

Praise for Antonia Fraser

***Must You Go?: My Life with Harold Pinter***

“Combining disarming emotional frankness with restrained elegance, Antonia Fraser weaves her diary entries and memories into a compelling and moving history of a long, passionate relationship.”

Katie Owen, *Sunday Times*

“[Written] with exemplary clarity and courage...Fraser keeps her gaze steady and her heart open.”

Boyd Tonkin, *Independent*

“This book – full of funny and tender things – satisfies on more than one level. It is an intimate account of the life and habits of a major artist; it is a pencil sketch of British high society in the second half of the twentieth century; and it is, more than either of these things, and much more unusually, a wonderfully full description of the deep pleasures and comforts of married love.”

Sam Leith, *Spectator*

“Unremittingly delicious: strange, rarefied, frequently hilarious.” Rachel Cooke, *Observer*

“It takes a daring biographer to turn her sharp eye on her own life as Antonia Fraser does so movingly and beautifully in her memoir.”

Tina Brown, *Daily Beast*

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***My History: A Memoir of Growing Up***

“*My History*, a captivating memoir of her childhood and early youth...is a delight from start to finish. Antonia Fraser is warm, amusing, intelligent, generous and original. She says that her idea of perfect happiness is to be alone in a room with a house full of people. I can’t think of a better way to start the year than to be alone in a room with this book.”

Cressida Connolly, *Spectator*

“*My History* is a hugely enjoyable squishy romp, the literary equivalent of a big crumbling meringue at a society wedding.”

Roger Lewis, *The Times*

“Fraser’s previous volume of memoir, *Must You Go?*, an account of her life with Harold Pinter, was acclaimed as a moving love story. In this second instalment, she stands unabashed and alone – wise, self-deprecating and always entertaining.”

Peter Stanford, *Daily Telegraph*

“Fraser’s early years provide material as vivid and character-rich as her popular histories... Amiable and engaging as personal reminiscence, *My History* is also a sharp, unpretentious study of a writer in the making.”

Wendy Smith, *Washington Post*

“A witty, perambulating memoir of youth and early adulthood...Nuanced and emotionally oblique in a most English fashion, [*My History*] offers a textured glimpse into a bygone era.”

*Publishers Weekly*

“Engaging and elegiac.”

Virginia Rounding, *Financial Times*



# Our Israeli Diary

**Also by Antonia Fraser**

Historical Works

*Mary Queen of Scots*

*Cromwell: Our Chief of Men*

*King Charles II*

*The Weaker Vessel*

*The Warrior Queens*

*The Six Wives of Henry VIII*

*The Gunpowder Plot*

*Marie Antoinette*

*Love and Louis XIV*

*Must You Go?*

*Perilous Question*

*My History*

# Our Israeli Diary

Of That Time, Of That Place  
*8–22 May 1978*

ANTONIA  
FRASER



A Oneworld Book

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Dedicated to Harold's parents,  
Frances Pinter, 1904–1992, and Jack Pinter,  
1902–1997, who loved Israel.



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*All photographs are from the author's own private collection except where otherwise stated.*

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Antonia Fraser

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Antonia in the Dead Sea

Lois Sieff, Eileen Marmont and Harold

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Harold and *Jerusalem Post* journalist Hirsh Goodman

Masada from afar (courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The Cableway (courtesy of Berthold Werner/  
Wikimedia Commons)

Masada

Harold's certificate commemorating his ascent  
to the summit of Masada

The guest house in Jerusalem where Antonia  
and Harold stayed (courtesy of Rafael Ben-Ari/  
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Via Dolorosa in 1978 (courtesy of Tony Spina/  
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Conductor Zubin Mehta (courtesy of Getty  
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Cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich  
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Jackie Kennedy Onassis (courtesy of Ron  
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Shimon Peres in 1978 (courtesy of Keystone  
Pictures USA/Alamy Stock Photo)

Peter Halban and Antonia

Harold and Antonia with Harold's parents,  
Frances and Jack Pinter

## A Note on the Text

This is an immediate record of our stay in Israel in May 1978. I wrote it every morning on my little portable typewriter while Harold had his shower. At this point Harold and I had been living together since August 1975 but were not yet able to get married. He was 47 and I was 45. We were finally married in November 1980.

I first re-read the diary nearly 40 years later, in May 2016, when I came across it by chance clearing out an old cupboard. Writing my memoir of my life with Harold, *Must You Go?*, I relied on memory and the narrative captions round the prints in my photograph album.



## Israel in 1978

May marked the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, in 1948.

Menachem Begin, founder of the Likud Party, had become Prime Minister of Israel when his party won the election in 1977.

Moshe Dayan, military commander and politician, had been Defence Minister during the Six Day War of 1967.

Golda Meir had been Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 and resigned in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

Shimon Peres was first elected to the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, in 1959. Later, as leader of the Labour Party, he would become Prime Minister of Israel in a National Unity Government in 1984, and in 2007 President. He died in September 2016.





