

[**HARDCOVER:** UK]

Vile conspiracy theory learns new tricks

BY **RAFAEL BEHR**

THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

When the British Labour politician Peter Mandelson was ennobled (made a member of the House of Lords) recently, one lord was reported to have described his new peer as “a quintessential Jew.” It isn’t clear whether or not that was meant as a compliment. Let’s assume not. Mandelson is not Jewish in any way orthodox believers, or most other people, would recognize. He has a Jewish-sounding name because his father was Jewish. That’s it. So if he is the “quintessence,” on what remote periphery of “Jewishness” are the people who actually practice Judaism?

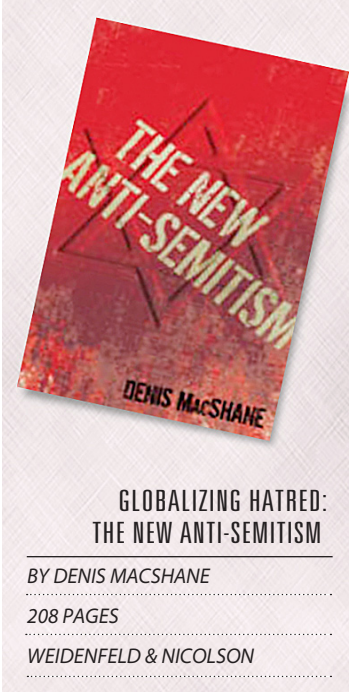
That, of course, is beside the point, as anyone familiar with the intellectual contortions of anti-Semitism knows. Anyone unfamiliar with that prejudice, or who thought it was a purely historical artifact, should read Denis MacShane’s *Globalizing Hatred: The New Anti-Semitism*. MacShane, a British Labour Member of Parliament and former minister, doesn’t deal specifically with Mandelson-baiting, but he would recognize the warped thinking behind it. Mandelson’s ostensible non-Jewishness is exactly what sets him up as the perfect stereotype: the furtive puppet-master; the Svengali; the “Prince of Darkness”; slippery, a bit too clever, dishonest.

There is a long tradition of British parliamentary old boys being snide about Jewish parvenus. Tory (Conservative party) grandees in the early 1980s issued a collective harrumph at Margaret Thatcher’s promotion of Leon Brittan, Nigel Lawson and Michael Howard (“More old Estonian than old Etonian” in Harold MacMillan’s famous dig). MacShane treats that sort of chatter — “dinosaur Tory anti-Semitism” — briskly. He is more concerned about a resurgence of overt and vicious treatment of Jews, including a rise in violent crimes against them. This is no speculation. MacShane presents ample evidence of increased hostility in nearly every country with a large Jewish community — and in those without one, too. In Japan, for example, there is a brisk trade in pamphlets purporting to expose a plot by Jewish financiers to control the world.

The sinister global conspiracy is one of the oldest and most pervasive tropes of anti-Semitism. In the first half of the 20th century, that generally meant presenting the Jews as responsible for Bolshevism. In the 1950s the UK Foreign Office suspected that the new state of Israel was a Soviet puppet. Meanwhile, the Kremlin was conducting a purge of “rootless cosmopolitans” — code for Jews. Israel is now generally regarded as an American proxy. Or, rather, the US is judged around the world to be controlled by Jews, through the “Israel lobby.”

MacShane devotes some time to deconstructing that particular idiom. American Jews, he points

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out, are entitled to call on their government to pursue a certain policy. There are two reasons why that might look pernicious: first, if it is assumed that the government in question exercises no critical judgment of its own — that the “lobby” is not a supplicant to power but the hidden source of it; second, if it is assumed that the policy request is unquestionably repulsive. Both assumptions in the case of the US alliance with Israel are false. Both, when applied to the influence of Jews, reek of anti-Semitism.

There are lots of features of US policy that foreigners, and plenty of Americans, think are misguided. But only with Israel do critics seem to assume that the White House loses all rationality and takes dictation from some extraneous, parasitical force. If the “Israel lobby” was all-powerful, MacShane notes, it might have done something by now about Washington’s solid alliance with Saudi Arabia, which is the chief exporter of an ideology explicitly dedicated to the destruction of Israel and of the Jews.

