WRITING THE DIASPORA:
A BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON
POST-SHOAH ENGLISH-LANGUAGE JEWISH FICTION IN
AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AFRICA, AND CANADA

by

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the Shoah (Holocaust)—the mass murder of 6,000,000 Jews—Jean-Paul Sartre wrote Réflexions sur la Question Juive (1946), in which he concluded that the fate of the Jews, the fate of the individual non-Jew, and the fate of the entire world are inextricably and reciprocally intertwined. Building on Sartre's perception, Portrait of a Jew (1962) and The Liberation of the Jew (1966) describe what the author, Albert Memmi, terms “the universal Jewish fate”: that of being the paradigmatic “colonized” Other—insofar as the Jews are a particularly oppressed minority, that is, their marginalization epitomizes the fate of all humanity. Further, Memmi argues both that “to be a Jewish writer is . . . to express the Jewish fate” and that a “true Jewish literature” is necessarily one which revolts against the imposition and acceptance of this fate. Sartre’s and Memmi’s insights posit that Jewish consciousness acts upon both national and world consciousness. Memmi suggests that one means of expressing the Jewish consciousness is through literature.

In their imaginative interpretations of the post-Shoah interconnections between the Jew, the nation, and the world, modern Jewish fiction writers of the Diaspora (dispersion)—at least those whose work foregrounds tropes of Jewish sensibility, incorporating Jewish characters and themes—often delineate a world which, in the aftermath of Auschwitz, is socially and existentially even more precarious than it was before the war. This study examines post-Shoah Jewish consciousness and its relation to national/world consciousness, as represented in the English-language Jewish fiction of Australia, South Africa, and
Canada, Commonwealth countries whose diverse Jewish literatures have been overshadowed by the predominant English-language Jewish literary culture of the U.S.A.

The structure of this study is bipartite. Part B is an indexed Bibliography enumerating primary works by Jewish prose fiction writers of Australia, Canada, and South Africa. Part A is a critical commentary on Part B. The Introduction (Chapter 1) outlines the theoretical bases for the study. The three following chapters scrutinize Jewish Australian (Chapter 2), Jewish South African (Chapter 3), and Jewish Canadian (Chapter 4) fiction. Among the writers considered are Australians B. N. Jubal, Judah Waten, David Martin, Morris Lurie, Serge Liberman, and Lily Brett; South Africans Nadine Gordimer, Dan Jacobson, Jillian Becker, Antony Sher, and Rose Zwi; and Canadians Henry Kreisel, A. M. Klein, Adele Wiseman, Mordecai Richler, and Robert Majzels. Each of these three chapters follows a similar format: a description of the origin, history, and demography of the Jewish community; an outline of the important pre-World War II Jewish fiction writers and their work; an examination of representative post-Shoah works; and concluding remarks about the ways in which the works under consideration here contest and revise both the canons of nation and national literature and the very concepts of nation, canon, and canon-making. An Epilogue (Chapter 5) contextualizes the thematic patterns common to the Jewish fiction of the three countries and suggests ways in which this fiction can be located within the larger framework of Jewish Literature.
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DEDICATION

To the sacred memory of the Six Million

In loving memory of my brother,

James David G. Hart, "ל risky
(June 23, 1955–June 18, 1993)

In loving memory of my friend,

Ian Kent, "לב נון
(January 1, 1915–September 20, 1996)

May the spirit of G-d place them in the Garden of Eden
PART A
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

After the Holocaust, we are all refugees from the human dream.

William Heyen

It has become clear that every version of an ‘other,’ wherever found, is also the construction of a ‘self.’

James Clifford

Every land is grown strange
All lands all waters
The songs of Zion are sung on every coast.

Charles Brasch

The enormity of the Shoah\(^1\)—the catastrophic destruction of 6,000,000 Jewish men, women, and children in Eastern, Central, and Western Europe; the annihilation of an entire Jewish world; the incineration of continental European civilization—overwhelms. Claude Lanzmann, documentary chronicler of the events of 1939-1945, in an attempt to fathom the
fundamentally unintelligible nature of the most significant event of the twentieth century, writes: "The destruction of Europe’s Jews [. . .] cannot be logically deduced from any . . . system of presuppositions. . . . Between the conditions that permitted extermination and the extermination itself—the fact of the extermination—there is a break in continuity, a hiatus, an abyss.' That abyss forms the essence of the Holocaust" (qtd. in Howe 178). Not only did the intellect fail to prevent such an abyss, it precipitated and participated in an abysmal and genocidal slaughter unprecedented in both scale and devastation in world history. Confronted with the massive ruin now inadequately designated as the Shoah, the mind becomes paralyzed, the heart numb.

The Shoah “is a novel event and a new marker in history” (Hilberg 17), and if, in the aftermath, we concur with Theodor Adorno’s famous midrash that “[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” then how much more barbaric to write literary analysis and criticism (Adorno 34). Faced with the fact of Nazi German genocide, perhaps the most eloquent response is silence—dead silence. Indeed, critic George Steiner writes that his “own (provisional) feeling [is] that silence is the only, though in its way suicidal, option . . .” (156). In a similar turn, Saul Friedländer claims that “[s]ilence . . . is possibly the most explicit narrative of all” (67). However, silence, no matter how tentatively suggested as a possible response to the Shoah, would be a profanation of the sacred memory of the six million dead. Aharon Appelfeld, the distinguished Israeli writer and survivor, notes that “[a]rtistic expression after the Holocaust seems repugnant, disgusting. The pain and suffering called either for silence or for wild outcries” (89). Writing can be just such an outcry in response to the Shoah, a way “not to comprehend or transcend it, but rather to say
no to it, or resist it” (Fackenheim 239).

The Shoah demonstrated, with the silent complicity of most of the entire world, just how horribly inexorable the global scheme of annihilation could be for its victims, the Jews, a people long reified as Other, as Outsider. The systematic destruction of one-third of the global Jewish population has made the problems that have eternally confronted the Jew and informed Jewish consciousness—exile, expulsion, homelessness, “outsiderness,” separation, victimization, vulnerability, self-hate, assimilation, and antisemitism—much more menacing and immediate. Indeed, both the fact of the Shoah and the founding in 1948 of the state of Israel, the miraculously revived Jewish homeland, have in different ways magnified these problems for world Jewry.

