson's is in evidence with almost comic results: of course, Islam accepts all the Old Testament Prophets including Jesus, even accepting the Immaculate Conception of Mary, (a doctrine no longer interpreted literally by many Christian revisionists), so it is hardly outrageous or anachronistic as Wilson implies that Moslems would pray at this site, especially since Arabs built this exquisite Mosque dismissed by Wilson as "a pretty little Moslem rotunda" (p. 91).

Just as Wilson seems to have difficulty picturing Arabs having a right to pray at "Jewish" places, so he seems to find it strange that Arabs would have any business praying at Christian sites. Amidst the "vulgarity and bad taste" he finds in Holy Sepulchre church, Wilson describes the Tenebrae procession of "white gowned choristers, the brown-robed Franciscans, the Greek priests in their flat-topped black hats are all *in their best clothes*" (p. 94) (emphasis mine). An astonishing remark implying no doubt that their usual clothes must be vulgar and dirty, therefore, since these are clean and ceremonial, they must be their best clothes! And he adds almost immediately, "Christianized Arab women, with white headdresses and Arab robes, kneel on the floor with their children" (*ibid.*). Now this suggests that there is something temporary and recent about the "Christianity" of these Palestinian women, though of course the Christian communities of Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron like those in Damascus, Maloula, Homs, Aleppo, Beirut and Cairo, are among the earliest Christian communities in the world. Would he say of a procession in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York that "Christianized American women" in smart dresses knelt in prayer? No, of course not, though the families of many of these Palestinian women have been Christian for centuries longer than some of those in New York. He somehow sees and wishes his readers to see that there is something incongruous (and hopefully temporary?) about Arab women being Christian.

Wilson's partisanship shows itself throughout his account of the dealing in scrolls: only Arab behavior is criticized. The Syrian cobbler of Bethlehem known as Kando he describes as both "totally ignorant" and, in the same sentence, having it both ways, as "a master of Middle Eastern cunning" (p. 378) whereas the devious, anonymous purchase of scrolls through an intermediary by the Israeli General Yadin, Wilson finds quite acceptable. Kando is finally punished for asking outrageous prices for scrolls, taken to Tel Aviv and "interrogated" for five days, again with the full approval of Wilson (p. 378). Here Kando is derided for trying to profit from finds made by Arabs on Arab land, while elsewhere Wilson generalizes dismissively that "Arabs show little interest in their history" (p. 341). Wilson laments that some of the scrolls "now belonged to the Jordanians, who were not even able to read them" (p. 374). Of course, no one except scholars trained in ancient languages could read them, and being Jordanian would not prevent one from acquiring these skills, Wilson's racist implications notwithstanding. Not surprisingly, many Jordanians and other Arabs in fact possess such skills, though they might be forgiven for applying such skills to the Scrolls with something less than the obsessive-compulsive fervor of Jewish and Christian scholars. Anyone who has travelled in Syria, Palestine, and Jordan can attest that the people of many Arab countries are far more multi-lingual by and large than Americans.

As Wilson reaches his rousing finish, he lauds the peace-loving Israelis, notably David Flusser whose appreciative book on Jesus is offered as evidence of the interest Jews are taking in Jesus today (pp. 354-365). By a marvel of rhetorical manipulation, Flusser manages to make the Arabs aggressors and Israeli violence merely a response: "*Before the crisis arose and the Arabs had begun making public statements, he (Flusser) had explained that they were still thinking, as they had been when they were massacring Christians, in terms of a Holy War: every man or woman of Israel that they blew up with dynamite they regarded as a score for Islam. The Jews already in Talmudic times, had given up the idea of a Holy War. And the Muslims, besides, were still feudal. The countries had quite primitive quarrels with one another...*" (p. 361). To this non-sequitur bit of self-justification Wilson courageously brings up Israeli retaliations, noting that the Israelis had raided a village, driven out (no doubt a euphemism for massacred) the families, and blown up forty houses in Jordan (probably the West Bank). Flusser defends the Israelis by saying: "*They resort to reprisals...because they have come to the conclusion that that's the only language the Arabs can understand. And we don't succeed! We don't really believe in it!*" (p. 362). Of course, he is not so scathing in his accounts of quarrels among various Jewish groups, and it approaches the comic to justify Israeli violence by saying they are unsuccessful and don't really believe in it: billions of US dollars were and continue to be poured into their arsenal, and it is now common knowledge that the most sophisticated US technology (including US Air Force

cryptographers out of uniform flown secretly to a base in the Negev) was used to destroy the Egyptian air force, for example.

As Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht says in her brilliant book *The Fate of the Jews*,⁵ it was the propaganda coup of the century that the Israelis took the land from the Palestinians and yet presented themselves to the world as Arab victims.

Wilson concludes the book with a voice which has become interchangeable with the triumphalism of David Flusser ("This is the War of the Children of Darkness against the Children of Light!") (p. 362) and that of General Yigael Yadin ("The parallel between the scroll's prescription for mobilization in the face of complete extermination and what actually happened in Israel two weeks before the war is quite fantastic.") (p. 382). Wilson himself finds that this "millenia-spanning mixture in Israel of ancient and modern history" makes Israel "a place of unique interest and of heartening inspiration" (p. 382). To visit Israel, he says, is to "feel oneself partly released from the narrow constrictions of today's and yesterday's newspaper and to find oneself...in touch with *one of the greatest human forces for the tenacity and authority of our race*" (p. 382) (emphasis mine).

If this misguided rhetoric were merely the harmless school-boy enthusiasm of an anonymous spy novelist, it would be unimportant. However, given Wilson's stature, his distorted view of Israel and his dehumanization of the Arabs plays a serious role in the contemporary world. As Edward Said has pointed out, this very ignorance of Islam and of Arab culture generally has made possible the mass destruction of Arab institutions and people in the Gulf War. On the eve of the war, he wrote:

"It is terrifying to watch Iraq now being readied for mass destruction. First its leader (who like so many of our friends is a tyrant) is made the personification of evil, and our new allies the embodiment of virtue; then Iraq's people and society are reduced to 'military assets' and a demonized 'Islamic jihad'; then finally, after some arbitrary deadline has expired, both leader and people are declared a virtual nonentity, cities are to be smashed from great distances and heights, agriculture and economy are to be torched, infrastructure reduced to rubble, military capability nullified. In all this frightening rhetoric, the sustained ignorance of Arab and Islamic culture is turned into a useful mode of warfare: The enemy has been so dehumanized for so

⁵Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, *The Fate of the Jews*, New York, New York Times, 1984.

long that we never hesitate to deliver the final blow."⁶
(emphasis mine).

I would argue that Wilson's book has made a major contribution to this dehumanization and, concomitantly, has made possible the unconscionable attack on Arab people in the Gulf War as well as the ongoing aggression of Israel against Arab Palestine.

But the pernicious influence of military Israel is not limited to its Palestinian victims. In the section called "Tattoo" Wilson speaks of the disappointment among Israeli leaders that many important nations boycotted the sword-rattling anniversary military display put on in May 1967. Somewhat consoling, however, was the presence of lesser dignitaries such as diplomats from minor south American countries and the "newly established African republics" (p. 334). We might ask ourselves what these minor dignitaries were doing at this ceremony. Indeed, they were present for good reasons as we learn from Noam Chomsky. In 1983 Chomsky presented a paper at a Chicago Conference on US-Israeli involvement in Central America, planned to coincide with the anniversary of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Entitled "US Aid and Torture" and published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*,⁷ this study points out the positive correlation between the granting of American aid and the use of torture, particularly in Latin America, as well as noting Israel's function as a proxy for American power in different parts of the world, but prominently in Latin America. Demonstrating that torture increases in direct proportion to US Aid, since Aid is determined by the favorable climate for US trade, Chomsky shows that, when US Congressional restrictions forbade continued support for some of the most repressive régime, and to the "contras" in Nicaragua, this Aid was in fact continued through Israel acting as surrogate. In Guatemala, for example, malnutrition is rampant though croplands are devoted to export crops, chiefly to the United States. Chomsky says:

"In Latin America, Israel has acted as a proxy for American power to insure that the fundamental relationship between the investment climate and foreign aid remains in place. The methods include supplying arms and high technology computer systems to régimes which are favorable to the US. Since 1978 virtually fifty percent of all American military aid has gone to Israel. This is largely why Israel is the third or fourth most powerful state in the world, with the

⁶Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination: 1969-1994*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1994, p. 285.