MacShane looks at the set texts of radical *jihadi* Islam and finds them full of abuse of Jews. He observes that the idea of an aggressive Jewish conspiracy is not a marginal strand in Islamist radicalism, but the essential premise. An ideological edifice of murderous hatred towards Jews is being erected in communities around the world and yet many people think anti-Semitism is something that once happened in pre-war Europe. Worse, many left-leaning, liberal intellectuals seem to think that anti-Israel rhetoric is one of the more reasonable bits of the *jihadi* agenda — that on Zionism, at least, the terrorists have a point. Except that, by Zionists, al-Qaeda means Jews and its reason for hating them is that they are conspiring to control the world. Any complicity with that notion was anti-Semitic in the 1930s and it still is.

The old songs are the saddest

Liao Chiung-chih has earned a reputation as being the best performer of the ‘sorrowful woman’ role in ‘gezai’ opera

BY **IAN BARTHOLOMEW**

STAFF REPORTER



Liao Chiung-chih, one of the very few *gezai* opera stars to earn fame in playing female roles, performs tonight at the National Concert Hall.

PHOTOS: CHEN SHAO-WEI, COURTESY OF NTCH

Liao Chiung-chih (廖瓊枝) has been singing Taiwanese *gezai* opera for nearly 60 years. Tonight she will look back on her life in a unique operatic autobiography in cooperation with the National Chinese Orchestra (NCO, 台灣國家國樂團). Over her long career, she has earned a reputation as being the best performer of the “sorrowful woman” (苦旦) role in *gezai* opera, and is highly respected as one of the pioneers of formal education in the art of *gezai* performance.

“She has never acquired the fame of performers like Yang Li-hua (楊麗花), who developed her career through television,” said Shih Ju-fang (施如芳), the scriptwriter of tonight’s performance. (Yang became a household name in the 1970s as a performer and producer of opera for television.) “In the minds of most people, *gezai* stars are television stars, but Liao has always performed on stage, and so she has never had the same level of exposure. At the same time, this has given her the chance to develop her art to a higher level.”

Liao, 73, is a diminutive woman with an intensely self-effacing bearing, and working with conductor Wen Yi-ren (溫以仁) at the NCO rehearsal room earlier this week, she seemed almost to vanish among the crowd of musicians and their instruments. That is, until she started to sing. The power of her voice is not what it once was, as even Shih admits, but in the intensity of feeling that she communicates, she outshone other performers and easily held her own against the swelling cadences of the score, which mixes Chinese-themed orchestral music (think *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* with Chinese instruments) and the traditional *gezai* musical ensemble.

Liao’s style of singing is also unusual, taking songs at a much slower pace than is usual in *gezai* opera. “For many performers, the song is simply a means of getting the words of the opera across, but Liao focuses on the sound,” Shih said, referring to the amazingly expressive tone of Liao’s singing. Shih tells of various instances of people moved to tears by Liao’s singing even though they could not understand the Taiwanese lyrics.

When asked why she favors the roles for the “sorrowful woman” part, Liao looked enigmatic and replied, “It may have something to do with my background. I simply prefer the sorrowful roles.” Certainly, there has been much sorrow in her life, and tonight’s opera focuses on a single incident, the death of her mother, that Liao repeatedly returns to when telling her story. It is an old story: her mother was

the mistress of a young man from a wealthy family who was unable to marry her. Abandoned with a young child of 2, she took a risky journey to Turtle Island (龜山島) off Taiwan’s east coast and drowned during the crossing. Raised by her grandmother, Liao, like many pretty girls of poor family, drifted into the world of traveling theater troupes.

Recalling her childhood, Liao said, speaking in a precise Mandarin that is very much a second language to her, that she endured the painful physical training of the theater for the adulation of the crowd, and by 21, she had become a principal performer. “Although I was the lead, I knew nothing of bringing out emotion in my performance. My breakthrough came from my teacher Chen Hsiu-feng (陳秀鳳), the owner of the Lung Hsiao Feng Opera Troupe (龍霄鳳劇團). She told me: ‘You should sing as though you are being beaten.’” In listening to Liao’s story of her early days in opera, she was clearly no stranger to beatings, and from that time on, she developed her talent for expressing sorrowful emotions. “When you tap into those emotions of being a victim of injustice, it can be hard to express yourself. The ability to vocalize is where the artistry comes in. It is what I worked at,” Liao said.