For, ever since the independent Jewish nation, Israel, was invaded, colonized, Hellenized, and, ultimately, catastrophically destroyed in CE 70 by the legions of Rome, the imperialistic, European superpower of that epoch, Jews have had to live, always precariously, in the various nations of the world. They learned to live a colonized, marginalized, and, for those living in Nazi German-controlled Europe during the Shoah, an inhuman existence. Yet, for two millennia, banished from their demolished sovereign state, enduring the hybridized existence of a (temporarily) tolerated ethnic and religious minority within the various nations of their sojournings, the Jews survived. Their inexplicable continuity can perhaps be construed by the tenacious memory of nationhood they nurtured, the religious rituals they practised, the rich Biblical tradition they remembered and taught to their children, the stubborn belief they maintained in the face of an often bleak reality that, having been chosen by the Almighty to be a light unto the nations, a conscience for the
world, a holy people with a vital and infinite purpose, they would (as recited in their daily liturgy) be ingathered from the four corners of the earth and would once again walk upright to their ancestral land. In Zygmunt Bauman’s view, “[t]he Jew is ambivalence incarnate” (211); he cites David Biale’s suggestion that Jewish survival was primarily dependent on that very ambiguity:

... [I]f they had possessed real power on the scale of the ancient empires, they probably would have gone the way of the Assyrians and Babylonians [and Romans]. But if the Jews had not developed a myth of their centrality, they would likely have vanished like other small nations. ... Relative lack of power combined with a myth of power was perhaps one of the keys to Jewish survival in antiquity. (Biale 28)

Whether the Jewish “myth” was strong enough by itself to sustain Jewish continuity for over 5,000 years is a contestable proposition; nevertheless, despite the ambiguous nature of Jewish survival, the destinies of the Jews and the world are inextricably enmeshed.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s Réflexions sur la Question Juive (translated as Anti-Semite and Jew), first published in Paris in 1946, concludes with a profound insight into the ineluctably reciprocal relation between the fate of the Jews, the fate of the individual non-Jew, and the fate of the entire world:

It has got to be made clear to each and every person that the fate of the Jews is also his own fate. No one in France will be free as long as the Jews do not enjoy their full rights. No Frenchman will be secure as long as a Jew in France and in the whole world has to fear for his life. (198)
As long as the Jew is perceived and persecuted as a Jew, as Other, both the perceived and the perceiver will remain enslaved, their lives under threat. This occurs because, as Hans Mayer comments on Sartre’s analysis, “the global scheme of annihilation could make him [i.e., the perceiver] as well, as Frenchmen or white or whatever, into its object” (394).

Echoing this sense of dynamic interconnection, historian Ignacy Schipper said, in Maidanek: “‘Nobody . . . will want to believe us, because our disaster is the disaster of the entire civilized world’” (qtd. in Howe 183). In the post-Shoah world Sartre envisages, Jewish experience and consciousness are in turn intimately interconnected with national, and thus world, consciousness.

Because “the extermination of the Jews, who in their finite minds conceived of the infinite, becomes an attack on the imagination itself,” the contemporary production of imaginative Jewish writing is in itself a counter-discursive strategy of resistance against the Shoah (Epstein 263). In their imaginative interpretations and elaborations of the post-Shoah interconnections between the Jew, the nation, and the world, modern Jewish fiction writers of the Diaspora (dispersion)—at least those whose work foregrounds tropes of Jewish sensibility, incorporating Jewish characters and themes—often delineate a world which, in the aftermath of Auschwitz, is socially and existentially even more precarious than it was before the war. This study examines post-Shoah Jewish consciousness (a concept not meant to imply, a priori, uniformity, homogeneity, or consensus) and its relation to national/world consciousness, as represented in the English-language Jewish fiction of Australia, South Africa, and Canada. The structure of this study is bipartite. Part B is an indexed Bibliography enumerating primary works by Jewish prose fiction writers of Australia,
Canada, and South Africa. Part A is a critical commentary on Part B, consisting of close readings of germane Commonwealth texts by Jewish writers, a thematic exploration of the cross-cultural patterns, paradigms or tropes (and their development, deviation, and qualification), and a structural exploration of the language and literary form of the primary texts.

For writers in English, the predominant Jewish literary culture is centred in the United States. And the impressive productivity of this particular literary culture has since about 1935 generated a body of eclectic scholarly criticism. The Jewish literary output in Commonwealth countries is proportionately smaller. There are no bibliographic instruments which focus on this subset of Commonwealth literature, and there are virtually no critical studies. Yet Commonwealth Jewish fiction is a diverse, exuberant, vital, and fascinating body of literature which merits the same close critical attention that has been addressed to the Jewish American literary mainstream.

Jewish fiction writers often write of and as outsiders. Commonwealth Jewish fiction writers are doubly outsiders. As "Jews," a distinct religious and ethnic minority group within the majority culture, they live in a unique diaspora within the larger Diaspora. Their perceptions are tied to their particular circumstances and experiences in the Commonwealth country of their adoption. And the experiences of the Jewish fiction writer in Canada, differing from those of his or her counterpart in Australia or South Africa, will be reflected in the different kinds of texts he or she creates. What remains constant in these Commonwealth Jewish texts is the paradigm (or trope) of the confrontation between traditional Jewish cultural and religious values, and the assimilating, threatening (and
threatened), non-Jewish Commonwealth culture: the relation between the vulnerable outsider and the powerful insider. These texts in turn contribute to the manifold Jewish consciousness. Sartre's intuitive understanding of the existential equation between the freedom of the Jew and the freedom of the nation/world underlies and informs Commonwealth Jewish fiction.