⁷"US Aid and Torture," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Winter, 1984) pp. 184-192.

third largest air force in the world, and so on. This couldn't happen by itself: it could only happen if Israel became an appendage of the United States."⁸

Israeli service to US foreign policy extends also to Africa. Chomsky continues: "In the 1960s Israel, with a substantial CIA subsidy, helped America to penetrate Black Africa. This meant supporting Mobuto in Zaire, Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, Idi Amin in Uganda, Bokassa in the Central African Republic, and so on. And with regard to the white racist states of southern Africa: when the US wanted to evade the oil embargo against Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) Israel was used as a conduit to funnel oil there."⁹

But Israel also operates on its own in reaping profits from its military expertise and its experience at putting down popular insurrection. It was profits from arms dealing with the Zionists and other arms dealers, Chomsky says, which allowed the Guatemalan army to set up the first munitions factory in Central America. Henceforth, the Guatemalan army uses Israeli Galil rifles and Uzi submachine guns for its oppression of its own people. Chomsky also records that after the invasion of Beirut, Ariel Sharon offered weapons captured from the PLO to the Honduran army and the Nicaraguan "contras" merely for the cost of shipping.¹⁰ (Readers of Chomsky's book *Turning the Tide*¹¹ are familiar with the use of these weapons by the "contras": attacking villages, killing the men, burning the crops, and leaving women alive hanging bleeding from trees, their breasts having been cut off.) Israeli advisers also work with the Guatemalan military both in setting up the computer systems used for "internal security", i.e., the control of its own people, and in planning the "interrogation sessions to which thousands of kidnapped and jailed Guatemalan patriots are subjected in clandestine army jails."¹²

These passages from Edward Said and Noam Chomsky demonstrate the very real and direct effect of language which dehumanizes and stereotypes human beings. But it must be asked why it is the Arab world which is the target of negative stereotyping and therefore the target of massive violence. Why, in other words, does Wilson regard his admitted bias as "natural" and what is the source of the affinity which this book demonstrates between the author and militant Israel especially in the interpretation of the recently discovered scrolls?

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹¹Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide*, Boston, South End Press, 1985.

¹²*Op. cit.*, JPS, *Idem.*

Wilson's comfort-level in Israel as opposed to his discomfort in Arab Jerusalem is a barometer which indicates the degree to which Israel is and has always been an American colony. As a traveler, Wilson has not left the shores of his own country when he relates to Jewish scholars and generals. It is only when he crosses the line into the Arab sector of the city that he finds himself on foreign soil. After all, the Puritan settlers of Salem saw themselves as founders of the New Jerusalem firmly rooted in the same Old Testament principles of holy war as the Israelis, as Hawthorne, Melville, and Arthur Miller remind us.

As an American Zionist, Wilson shares in the conspiratorial glee of the Israelis in finding among the scrolls the Essene War Scroll and The Temple Scroll, both of which deal with war and preparations for war (described in the final chapter, "The June War and the Temple Scroll," pp. 373-382). In essence, the contents of these scrolls confirm the genocidal message of the well known books of the Hebrew Bible that it is Yahweh's will for the Jews to slay all the people living in the lands that they want to take over. American anthropologist Marvin Harris has demonstrated how the Aztec priests and kings assured their own positions by promoting the idea that the Sun God and the Moon God were thirsty for human blood, thus justifying the slaughter of thousands of humans to be cooked and eaten by their protein-hungry people (see Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures*).¹³ In exactly the same way the folkloric accounts of Jewish history present Yahweh as a patriarchal, rapacious, land-hungry god to justify the depredations of a land-hungry people, today as well as in the past. In his obvious approval of and identification with this purpose, Wilson acts out a psychological drama like the perverse child enjoying the perverse approval of a parent for acts of sadism which he perpetrates.

The same Divine Fatherly approval allowed the settlers of America to slaughter the indigenous people, men and women, children and suckling babes (see *Samuel I and II*), plus their buffalo and horses, and to take their land. Thus, the same specious "manifest destiny" is based on the same specious documents as Wilson's Israeli friends have rediscovered in the caves of the Dead Sea. Thus, Wilson's claim that this prejudice is "natural" finds a vindication that we can only see as tragic.