Liao is unusual in being one of the very few *gezai* opera stars to earn fame in playing female roles — conventionally, the big stars of *gezai* are women like Yang who specialize in male roles.

Liao now dedicates herself to teaching, and despite her exalted reputation among the *gezai* cognoscenti, spends much of her time in grassroots education in primary schools and community centers around the country. She places enormous importance in preserving the tradition that nurtured her, both in the training of professionals and also in the cultivation of a new generation of audience. “When I started teaching, many people would tell me of their memories of being taken to watch *gezai* opera by their grandparents,” she said. “This is what inspired me to direct my effort toward the very young.”

Liao will retire from performance next year, and the National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Center (國立中正文化中心) is already planning a farewell program, but the current autobiographical performance, which features Liao in a dialogue with her younger self, performed by Cao Ya-lan (曹雅嵐), offers an opportunity for Liao to tell her story through the medium that sustained her through life.

Liao’s autobiographical performance, titled *Liao Chiung-chih and Death and Love of My Mother: The Reminiscence of the Diva Daughter* (廖瓊枝與臺灣國家國樂團 — 淚水牡丹) will be performed as a semi-staged concert at the National Concert Hall tonight at 7:30pm. Tickets are NT\$400 to NT\$1,600 and are available through NTCH ticketing.

[**HARDCOVER:** US]

Dishing up the dirt makes an interesting read

‘Don’t Mind if I Do’ goes a long way toward explaining George Hamilton’s flashy charm, if not his ‘handsome cinnamon brown’ tan

BY **JANET MASLIN**

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

In 1964, George Hamilton appeared in a bit part on a television series about three suave con-men cousins. The leading men of *The Rogues* were David Niven, Gig Young and Charles Boyer, and they kept busy trying to upstage one another. The cocked eyebrow, the attention-getting cough, the scornful sneer: Hamilton learned those debonair tricks from the experts and has spent a lifetime putting them to sneakily good use. When it comes to trade secrets, he also likes to ask himself, “What would Gloria Swanson do?”

One thing Swanson did was publish a memoir (*Swanson on Swanson*) equally devoted to image burnishing and indiscretion. It was in the tradition of *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* by Errol Flynn, another member of Hamilton’s personal pantheon. Now 69, at a point in his career where a stint on *Dancing With the Stars* qualifies as a recent triumph, Hamilton is ready to spill some

beans of his own.

He’s not about to give up his best secrets. You won’t learn much about either his taxidermist or his “handsome cinnamon brown” tan. Nor will you be entirely privy to the maneuvers that kept him fiscally afloat and Rolls-Royce-ready as he squired some of the world’s most fabulous, maternal divas from camera to camera. There are certain details about Imelda Marcos, Elizabeth Taylor, Lynda Bird Johnson, Merle Oberon and Princess Soraya of Iran that he will never, thank goodness, reveal.

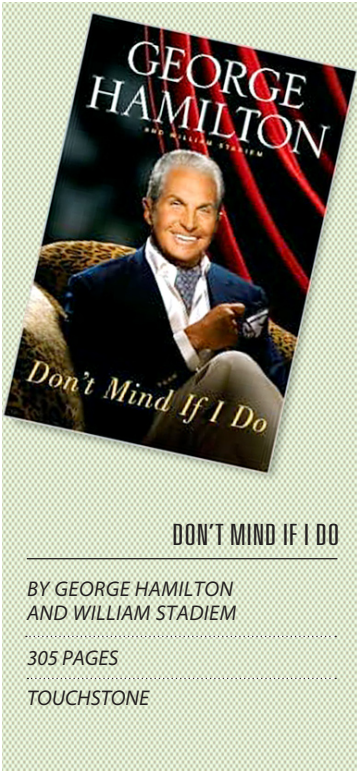
But his book, *Don’t Mind if I Do*, goes a long way toward explaining Hamilton’s flashy charm. And the life he has created, in the flesh and now on the page, can be better than fiction. How do we know? Because another of the women on that long list of wealthy conquests was Danielle Steel, the nonstop romance novelist. Hamilton spent time with her between husband No. 4, a Napa Valley vintner, and husband No. 5, a Silicon Valley financier. “I