Several critical and theoretical contexts and concerns necessarily emerge from an inquiry as broad as that proposed in this bibliography and critical commentary. The most essential considerations are perhaps the most obvious: Who is a Jewish writer? And, why, in a study of Post-Colonial literatures, focus on Jewish writers? In answer to the first of these questions, according to halacha (Jewish religious law), a person is a Jew if born of a Jewish mother or if converted in a strictly Orthodox manner to Judaism. For the purposes of this study, this will be the operational definition. However, such a definition does not imply any particular religious practice or affiliation. In both their texts and their lives, many Jewish writers throughout the world eschew any Jewish identification whatsoever. The bulk of the fiction written by Nadine Gordimer and by Matt Cohen, for example, does not foreground a specifically Jewish consciousness; however, the authorial perspective and consciousness of their "non-Jewish" texts may be very Jewish. Such texts by such Jewish writers—devoid of Jewish themes, characters, or ethos—are not central to the purposes or thesis of this critical commentary. Texts by non-Jewish writers which do encompass Jewish themes and characters are similarly beyond the scope of this inquiry.\(^4\)

In answer to the second question, Post-Colonial theorist and philosopher Albert Memmi's most famous book, and the one cited most often by Post-Colonial literary critics
and theorists, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), describes the horrific relation between the two primary participants in the colonization process. This paradigm of hostile mutuality and entropic interdependence is further explored by Memmi in two subsequent books, less well known than his 1957 opus but remarkably relevant to this study: *Portrait of a Jew* (1962; hereafter *PJ*) and *The Liberation of the Jew* (1966; hereafter *LJ*). The former is Memmi’s autobiographical attempt to describe what he terms the “universal Jewish fate” (*PJ* 9). Echoing Sartre, Memmi envisages the Jewish fate—that of being the quintessential “colonized”—as acting upon the national/world consciousness: “Now the Jews are particularly oppressed, more seriously, more generally than other men. The Jewish fate, I insist, is only an abridged form, more condensed and gloomier, of the general fate of mankind” (*PJ* 236). The latter book complements the former. In it, Memmi continues his discussion of the Jewish fate and relates it to the creation of a Jewish literature: “For a Jewish writer, true courage, true success, is surely to be able to speak, as a Jew, to all men” (*LJ* 175); “To be a Jewish writer is, of necessity, to express the Jewish fate, set it before others, and to a certain extent even make them accept it. . . . A true Jewish literature could only be a literature of explicit accusation and revolt” (*LJ* 175-76, 178). Memmi’s analysis in these two books explicates and particularizes his colonizer/colonized paradigm and provides a crucial theoretical context for Jewish writing.

The Jew as paradigmatic Other is a theoretical position which E. M. Cioran also supports:

To be a man is a drama; to be a Jew is another. Hence, the Jew has the privilege of living our condition *twice over*. He represents the alienated
existence *par excellence*, . . . the *wholly other* . . . [E]mancipated from the tyranny of local commitment, from the stupidities of *enracinement*, without attachments, acosmic, he is the man who will never be *from here*, the man from somewhere else, the stranger *as such* who cannot unambiguously speak in the name of the natives, of all . . . [E]xodus is his seat, his certainty, his *chez soi*. Better and worse than us, he embodies the extremes to which we aspire without achieving them: he is *us* when we are beyond ourselves . . . (Cioran 80-81)

Post-*Shoah* Post-Colonial Jewish writers would thus appear to be in a dubiously privileged position to identify and portray the alienation and dislocation at the core of their ambiguous condition as both citizens and exiles. Having peered into the abyss of this shattered century, being from elsewhere and not from *here*, these Jewish writers perceive the *here* of Australia, South Africa, or Canada from a marginalized and hybridized perspective, which challenges the myths of both heterogeneous nations and closed canonical national literatures.

The Jewish fiction writers considered in this bibliography and critical commentary have been grouped by the country of their citizenship (which is not always the country of their origin). Homi K. Bhabha has edited a book of critical essays titled *Nation and Narration* (1990) which investigates the reciprocal relation between the concept(s) of nation and the narrations which both construct and perpetuate the concept(s). Bhabha attempts to deconstruct the term “nation,” arguing that it cannot represent homogeneity of consensus or thought. Indeed, the concept of “nation,” when misused for the purposes of political power, marginalizes those who do not fit into the master narration of such a nation and either
banishes them to the periphery or erases them altogether. The concept of “nation” is extremely relevant to the often perilous Jewish experience in the Diaspora. Though often writing at the margins of the Post-Colonial literatures in which they are situated, Jewish writers are, through their narrations, adding to, and thus transforming, the concept of what Australia, South Africa, or Canada is and can be. And as this Jewish consciousness transfigures the narrative of the Post-Colonial nation of the writer’s adoption, it simultaneously redefines the constituent boundaries of the construct of the national literature and its history.

The Commonwealth countries (other than the United Kingdom) with the largest Jewish literary cultures are Canada, South Africa, and Australia. Demographically, this ordering of these three countries also reflects their overall Jewish populations: Canada—380,000 (the largest Jewish community in the Commonwealth, some 30,000 greater than that in the United Kingdom); South Africa—106,000; Australia—100,000. Both demographically and literarily, the Jewish presence in each of these countries represents a minute proportion of the total population: Canada—1.3%; South Africa—0.3% (2.1% of the White population); Australia—0.5%. The minority status of both the Jews and their literature is exacerbated by the subsuming of Jewish creative writing under the often pejorative rubric of “ethnic,” “migrant,” “immigrant,” or “multicultural,” all peripheral to “mainstream” national literature. For example, in researching Australian “migrant” writing, Sneja Gunew found that the system of literary categorization which criticism has brought to the examination of this literature—sometimes in an attempt to include it within the mainstream—in fact perpetuates its continued marginalization:
Simply to call them [i.e., multicultural writings] ‘migrant writing’ often amounts to maintaining a reductive notion of their content (they deal ‘simply’ with the migrant experience) and locating them in oral history and sociology, where they signify ‘migrant problems’. To describe them as ‘non-Anglo-Celtic writing’ is both to define them negatively and to generate unnecessary controversy about their relation to older settler groups in Australia. To call them ‘multicultural writing’ is to homogenise the very differences which are demanding to be analysed. (Framing Marginality 23)