Israel in 1978



We get down to the cable-car. In the car H, sweating heavily and looking extremely ill, still no spectacles, staggers onto the solitary bench. It is occupied by another, heavy-set, man who begins: "As an Irish-American, may I salute a fellow Britisher?" It would only happen to H.... In the end Peter and I turn round and forcibly shut him up. "Why is he ill or something?" queries the man in a baffled and rather hurt but still very grating voice.

So we are down.

H later: You know I told you I didn't know what the next stage of vertigo was. Well now I know. Coldness. Nausea.

Me: You were a hero - you got down. With your hand.

He gives me a copy of Yadim's splendid Masada inscribed "to Antonia, the girl who got me down alive".

From the original diary...



*Monday 8 May*



Writing this sitting in the aeroplane (already delayed one hour for lack of incoming aircraft and now for traffic congestion about another hour). We are off to Israel. Neither of us have ever been before, neither of us for want of asking. H. must have been invited many times and in my previous life I nearly went three times with my husband Hugh, a pro-Israel Tory MP, who also received many invitations. I was often prevented by chances which now seem premonitions. Harold has concentrated his shopping for the trip on *shoes*, many pairs of bi-coloured leather and canvas shoes which I hope mean he intends to go sight-seeing. I have bought a sand-coloured skirt from St. Laurent and a white blouse from M & S (loyalty) and *also*

some shoes. Our feet seem to have been much on our minds. I think we both believe we shall tramp through a great deal of history.

Harold, rather providently, has also thought of his eyes. He has ordered/bought a new pair of prescription sunglasses, abnormally huge and rather sinister. Perhaps he sees them as protective?

A typical flight to Israel in 1978 (we are first class, but it really doesn't affect the issue) involves the following procedures:

1) You re-collect your luggage from the check-in, labelled also with your name unlike most flights, and wheel it yourself to a gateway marked S.

H.: "Note that all other countries in the world have a shared gateway. One country has one gateway."

We queue there for perhaps 30 minutes. In the queue some Sieffs.

I have caught my breath at the sight of Teddy Sieff, the survivor of the assassin's bullet fired by Carlos the Jackal.

Me: "You're not supposed to get on a flight containing a prominent Jew, and here's that hero Teddy Sieff."

I am glad to see that Teddy at least is guided through, tho' later he complains about this, quite genuinely:

T.S.: "You see, unlike you, I have come to believe in a classless society."

I do not contradict this, as in the first class lounge H. and I have had one of our ridiculous summer-lightning rows about the presence of the C.I.A. in Angola (!!!) so I am wary of contradicting anyone...

Well, as I was saying,

2) A very thorough search of your main luggage. But we had a Scotsman – Aberdeen – who asked for my autograph at the end of it. This propensity of the British for adapting and making pleasant what must be endured.

The girl who,

3) searched our hand-luggage also ventured the view: "I wish I was going with you. Perhaps one day" instead of just coldly hating us all.

Incidentally. Me to H.: "That customs man, like Mr. Goldenberg at the Carlyle Hotel, was not your fan..." Shortly afterwards the customs man reappeared, panting, and asked for H.'s autograph.

How wrong I was. I liked the man's approach to his endless and tiresome job, creating a unique autograph book. "I have searched the luggage of..."

4) We hear the flight is delayed. A low moment. H. gets a beer. I disappear to the Ladies, being disabled by my wretched skin allergy, the alleged poison ivy. When I return, H. has some champagne and we both feel better.

5) To the first class lounge where Teddy's wife Lois is very excitable and sweet about Mishkenot Sha'ananim, the artists' colony where we are going to stay. Later Teddy himself, a handsome and rather fit 70-year-old (who would ever have guessed?), talks to us of his Anglo-Saxon Kibbutz 3 at Tiberias.

6) A long queue for boarding, with another quite detailed search.

And now we are here sitting...

And now about to take off.



## Our Israeli Diary

Preparation: I've read Saul Bellow's book about Israel, and am reading the former Foreign Minister Abba Eban's autobiography which gives an extraordinary picture of the 1947 negotiations. I've bought *O Jerusalem!* by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre and a book by Moshe Dayan. I haven't read so much Jewish history since I was working on my biography of Oliver Cromwell in the 1970s: his desire for the readmission of the Jews to England.

H., I sense, is just *thinking*...



The actual arrival at Tel Aviv airport, after all this, was smooth. A large lounge for collecting luggage. Rather less chaos than at Heathrow. A taxi came from Mishkenot. We made a journey of about an hour through the night. Sights: a prison – clearly so – was lit up with fairy lights, a huge red and white star of David for Independence. With its barbed wire and searchlights it nevertheless looked odd to have this particular celebratory star...

Impossible to sense the countryside tho' reminded of Teddy Sieff saying it had all been desert when he first came.

H.: "We should not take this road for granted."