hope I was a peak,” he says, while also noting that Steel used him as material and treated him like homework. Here, after all, was a jet-setting, lady-killing, martini-shaking, devilishly handsome Hollywood luminary of the sort Steel usually makes up.

But nobody outdoes Hamilton in milking his life story. Amid an onslaught of pretty-boy memoirs (including books by Tony Curtis and Robert Wagner, both of whose stories overlap Hamilton’s), his is the one with the most flair, partly because of his writing collaborator, William Stadiem. Stadiem has moved seamlessly from the ring-a-ding-ding of *Mr. S*, a memoir he wrote with Frank Sinatra’s loose-lipped valet, George Jacobs, to the savvy Hamilton, who briefly hired Jacobs but soon figured out that a swinging, tattletale employee was the rare luxury he couldn’t afford.

Propelled by Stadiem’s ear for dishy anecdotes and casual regard for the truth (there are some glaringly obvious exaggerations here, particularly one involving a frozen

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BY **GEORGE HAMILTON**
AND **WILLIAM STADIEM**

305 PAGES

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16kg turkey). *Don’t Mind if I Do* begins by explaining the Hamilton family pathology. The actor’s father was a bandleader whose footloose good times impressed his middle son mightily and led to a divorce. His mother, nicknamed Teeny, was a much-married, gold-digging Southern glamour girl who contributed greatly to what the actor calls his case of “plantation syndrome.” Teeny and their three sons were constantly on the move, bouncing from Beekman Place to Beacon Hill to Beverly Hills, teaching Hamilton the importance of living far beyond his means. He now ascribes his showy, clotheshorse style to a way of attracting his mother’s wayward attention.

Sample Hamilton family story: Hamilton once walked into a Spanish brothel to find his mother at the bar, drinking with Ava Gardner. “What in the world are you doing here?” he asked her in astonishment. “I should ask the same of you,” his mother replied.

Don’t Mind if I Do is remarkably mum about the ways in which

the young Hamilton’s devastating good looks caught the notice of male directors when he hit Hollywood. (Vincente Minnelli, described by Hamilton as effete, did see in him “the quality of a privileged but sensitive mama’s boy.”) In any case, Hamilton parlayed his mother’s social connections and his own wiles into an inexplicably enduring film career. He now freely acknowledges that there were plenty of rich, aristocratic thrill-seekers eager to finance films, and that he appealed to them. But he was both lucky and smart. He knew that making outrageous demands signaled Hollywood status, and he played that trick to the hilt. “Five hundred a week is nothing,” he told MGM, in one ploy to double his salary. “My mother makes that.” Hamilton’s book also describes his strategic eagerness to be the youngest, most impeccably polite actor in the room and a tame alternative to the James Dean types who dominated Hollywood in the late 1950s. His skills as an escort (and, he says, a Don Juan) were just as carefully honed. Glamour-

ous women liked to be listened to and appreciated, and he had been brought up with those skills. Some women also sought his advice when it came to beauty secrets. This was something about which Hamilton knew a lot.

Caddishness was part of the formula, too. (As a teenager, Hamilton had sex with his stepmother. Put that in the circular more-than-we-need-to-know file.) There is a sleaze factor to some of his stories, like the suggestion that an emissary for the jeweler Harry Winston used high-class prostitutes to create matrimonial guilt and sell guilty husbands gifts for their wives. But the reigning mood of this book, like Hamilton’s approach to turning Dracula (*Love at First Bite*) and Zorro (*Zorro, the Gay Blade*) into camp classics, is self-deprecating good humor. And its stories are star-studded and wild, offering hearty proof of its chief claim. Hamilton always wanted more than mere Hollywood glamour. He wanted to learn “how to really milk it to the max.”