Gunew settles on Canadian critic Enoch Padolsky’s term “ethnic minority literature” (Padolsky 26),

... partly because it signals that such writing needs to be seen always in relation to something designated (although rarely in any overt manner) as ethnic majority writing; this usage ensures that cultural majority groups no longer remain invisible. The term ‘ethnic minority writing’ also encourages the analysis of cultural difference as a critical category within cultural criticism. (Gunew, Framing Marginality 23-24)

The paradox of locating Jewish writing within the category “ethnic minority literature” is explained by the etymological connotations of the concept of ethnicity:

To say it in the simplest and clearest terms, an ethnic, etymologically speaking, is a goy. The Greek word ethnikos, from which the English “ethnic” and “ethnicity” are derived, meant “gentile,” “heathen.” Going back to the noun ethnos, the word was used to refer not just to people in general but also to
“others.” In English usage the meaning shifted from “non-Israelite” (in the Greek translation of the Bible [the Septuagint] the word *ethnikos* was used to render the Hebrew *goyim*) to “non-Christian.” Thus the word retained its quality of defining another people contrastively, and often negatively. In the Christianized context the word “ethnic” . . . recurred, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, in the sense of “heathen.” Only in the mid-nineteenth century did the more familiar meaning of “ethnic” as “peculiar to a race or nation” reemerge. (Sollors 25)

Just as the Jews, originally inscribing themselves as the only “non-ethnics,” became through Christian linguistic appropriation and translation an(other) ethnic minority, so too has ethnic writing withered to a marginalized minority status. The designation “ethnic minority literature” foregrounds and rejuvenates such writing, “but leaves open at the same time the universality of the term ‘ethnicity’” (Padolsky 26).

An authentic, revolutionary, post-Shoah Post-Colonial “Jewish literature . . . of explicit accusation and revolt” both interrogates and redefines concepts such as margin/periphery, centre, and ethnicity, decentring the notion of a homogeneous national literature and literary history, and creating the possibility of a new consciousness or sensibility (Memmi, *LJ* 178). In their study of Jewish author Franz Kafka, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari theorize that a “minor literature,” that is a literature “which a minority constructs within a major language” (16), can become a force which “designates . . . the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (18). In so doing, a minor literature can contest, upset, and revise
both the canons of nation and national literatures and the very concepts of nation, canon, and canon-making.

The focal notion of juxtaposing (in the spirit of cross-cultural comparison) post-
Shoah Post-Colonial Jewish fictions which thematize Jewish concerns in order to consider the relation between Jewish and national/world consciousness is an innovation unattempted elsewhere. The following chapters examine Jewish Australian (Chapter 2), Jewish South African (Chapter 3), and Jewish Canadian (Chapter 4) fiction. Each of these three chapters follows a similar format: a description of the origin, history, and demography of the Jewish community; an outline of the important pre-World War II Jewish fiction writers and their work; an examination of representative post-Shoah works; and concluding remarks about the ways in which the works under consideration here contest and revise both the canons of nation and national literature and the very concepts of nation, canon, and canon-making. An Epilogue (Chapter 5) contextualizes the thematic patterns common to the Jewish fiction of the three countries and suggests ways in which this fiction can be located within the larger framework of Jewish Literature.
CHAPTER 2

Alien Sons and Daughters:

Jewish Australian Fiction and the Paradox of Belonging

Origin, History, and Demography of the Jewish Community

The Jewish presence in Australia began with the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788:

For the first thirty years of Australia’s existence, most of her settlers arrived either in chains or in uniform. Among the 751 convicts transported in the First Fleet, at least eight and possibly fourteen can be identified as Jews. Esther Abrahams, Henry Abrams, Daniel Daniells, John Harris, Frances Hart, David Jacobs, Amelia Levy, Joseph Levy, certainly were Jews. Sarah Burdo, Aaron Davis, Sarah Davis, John Jacobs, Thomas Josephs, and Joseph Tuso may have been Jewish. (Levi 14)¹

In fact, Jews were present on most of the convict ships transporting Britons to Australia: “In this bizarre, haphazard way Australia became the only community of European people in which Jews were present from the moment of its establishment. It was the prelude to history’s mildest struggle for Jewish emancipation, and the beginning of a unique Jewish
experience” (Levi 10).

On December 19, 1816—the very year in which the first free Jewish settler in Australia, Esther Isaacs, arrived in Sydney to join her convicted husband, Jacob Isaacs, transported the previous year—John George Lang (1816-1864) was born in Parramatta to Elizabeth Lang (née Harris), whose husband Walter had died eight months previously. Elizabeth’s father, John Harris, a labourer of St. Marylebone, London, was one of the original Jewish convicts who arrived in 1788 aboard the Scarborough. Having been twice condemned to death (in 1783 and 1785), and having been sentenced to deportation for life to a British penal colony in West Africa, he was eventually transported to Australia for fourteen years for the theft of eight silver spoons valued at three shillings and a penny (Levi 30-31). He later proposed the establishment of a night watch for Port Jackson, the settlement which later grew into Sydney, and, his proposal having been accepted, Harris thus became, ironically, the founder of the Sydney police and Australia’s first policeman. He held the same position at the Norfolk Island settlement, where he married a non-Jewish woman (whose name may have been Mathilda); their marriage produced two daughters, Elizabeth and Hannah, and a son, John.

John George Lang, grandson of John Harris, the transported Jewish convict, was both the first native-born novelist and the first fiction writer of Jewish ancestry in Australia. His book of short stories, Botany Bay, or, True Stories of the Early Days of Australia (1859), was reprinted under a slightly different title as recently as 1994. Although there is little or no Jewish content in Lang’s works, his novel Assigned to His Wife, or, The Adventures of George Flower, the Celebrated Detective Officer: (A True Tale of Australian Convict Life)
(Sydney, Austral., no date), reprinted in England in 1885 as *The Forger's Wife, or, Emily Orford*, constructs the fictional protagonist George Flower on the factual characteristics and experiences of Israel Chapman, another transported Jewish convict and Sydney's first detective—later the Inspector of Police (Levi 62-63).

