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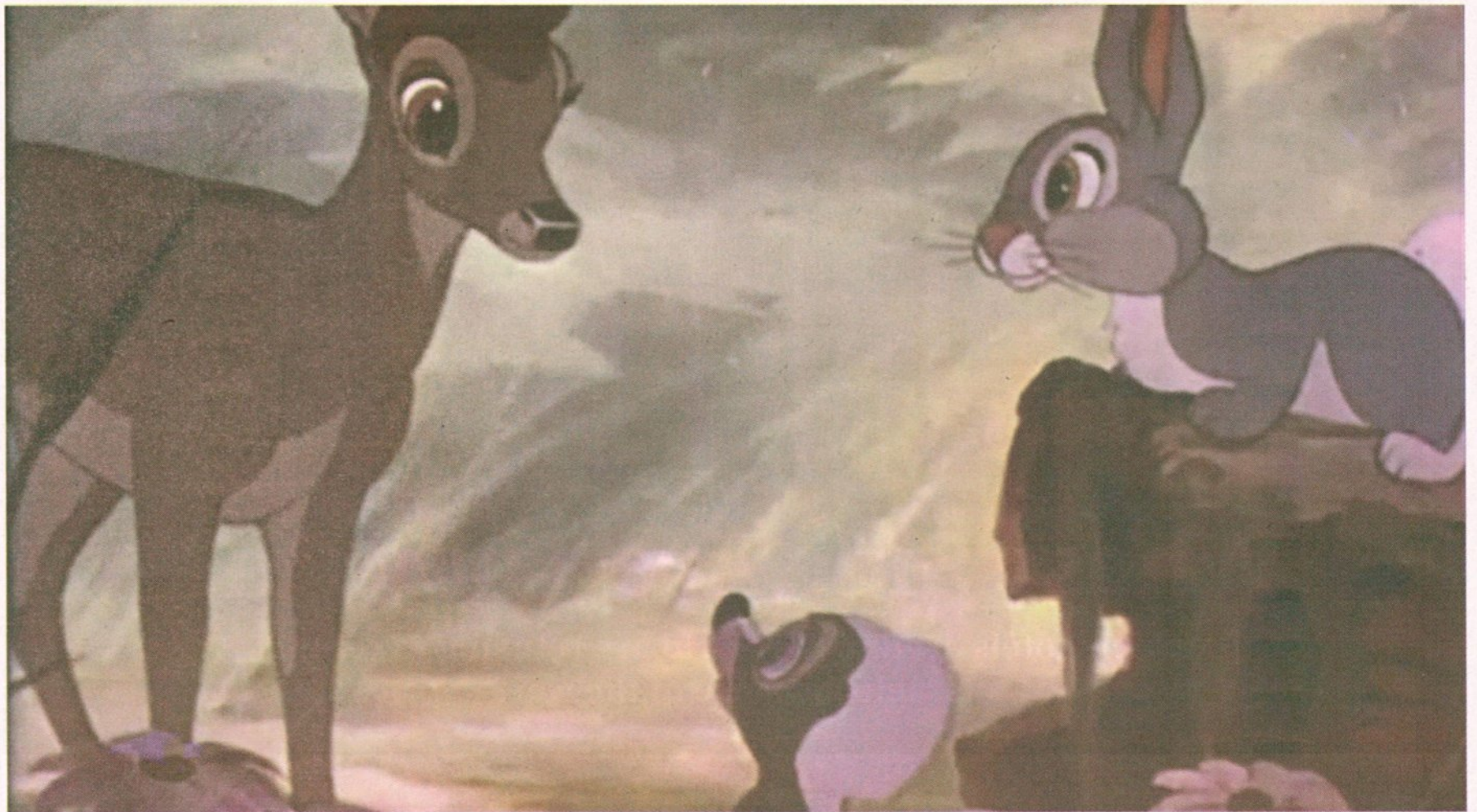


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The Writing Is (Still) on the Wall

Bambi, Kafka and other warnings on European anti-Semitism

By JACOB SIVAK

And, I am sure, many others were surprised to learn that Disney's *Bambi* was originally published in German in 1923 as an allegorical novel by Felix Salten, who was an Austrian Jew. A new translation of the novel by Jack Zipes (*Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest*) shows how Salten's book was a warning of the coming persecution of the Jews of Europe.

Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* (הגלגול) had the same agenda. As an example, Anne Roiphe wrote that the transformation of the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, into a man-sized insect was an allegory about how "the extermination of the Jews began as a campaign to make them seem non-human. The normal laws of compassion and empathy do not apply to them."

The Metamorphosis was written in 1912 while Salten's book was published in 1923, a long time before the Nazis took over Germany.

There were other warnings. A German-Jewish doctor, Bernhard Cohn, published an article in 1896 titled: "Before the Storm: A Serious Word of Warning to the Jews of Germany." William Osler was an important non-Jewish Canadian doctor who wrote about his visit to Germany in 1884 ("Letters from Berlin," published in *Canada Medical Journal*). He warned of the coming catastrophe faced by the German Jews. But the strongest warnings came from the Zionists.

Zionism

While the word "Zion" has a history thousands of years old, "Zionism" is a more modern term that was born in the late 1800s. Zionism is often described as being a result of European nationalism. Anti-Zionists like to paint Israel as nothing but a European colonialist creation. In reality, Jews have lived in Zion and returned to Zion through the years whenever they could, from both European and non-European territories.

It is no coincidence, however, that the birth of the modern Zionist movement went hand in hand with the violent pogroms and anti-Semitism against the Jews of Russia. Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, was obsessed with the urgent need to find a safe place for the Jews of Eastern Europe. Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader behind the Balfour Declaration (הצהרת בלפור), said that without a home in Palestine the Jews of Europe faced extermination.

Early in 1936 *The Atlantic* magazine published an article by American Zionist leader Ludwig Lewisohn titled "Jews in Trouble." Based on his life in Europe in the 1920s and '30s, Lewisohn describes the dangerous status of the Jews in Germany and elsewhere. He writes that German Jews, as well as those of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Austria, are like the man in Poe's story, "The Pit and the Pendulum" ("הבור והמטוטלת"); they see the terror drawing near, but they cannot escape it.



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Perhaps the strongest warning could be found in the words of Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky to the Jews of Warsaw on Tisha B'Av, 1938. He said, as translated from Yiddish:

"It is for three years that I have been calling on you, Jews of Poland... I have been warning you that the catastrophe is coming closer... our dear brothers and sisters do not see the volcano which will soon begin to spit out the fire of destruction. What I see is terrifying. The time is short in which one can still be saved... ."

It was too late. Even if some of the three and a half million Polish Jews could have left, where could they go? All options, including Palestine, were closed to them. It was too late for the 6 million, but not for the many Jews who found safety in Israel, before and after 1948.

The connection between Zionism and Jewish physical survival should be obvious, yet to many it is not.

In 2019, a well-known German-Jewish writer called Henryk Broder said that Europe is not a safe place for Jews. They should either leave or get ready to live their lives in a gated community, relying on the state to keep them safe.

The attacks on Jews in the US, France, Germany and elsewhere, as well as the hatred for Jews on social media platforms and at sports events, as well as the ongoing tragedy in Ukraine, show that Zionism is still needed for our survival.

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