

Letters (mainly to other editors)

To the Editor, *London Review of Books*, 12/8/05
on Anthony Julius, Israel, Palestine and the Arabs

Dear Mary Kay,

Anthony Julius may be a “distinguished” lawyer but his crude labelling leads him into some unlikely conclusions. He should learn that criticism of Israeli policies is no more anti-semitism than criticism of Palestinian resistance to occupation is. Insurgents are freedom fighters or *resistantes*: it all depends on the, admittedly murky, context.

In fact, Julius may have no sense of history or of the iteric text but, Lord, does he have a way with the jargon of RLT; unconvincing though his repetitions exonerating it are, Israel’s abrogation of peace treaties and accords have not afforded it any ethical advantage. There is however a phenomenon that Dr Julius will be familiar with, illegal acts of States and crimes against humanity, and which, in Ariel Sharon’s case, are sufficient to found an indictment before The Hague.

As Julius, the well known hammer of T. S. Eliot, should know, in the manner of *After Strange Gods*, a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated when it may eliminate first your religion—“a large number of free-thinking” ... what, Christians? Hindus?—and then your nation.

Nor is the argument or judgement much advanced by Jaqueline Rose’s opus. The victimhood of states and their paranoia, explicable by the language of post-Freudianism, cannot be, since states can only act by treaty, mutual instruments of assistance and understanding, and the mechanisms of international diplomacy in the public domain. That is why the public opprobrium of international pressure has finally forced Sharon to honour some elements of the Oslo Accords and not some ultimately unknowable and unprovable cant theory beloved by Ms Rose.

Muslim anti-semitism is ultimately a cliché, convenient for enabling Julius to ignore the wider questions of identity within a dominant culture, the political non-solutions to the pertinent problems of religious and cultural and national identity that Britain is now acutely faced with, responding in its rush to judgement in much the same way as Sharon’s Israel.

Cultural labelling, racial labelling does not help; Arafat was rightly outraged as a semite Palestinian at being called anti-semitic. The problem of a large number of people of the same racial group and culture living in the same place is not solved by economic repression, fragmentation and occupation, as is demonstrably the case in Palestine and Iraq.

Zionism is inevitably and ultimately anti-Arab because its objects are imperial, nationalist, aggressively colonial; some cynical

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observers will say that Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza is a concession to Western opinion as a prelude to territorial encroachment but of course to say this is to stand accused of anti-Semitism by commentators like Julius.

Colin Honnor



And a reply to Colin Honnor's letter that has come so quickly, I feel it ought to go in this issue rather than the next in three months' time.
Ed.

Dear Sir,

I'm afraid I cannot understand Mr Honnor's letter about Anthony Julius, Israel, Palestine and the Arabs, perhaps because I have not read the issue of *London Review of Books* which provoked him. (What is the RLT? And is an "iteric text" simply one containing too many repetitions?); but allow me to rebut what strike me as some objectional manoeuvres and remarks.

I don't require being told that criticism of some policies of Israel is not necessarily anti-semitism, and I am alarmed to think that Mr Julius does. I'm bound to wonder if Mr Honnor is being fair. Nor do I feel like being reminded that "insurgents are freedom fighters or *résistantes*; it all depends on the, admittedly murky, context." But not and never terrorists? Surely I don't need to tell anyone that a freedom fighter or *résistante* is a terrorist if he/she puts a bomb in a supermarket or on a bus?

So far as I know, Ariel Sharon was a brilliant battlefield commander, in the Egyptian campaign, who later entrusted the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatilah to Lebanese Christian militia, who proceeded to massacre the inhabitants, some of whom had helped perpetrate horrors upon the Christian community as well as the Israeli. Just as Israel's enemies constantly remind us that they can *understand* the mentality of Arab suicide bombers, perhaps those who rightly deplore the massacres at Sabra and Shatilah should try a little harder to understand the circumstances surrounding those.

I can't imagine the context of the third paragraph of Mr Honnor's letter. Perhaps, dear Editor, you could have helped in this regard by printing some of the source-material? Ditto the next paragraph. Ditto the amazingly sophisticated phraseology of the rest of the letter; but I understand the vicious and unthinking antisemitism of the last paragraph, which, I'm confident, no words of mine will dissolve in Mr Honnor's eyes.

So, "Zionism is inevitably and ultimately anti-Arab because its objects are imperial, nationalist, aggressively colonial; some cynical observers will say that Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza is a

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concession to Western opinion as a prelude to territorial encroachment but of course to say this is to stand accused of anti-Semitism by commentators like Julius.”

Anti-Arab? Anti- all the Arabs in the world? But not anti-Muslim perhaps? Why not throw in both groups. Israel is anti-millions and millions of semitic (?) and aryan (?) people we loosely call Arabs and/or Muslims. Israel's objects are imperial, are they? What, to restore an empire Israel never had, though in the days of King Solomon the borders were much wider than now? Is there an Israeli political party with that aim in view? Who would vote for it beyond a few nut-cases? Nationalist? Oh yes, it is nationalist: it believes in defending its borders and would no doubt like to expand them here or there; but it happens to have just given up a large chunk of territory (Gaza), no doubt in the hopes of improving its bargaining chances elsewhere. Is that villainous of a young state with no friends in its region? Aggressively colonial? Is that a camouflaged way of saying that Israel would love to hang on to the whole of the West Bank? Well, of course it would, and the Palestinians (not perhaps all the Arabs and Muslims in the world) would like to re-occupy the whole of Israel and make believe it all never happened: there was no Israeli War of Independence, no Six Day War, not even a Yom Kippur War which began well for Egypt and Syria, but ended with Sharon leading the Israeli army over the Suez Canal.

I hold no brief for Mr Sharon. I would never have voted for him, and in my naïve way I have thought him a bully. There's much more in it than that. One thing is sure: the road towards an actual peace will be made harder by hard-liners like Mr Honnor.

Barrie Mencher

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To the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 22/9/05

Dear Sir,

Craig Raine should try at least to aim for accuracy in his review of Lowell's *Letters*; "Volveran" does not appear in *Notebook* under that title nor in that form; it is a poem Lowell has written for *History* and so confounds the point Raine thinks he is making about Lowell's readiness to revise (and where does revision become the new thing and where does it not?)

According to the orthodoxy (Hamilton; Kermode: "one dead, the other powerless to be born"), rephrasing *Notebook* to turn it into *History* made the latter less obscure, and less allusive, a virtue if you consider difficulty too difficult, a vice if you consider the careful

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nuances and balances and metatextual references of the former a virtue. You take your pick, but there is an unquestionable hastiness and falling off in tone in the latter book as in the later work. Letters appear; quotes from things said and written appear: Raine is a treasonable clerk if he thinks (*A la recherche?*) he's immune to this sort of thing. But he's unscholarly and careless with reference: I have yet to discover the *Chorus from the Rock* he invented for his T. S. Eliot review.

Colin Honnor

To the same, 17/10/05

Dear Sir,

I am not surprised that you will not publish a letter identifying the lack of scholarship and textual inaccuracy of one of your reviewers; after all, you employ as reviewers those whose scholarly accuracy is well below acceptable professional standards and who seem as much to indulge in *parti pris* and point scoring as to analyse the book in question.

The Raine review of Lowell's *Letters* is a travesty, full of bad writing and factual inaccuracy; and your failure to point this out suggests that the monstrous egotism of the subject is only matched by that of its reviewer.

Colin Honnor