The initial phase of the settlement of Australia began with the First, Second, and Third Fleets in 1788, 1790, and 1791 and ended with the discovery of gold in a tributary of the Macquarie River northwest of Bathurst in 1851. This place was named after King Solomon's biblical gold mines: Ophir. J. S. Levi and G. F. J. Bergman note that “[o]f the 145,000 Britons transported to Australia from 1788 to 1852, at least 1,000 were Jews. Most of these were men and boys who were born within the London community that numbered at most 30,000”; the largest number “to arrive in a single year was in 1818, when twenty-eight out of 2,550 sent to Australia from Great Britain can be identified as Jews” (10). By 1851, approximately 1,887 Jews lived in Australia, 0.47 per cent of the total population: 3

“... 979 in New South Wales, 364 in Victoria, an estimated 100 to 150 in South Australia, an estimated nine in Western Australia, and 435 in Van Dieman's Land [Tasmania]” (Levi 318).

Although a Jewish Burial Society had been formed in 1817 in Sydney, an organized Jewish community did not appear until 1832. Clearly, the convict population was not a sound foundation on which to build a communal, religious Jewish infrastructure:

Obviously the creation of Australia's first Jewish congregation had to wait for the arrival of free men who felt that it was their right to worship as they pleased.... Many of the older convicts had left families in England, and
returned to them as soon as they were free to scrape up the money for the passage. Most of those remaining were very young, often illiterate, and they had been brought up under such conditions in the London ghetto that preservation of the body rather than the soul was of prime importance. Their average age when they were transported was just over twenty-five. There were nine men to every woman. In only two of the early colonial households were both husband and wife Jewish. Of the first 250 Jewish convicts who arrived before 1820, only forty-five married in Australia. None married a Jew. The records, incomplete as they are, show that just over sixty children born in Australia carried the names, but not the faith, of the first Jewish settlers. Only one man went back to England and then returned with his family. (Levi 218)

This beleaguered, Anglo-Celtic Jewish remnant, “remote from centres of Jewish life, thought and religion, and, throughout its history in Australia, eroded by intermarriage and assimilation, has always and only maintained or increased its numbers through immigration” (Keesing, Shalom 10). Between 1851 and 1860, three-quarters of a million immigrants arrived in Australia seeking their golden fortunes. The Jewish population tripled; small congregations grew and became self-sufficient; the disparity in numbers between men and women vanished; transportation ended; new communities emerged in every major city: “For the Jews of Australia it meant the sudden emergence of a Jewish community of free citizens and settlers” (Levi 317).

Under a series of Russian Czars and Hapsburg Emperors hostile to their very existence, a few Eastern and Central European Jews began to leave the continent. However,
following the assassination of Russian Czar Alexander II in 1881, huge numbers of Eastern European Jews fled the ensuing pogroms and the complete curtailment of their personal freedom under a series of statutes called the May Laws (1882), which crippled Jewish life in the Russian-controlled Jewish Pale of Settlement. From the mass exodus of some 3,000,000 Eastern European Jews, most seeking refuge in the United States or in other European democracies, some found their way to Australia:

But after 1881 Eastern European Jewish migration to Australia became a noticeable though certainly not significant component of the total Jewish flow to these shores. Using naturalisation records, [Dr.] Charles Price [a noted Australian demographer] found that a total of 669 male Jews from Poland and 2110 from Russia (including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Siberia) entered Australia between 1881 and 1920. During the same period, a total of 135 male Roumanian Jews arrived here, as well as 64 from Palestine, most of whom were of Eastern European birth and parentage. Excluding those from Palestine, the total number of Eastern European male arrivals was 2914. A total of 1036 male Jews arrived from Central Europe during the same thirty-nine year period. (Hilary Rubinstein, Jews 108-09)

According to these figures, some 3,950 Eastern and Central European Jewish males arrived in Australia between 1881 and 1920. The total Jewish population of Australia stood at 21,615 in 1921 and 23,533 in 1933 (Hilary Rubinstein, Jews 166).
Precursors: David G. Falk, Benjamin Leopold Farjeon, Millie Finkelstein, Abraham Samuel Gordon, Nathan Frederick Spielvogel, and Solomon Stedman

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jewish Australians such as David G. Falk, Benjamin Leopold Farjeon, and Millie Finkelstein were writing fiction which was both popular and forgettable. Abraham Samuel Gordon’s Mordecai MacCobber: The Story of a Scotch Jew in Australia, His Many Successes and More Dismal Failures, Compiled from His Posthumous Papers, Newspapers, Official Documents, and Private Family Records by the Late Benjamin Schlimm-Mazel [1918] was so popular with the Australian reading public that it was published in four editions over a thirty-year span.

Nathan Frederick Spielvogel

The first notable, Australian-born, Jewish fiction writer was Nathan Frederick Spielvogel (1874-1956). Spielvogel was born and educated in Ballarat, Victoria, the town in which his father, a Galician Hebrew scholar and a founder of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation, had settled during the gold rush period. Spielvogel worked as a teacher with the Victorian Education Department for fifty years. First published in the Bulletin, Spielvogel contributed histories, sketches, verse, and short stories to several periodicals, including the Victorian Teachers’ Journal, the Westralian Judean, the Australian Jewish Herald, and the Hebrew Standard. He was closely associated with the Ballarat Jewish community, and, in his fiction—combining elements of documentary realism, history,
personal anecdote, and sketch—he especially and effectively utilized the literary form of the short story as the means through which to best contextualize specifically Jewish Australian life, characters, and themes. Spielvogel was one of the first to use the short story to sketch the lives (often fragmented) of immigrant Jews—those peripheral to mainstream Anglo-Celtic Australian society and culture—and, by so doing, to invest those lives with meaning. Following his early example, subsequent generations of Jewish Australian authors have also superbly turned the short story form into the vehicle of their representations of Jewish life.