All the same, everything modern and therefore unremarkable, even the hilly lights of Jerusalem, even the new town itself, until we suddenly came on the famous historic windmill, well lit-up, *then* Mishkenot built into the hill, and above us, also lightly illuminated, a long (very clean) castle wall.

The first sense that we were actually in Jerusalem, although the lightness of the stone still made it seem unreal.

Annie, the den mother of Mishkenot, greeted us: a particularly kind of bright even merry look which already I associate with Israeli women on the strength of the airport, the restaurant later and Annie (Miriam Gross has it too) – dark hair, very white teeth, a charming regard, neat features.

We proceed towards Apartment 8, past closed doors and glass-enclosed gardens of house-plants – as we would call them. Our apartment is delightful and large. Arched windows, sitting

room, bedroom, extra bedroom, high windowless studio room, kitchen already with provisions – next morning I notice that everything is firmly labelled MEAT and DAIRY, according to the Kosher rules, and resolved hastily not to let down the side by mixing the two up.

We go to the Mishkenot restaurant, along the outside cloister which is even more monastic. This side has Hebrew numerals only. We memorise ours, which I describe as Sideways Dustbin, while H. neurotically tries to write it down. The restaurant is crowded and full of clearly jolly people. Both of us now exhausted, me rather sick. But the jolly manager (Moshe Pe'er, tho' I think him at first to be Mr. Pierre, which is how he introduces himself) finds us a quiet table. We eat hot hors d'oeuvres and veal and drink Israeli white wine – rather light and pleasant.

H. talks about his instruction for Bar Mitzvah, two nights a week learning Hebrew. "I haven't thought about it for years." How astounded his parents were by his gesture of revolt against the formal religion two years later. How they have mellowed. (Harold of course sent them on one or two trips to Israel when asked.)

We return to our Sideways Dustbin (H. points out the little Talmudic scroll outside, however) and can't get in, so round by many steps, knocking at locked gates – naturally, security is still with us.

In. I still read. Eban, having reached 1967, which only emphasises the peace and the newness of Mishkenot. H. reads the *Jerusalem Post* (which has a long profile of Golda Meir in it).

We are both absolutely exhausted.

*Tuesday 9 May*



**B**rilliant hard sunshine one senses from an early hour outside the silvery white blind over the arched window, and the traffic roars on the big road beneath Mishkenot. I peek up at the castle wall which I now realise is where the Jordanian guns perched before '67 threatening the poor (literally) Jews in the Mishkenot area. I visualise wretched black-clad figures scuttling about, reconciling themselves to the fact that every now and then an arbitrary gun will blow them out of this world. But scuttling in the same place every day all the same.

We make a breakfast of sweet bread and strawberry jam and coffee. The view from Mishkenot from where I now sit, in the outside cloister, stretches to the desert? or the sea? In the considerable heat, first

up to the bank which contains, among numerous notices, two of interest:

1) WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR ISRAEL – AN IDEALISTIC NOTICE ABOUT CONTRIBUTIONS.

2) TOURISTS – MEETING AT 6 PM AT X HOTEL ABOUT POSSIBILITIES FOR INVESTMENT IN ISRAEL.

Hotel next door for Israeli beer (Americans in the preponderance, no sense of being in Israel). Then, armed only with a little paper map, we walk down hill and up dale to the Old City.

Entering the New Gate and finding ourselves immediately in another Arab world – for this is what it is, despite notices like LATIN PATRIARCHATE RD – is an extraordinary experience. The emptiness of the area outside the castle walls and the teeming scene within (like an operatic set with a colourful chorus strolling about) adds to the strangeness. We walk rather bemused, but straight down a narrow way marked DAVID. Shops on left and right and soon we are under arches and thus shaded in a sort of endless commercial catacomb, kaftans, eastern blouses, gold souvenirs of Islamic nature, even sheepskin waistcoats, with eager shopkeepers all cast out of the *Arabian Nights* (operatic version),

also masses of vegetables, piles of peppers, red and green, tomatoes, bananas which look nice massed in the distance, rather frightening near to – I am suddenly terrified of being stranded here and forced to eat them! A nightmare of slight claustrophobia and hygiene. Then – “Look,” says H., pointing up. A soldier with a large gun is sitting on the roof above the crowd. What is he on the lookout for? We haven’t the faintest idea. “A familiar face in the crowd,” suggests H. And soon we are at a police post being searched, before finding ourselves in an open space at the end of the Old City, with open and strange country beyond. Where are we? We furrow our brows desperately wondering whether this is the Jordan frontier?? Crazy, of course it isn’t. But where was it?

The depth of our basic ignorance about obvious facts here hits us again and again during this strange morning. We were rather like moon-explorers in both history and politics, especially as H. won’t have a guide (I think rightly – he would be maddened and so learn nothing) and relies on me to dig up knowledge from my thin memory. Actually it turns out later we were