Since reading *Israel and The Dead Sea Scrolls*, I have searched in his other work and among his letters for some clue to the virulent bigotry of this book. What I find is rather like Hannah Arendt's discovery of the 'banality of evil': he thinks about the Arabs what those around him think. He is the rule, not the exception in this regard. In a letter to Celia Goodman,

¹³Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures*, New York, Random House, 1991.

dated November 12, 1967, Wilson remarks casually: "*I went to the Middle East in April and May to bring my book on the Dead Sea scrolls up to date—left just before the shooting commenced. I am very much pro-Israel—don't see how those dopey Arabs can ever accomplish anything.*"¹⁴

Like the rest of America at the time of this writing, Wilson was in the post-war posture of guilt for the Holocaust. In 1944 Charles Scribners in New York published Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*. Part of the demonization of godless communism consisted in showing that Jews had been and were still being persecuted in Russia, and Christian complicity in the murder of Jews by the Nazis was demonstrated (quite accurately) to secure U.S. and British support for "the poor remnant of a people" in Israel. That the creation of a Jewish state meant the dispossession of the Palestinians was simply a necessity in which they were expected to acquiesce, a sentiment expressed even by a theologian who is progressive in nearly all other respects, Hans Kuhn. This propaganda enterprise also required that the sufferings of other ethnic and political groups at the hands of the Nazis be played down: it became politically incorrect to speak of the Nazi murder of Gypsies, homosexuals, Polish communists, priests, and nuns.

There are two strains in Wilson's writing which may help to define the common American view: first, his strange idea of "race" or "blood" as a determining factor of human character, and second, a tendency to identify to a significant degree with men of action, especially violent military types. In his biography of Wilson, Sherman Paul dismisses the first of these tendencies when, in discussing the section of *To the Finland Station* dealing with *Das Kapital* where he comments: "*No one takes seriously Wilson's curious notions—that Lenin's lucid prose was due to his French Protestant blood, Lenin's diligence to his mother's German blood, Marx's system-breaking to his Jewishness and his severity to the Old Testament.*"¹⁵

Paul points out that in *Axel's Castle* Wilson spoke of Proust as having in him "much of the capacity of apocalyptic moral indignation of the classical Jewish prophet" (p. 187). But in *To the Finland Station*, this moral genius was attributed to the germ plasm, Paul relates, noting that "even Jewish readers were put off by this curious line of thought, and it is understandable that readers of the chapter on the Jews in *A Piece of My Mind*, in which Wilson expatiates on the 'Judaism' of New Englanders, might take it for the crotch of an old man" (*ibid.*). Perhaps Paul is right,

¹⁴Elena Wilson, ed., *Edmund Wilson: Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972*, New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux.

¹⁵Sherman Paul, *Edmund Wilson: A Study of Literary Vocation in Our Time*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1967.

but it seems to me more serious that the very New England tradition of which he sees himself an extension is the Calvinist Puritan continuation of the Old Testament. Paul continues: "In his list of eminent Jews, he is obviously extending the prophetic tradition to which he feels he belongs. To find that tradition very much a part of the mind of his forebears not only establishes continuity with them, and through them with the Biblical Jews, but better validates his own claim". (Ibid.)

This tradition of personal identification with the Israel of the Old Testament is also typical of the Catholic community whose liturgy abounds with references to Israel and Zion in which astonishingly gory accounts of Yahweh's slaying Sehon, King of the Amorites, or crushing the Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea still pretend to pass as metaphors for the individual soul and its quest for God. But this liturgy contains with the virulence of a cluster bomb the kernel of Zionism which has been turned in the 20th Century to a literal invocation of the same Yahweh who sanctioned the genocide of all the gentile peoples who had the temerity to occupy the land destined for the so-called 'chosen people.' The sources as well as the consequences of this conjunction are studied deeply in a brilliant book by historian Regina Sharif entitled *Non-Jewish Zionism*. Sharif points out among other things that, it was only Napoleon's defeat at Acre, which prevented him from announcing at Jerusalem his planned invitation to all the Jews of the world to return to the Holy Land. A definitive analysis of the scriptural underpinnings of Zionism is contained in the courageous address by Professor Husni Haddad to a meeting of the World Council of Churches at Milwaukee, published in a recent issue of the *NAAA Journal* in which the pretensions of Zionism to divine mandate are thoroughly deconstructed.

In retrospect, then, we can see why Edmund Wilson regards *Genesis* as "wonderful" and celebrates the genius that developed a deity which allows an imperial power to take what it wants without the inconvenience of guilt. Therefore, when Wilson feels in Israel "in touch with one of the greatest human forces for the tenacity and authority of our race" (p. 382), he is speaking as a Zionist who feels at one with the Jewish state because his myths have a common origin in the Hebrew Bible and his history as an American (which he reads as a series of triumphant frontiers but is more accurately read as a series of genocides) requires the same kind of justification as the triumphal Israelis: both take comfort in a tribal idol who sanctions land-grabbing and genocide.