In the short story “Mr. Bronstein Learns His Lesson,” the narrator, Spielvogel, reminisces about his meeting Mr. Bronstein in early 1914 in the large country town in Victoria whose school the former had come to run and whose Big Store on Main Street was owned and operated by the latter. Bronstein has been masquerading as a German immigrant, effacing his Jewish identity in a gesture of unconscious self-hatred:

[']When he [Bronstein] came to our town three years ago, we all thought he was a Hebrew. But he boasted much about being a German and praised German ideals and German business methods. But when Hebrews were mentioned he had nothing to say. Some of the naughty lads at the Club conspired to draw Mr. Bronstein out. So one night they told a lot of nasty stories about Jews. You know the sort of thing!

But Mr Bronstein made no protest and laughed as loudly as the others.[']

(Spielvogel 69).

World War I breaks out and palpable anti-German sentiment envelops the townspeople. Bronstein’s store windows are smashed and the word “HUN!” is painted on the pavement
in front. Business evaporates. Within a few weeks, Bronstein becomes a “haggard and nerve-shaken man,” barely recognizable to the narrator (Spielvogel 71). Even Spielvogel comes under suspicion—until his Club cronies discover that he is a Jew, that he was born in Ballarat, and “[‘]that he hates the Hun as much as we do!’” (Spielvogel 70).

Bronstein eventually seeks the narrator’s help; reveals, ironically, that he is a “[‘]German from Vilna!’”; and disappears from the town (Spielvogel 71). In his absence, the “whole ‘TRUTH’” begins to circulate that Bronstein was really a German spy (Spielvogel 72). As the fabrications multiply, a Commonwealth Inquiry Officer visits the narrator in order to gather information about Bronstein, now the putative German spy. When the narrator explains

... to him that Bronstein was a rather stupid Polish Jew who considered it better for his business prospects to be accepted as a German rather than as either a Pole or a Jew, the officer laugh[s] sardonically.

‘The same old story! I’ve had a dozen similar cases to investigate! Poor devil! But he is paying a big price for his stupidity!’ (Spielvogel 72)

The rumours have Bronstein interned and, finally, shot in Melbourne Gaol as a spy.

However, while on a vacation motor tour through southern New South Wales, the narrator arrives at a large country town, and above the building housing a fine, affluent, well-stocked store he sees a huge neon sign naming both the store and its proprietor: “ISAAC MOSES BRONSTEIN!” (Spielvogel 72). He re-encounters Bronstein, who has now adopted his innate Jewish persona:

‘Shalom Aleichem!’ he cried. ‘Vot do you think of my new place? You see
dey can’t keep a Yidella down. No! No! Dey can’t keep a Yidella down!

Vait a minit! I want to open a bottle of wine!’ (Spielvogel 72-73)

Bronstein speaks the Yiddish he previously denied understanding; he invites the narrator to stay until the following week in order to hear him read the *Haggadah* at his Passover *seder*. The narrator perceives “that Mr. Bronstein had learnt his lesson. Yes! And learnt it well! . . . Yes! I saw that Mr. Bronstein had learnt his lesson!” (Spielvogel 73).

The exact nature of the lesson learned by Mr. Bronstein is never explained; however, it would appear to be one infused with many levels of irony. Business prospered during Bronstein’s Teutonic masquerade, when to admit to being a Jew apparently invited even more suspicion and prejudice. As Germans and German immigrants become reconstructed as Huns, traitors, spies, and enemies, Bronstein evidently learns it is more politically and socially expedient for him to reinvent himself as himself—a Polish Jew. It is also, coincidentally, very good for his new business. Bronstein also learns that some outsiders are more equal or acceptable than others.

Spielvogel, the narrator, though Australian-born, is identified not as a native, but as a Jew, perhaps even a German Jew, albeit one who now despises the Germans as much as the Australians at his Club do. He remains sympathetic towards Bronstein, but maintains a detached and condescending tone throughout the anecdote. Whatever lesson(s) he learns during his experiences with Bronstein are sub-textual. His overwhelming sense of belonging appears to be unshaken. However, the ironies within the narration itself highlight a certain precariousness in the narrator’s position as an Australian-born Jew. In contrast to Bronstein’s Yiddish-inflected, foreign English, the impeccable, unaccented English the
narrator speaks and writes is the marker and medium of his belonging and functions linguistically to mask his difference and to mollify any threat to his status as a loyal Australian. There is an implication, however, that the fickle winds of public prejudice and intolerance could as easily shift and make Spielvogel, as Jew, no matter how thoroughly assimilated, their new target.

One lesson Bronstein may have learned is that assimilation, by whatever means, does not guarantee membership in, or acceptance by, the host culture. As the biblical, Hebrew nuances of his given names suggest, Bronstein later laughs at his imprudence (Isaac = Yitzchak; “he laughs”) and becomes once again a patriarch—though not of the spirit, but of commerce. However, just as Moses was forever denied entry into the Promised Land, Isaac Moses Bronstein too can only observe it from the mountaintop perspective of a perpetual outsider. Instead, he must settle for another land of exile: Australia.

**Solomon Stedman**

The other Jewish Australian fiction writer of note at this time was Solomon Stedman (1893-1979), a Siberian-born watchmaker and, later, a leather goods manufacturer based in Sydney, who arrived in Brisbane around 1913:

He is regarded as the first European in Australia to publish fiction in English. For that reason his papers are held in the National Archives [in Canberra]. Because he thought in Russian while expressing himself in English, his language is sometimes stilted and his characters flat. *My Neighbour’s Story,*
however, is one of the first stories to acknowledge the existence of an earlier culture in conflict with that found in the new land. He is aware of a different life before the time of writing and has not found it necessary to repudiate his ethnic youth, using it instead to enrich his writing. In this, Stedman is decades ahead of his time: it is he who first altered the nature of Jewish writing in Australia. (Hammer 13)

“My Neighbour’s Story” was first published in the journal *Westralian Judean* in 1933. It is a frame story, anecdotal in nature, in which an unnamed narrator and his anonymous interlocutor unravel the personality and history of Joseph Pitkovsky and his eponymous double, Joe Pitt, while travelling by ship to an unidentified destination. The interlocutor, a Marlow-like presence, dominates the story as he tells the tale of the bifurcated psychology of both the Jew in general and the particular, Russian Jewish immigrant around whom the story revolves. For the interlocutor, the Jew by nature embodies a psychic duality:

‘The Jew is known as a practical, grasping, “hard as nails” business man. You are told he is always out to make money at any price, ever ready to demand his “pound of flesh”. This picture of the Jew is painted either by our enemies or by those who do not know the Jew. But to know him is not easy, because the Jew is always an unknown quantity, a puzzle to the Gentile.’

My neighbour moved a little closer and, pulling the rug over his legs, continued:—

‘Take a Gentile tradesman, for instance. Once you know he is, say, a
watchmaker, you also know approximately his mode of life, his social standing and his intellectual attainments. But if you meet a watchmaker, a Jew, you know nothing of him apart from his trade. He may be a first class musician, a great Hebrew scholar, a profound thinker and certainly a dreamer. His trade is the result of his immediate surroundings, his intellect the repository of the accumulated knowledge and experience of his marvellous race. So there is really a double personality in every Jew and to know him well one must know the two sides of him.’ (Stedman 66-67)

His story centres on the duality of Joseph Pitkovsky, who, upon immigration to Australia from Russia, subsumes his Jewish identity and reinvents himself as Joe Pitt, “the shrewd business man, the exploiter of labour, the worshipper of gold, the mean, unscrupulous shopkeeper” (Stedman 67). The interlocutor admits that he is “the only man who knows the two, all others know the one only” (Stedman 67). He reminds the narrator of the tremendous collapse of Joe Pitt’s business empire and reminisces about Joseph Pitkovsky’s departure from Russia and his betrothed, Myra. In Australia, the internal conflict between the assimilating Joe Pitt and the suppressed Joseph Pitkovsky begins:

‘On his arrival here he perceived that Joseph Pitkovsky, as he was, could not be as successful as he would wish. He possessed too much sentiment, was full of old customs, traditions and beliefs. He had to create a new personality to achieve his object. So he changed his name to Joe Pitt. What was impossible to Joseph became easy for Joe. What he would not say as Joseph Pitkovsky, he could shout as Joe Pitt. His nature split in two, and it was a matter of time as to
which of the two would come out victorious.[''] (Stedman 68)

As the voice of his Jewish conscience fades, Joe Pitt becomes engaged to a non-Jewish woman, and victory over his double seems assured.

At this point in Joe's descent into the pit of assimilation, "'[w]hen everything he dreamed of became a reality, when everything he had set out to accomplish had become a fact,—then the thing that people called the collapse, happened['']" (Stedman 68-69). While Joe Pitt expands and consolidates his commercial empire, Joseph Pitkovsky reads in the newspapers about the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany and feels his co-religionists' humiliation and pain. The suppressed Joseph Pitkovsky becomes "['']restless and articulate['']" (Stedman 69), conjuring up in Joe Pitt's mind memories of their shared past, of Myra, and of those Jews who had stood up for their people in the past:

['']Even in his [Joe Pitt's] dreams he heard voices calling to him and he knew they were the voices of millions of Jewish martyrs who had died for their people, for their faith, and who called upon him to come to the aid of the suffering Jews, even as they had helped in the past.[''] (Stedman 69)

Joseph Pitkovsky's resurgence culminates in his attending a protest rally of the entire Jewish community in a collective assertion of Jewish solidarity and identity. Standing with the protesting Jewish community to which he belongs, it occurs to Joseph Pitkovsky that Joe Pitt feels the silent shame and embarrassment that the diminishment of his Jewish identity, symbolized in the amputation of his name, has caused him to suffer. To Joseph, "['']he seemed to have suddenly realised that he belonged neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, that he was a pariah, a homeless, friendless stranger['']" (Stedman 70). Joseph is
invigorated, revivified, and determined.

After the rally, Joe Pitt stands in front of his store staring at the electric signs that proclaim his wealth and stature:

["They hung there in space like some magnificent monuments to the living Joe Pitt and like mocking tombstones to the memory of Joseph Pitkovsky. It suddenly occurred to him that after all this name and the man who bore it were strangers to him, that he experienced no real pleasure in the glitter of the fiery signs. It was something like the reading of poetry in a foreign tongue, one understands the meaning of the words, but does not feel the music in them.

Entering his luxurious office, he remained for a long time sitting at the desk immersed in thought. Joseph rose as from a heavy sleep and stretching out his hand, pressed a button which extinguished the signs. Joe Pitt had died that night."] (Stedman 70)

The reanimated Joseph Pitkovsky liquidates the business, breaks off the engagement, buys a property in Palestine, and hopes to reconnect with Myra. After his interlocutor has concluded his tale and retired for the night, the narrator picks up the book the former had been reading: “It was Dreamers of the Ghetto, and on the fly leaf I saw the initials J.P. I wondered who was reading the book, Joe Pitt or Joseph Pitkovsky” (Stedman 71). With this final vignette, both narrator and reader discern that Joseph Pitkovsky has been the interlocutor and that he is now returning to Europe to find Myra. The narrator’s ultimate, ironic comment suggests that the doubleness Joe Pitt/Joseph Pitkovsky has experienced is not resolved completely. The sea journey home is a continuing and ongoing symbolic
process, and the destination has been neither determined nor named. The poignancy of this conclusion is heightened by the contemporary reader’s knowledge that Joseph Pitkovsky is sailing straight back to the maelstrom into which Europe was rapidly descending.

For both Mr. Bronstein and Joseph Pitkovsky, the internal conflict between assimilation and assertion centres on their status as outsiders and Jews. Ultimately, each painfully discovers personal integrity, but not necessarily resolution, in the assertion and reintegration of an innate, but previously violently suppressed, Jewish identity. For both characters, belonging represents an insoluble paradox. Mr. Bronstein and Joe Pitt can only belong to the Australian society to which they have immigrated if they sever the Jew from their psyches. Having done so, however, diminishes rather than increases their sense of belonging, because to masquerade as what they are not and can never be alienates them further from both the society to whose membership and acceptance they aspire and themselves. Perhaps both learn the lesson that to be a Jew means not being able to belong to anything alien to their own Jewish identities, however tenuous or expressed. This is certainly one lesson learned by the Jews of the Europe to which Joseph Pitkovsky returns.

B. N. Jubal

The Jewish community, the longest-established, non-Anglo-Celtic group in Australia, has relied on continuing immigration for its growth, vitality, and longevity. Until 1933, this community was of predominantly British origin, although it included a sizable minority which came from Germany, often via England. Australian Jews, most notably Sir Isaac
Isaacs (1855-1948), the first Australian-born Governor General, and Sir John Monash (1865-1931), Commander-in-Chief of Australia’s armed forces during World War I, rose to the highest levels of political and social life largely unencumbered by the most pernicious forms of antisemitism and unimpeded by less overt forms of prejudice against Jews. As W. D. Rubinstein explains:

The entire tenor of the older Jewish community here [in Australia] was to de-emphasise in every way the differences between it and the Gentile Australian majority. . . . Paradoxically, then, the very nature of the success of the older [Anglo-]Jewish community here set strict boundaries on its affinities and links to the Jewish people elsewhere and especially to the beleaguered, impoverished, persecuted, and, eventually, massacred Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. (Introduction 4)

An influx of Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European Jews began in the 1920s, after the doors to the United States of America had been slammed shut. However, between 1933 and the curtailment of international shipping in 1940-41, an infinitesimal 8,000 German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian Jewish refugees gained entry to Australia. To its great shame, the established Anglo-Jewish community in Australia was, at best, lukewarm, and, at worst, hostile towards its imperiled co-religionists:

Assimilated and untroubled by prejudice in this remote antipodean nation, it seems abundantly clear that the older Jewish community here failed the Jewish people in their greatest hour of need in modern history, by virtually declining to lift a finger to assist more of the beleaguered Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe.
to find a place of refuge in a practically unoccupied continent which, only a
decade later, admitted two million non-English speaking migrants with little or
no social disharmony. . . . By dint of decades of assiduous conformity,
sealous super-patriotism, ‘group invisibility’, and rampant assimilation, the
older Jewish community here had made itself largely immune from any
ramification of the tidal wave of anti-Semitism which swept Europe in the
interwar period. . . . Nor was it in its response to the Holocaust alone that the
older Jewish community failed: its characteristic[ally antagonistic] attitude
toward Zionism must strike most Jews today as regrettable and, as with its
response to Nazi persecution, virtually incomprehensible. (W. D. Rubinstein,
Introduction 5, 13, 6)

Unfortunately, these very attitudes prevailed throughout both the British Commonwealth
and the rest of the civilized world. Nevertheless, this ingress of Jewish refugees from
Eastern European antisemitism and Nazi German genocide transformed and revitalized a
moribund Australian Jewish community and profoundly affected Australian life, art, and
culture. The influence of the Jewish writers who emerged from this group and who
published in the 1940s and 1950s is remarkable; that English was not the native language of
a single one of them makes their accomplishments extraordinary.

Among these immigrants was Benjamin Newman Jubal (1901-1961), who was born
in Europe and worked as a theatre director. He fled the Nazis, arriving in Australia in 1938
or 1939. In Melbourne, he produced some Yiddish plays at the Kadimah Theatre. With the
publication of his one book, The Smile of Herschale Handle, in 1947, Jubal became the first
Jewish (or non-Jewish) author in Australia to represent the Shoah in fiction.

The author frames the vignettes which structure *The Smile of Herschale Handle* as a collection of Herschale Handle’s posthumous writings, edited by B. N. J. The “editor” introduces the collection with these remarks:

*I regret that Herschale Handle did not write more.*

*These stories, sketches or whatever you might call them he wrote because they were weighing on his mind and because he had to unburden it. They have no coherent action—nor do they present a sequence of events—they are simply connected with his life and attached to his life.*

*I believe they should be read.*

*In the course of the few conversations I had with Herschale Handle I could not get much information from him. After his death, as I went through his papers, I found some notes that gave me the impression that he had been married, loved his wife and that she had left him.*

*Perhaps because life at his side was too hard and too insecure.* . . . (Jubal [5])

This editorial preface functions in several literary ways. It constructs a simulacrum of authenticity, at once distancing Jubal from stories he has merely collected and edited, while simultaneously creating a biographical and bibliographical basis for the real existence of the supposed author and protagonist Herschale Handle. Framing the narrative as a fictional autobiography sympathetically assembled by a considerate editor helps to establish an empathetic engagement between Handle and reader, an intimacy and honesty and rapport
which allow the book its tremendous emotional impact. This narrative frame distances Jubal from the overwhelmingly horrendous fact of the Shoah, without diminishing its effect on his protagonist. In addition, the choice of verisimilitude as a rhetorical strategy serves to preclude any diminution or trivialization of the Shoah.

B. N. J.’s prefatory remarks consist of five paragraphs, two of which are short declarative sentences and the last of which is a sentence fragment. The opening paragraph is a single complex sentence; it begins with regret, setting a compassionate mood and a confidential tone for the stories which follow. The paragraph which follows describes the structure, or its absence, which characterizes the stories Handle wrote. The third (middle) paragraph is also a brief complex sentence, this time with a deleted subordinating conjunction, beginning with belief. The movement from regret to belief is paralleled in paragraphs two and four by the shift in subject from the structure of, and the motivation for, the stories to the scant biographical information gleaned from Handle in person and through his papers. The final paragraph moves from the despondency of the one preceding it to a speculative fragment about the nature of Handle’s life and marriage.

The symmetrical arrangement of these paragraphs, combined with the grammatical structures of the sentences, fragments the editor’s comments, creating at the level of form an analogue with the predominant thematic tropes of both the stories and their teller’s life: fragmentation and absence. For Handle’s life, as construed in his stories, is a series of disjointed and poignant vignettes—seemingly simple, ordinary sketches of an immigrant’s progress in Australia. Yet, for Handle, the yoke of being a Jew, especially after the Shoah and before the founding of the State of Israel, makes his very existence extraordinarily
significant.

The fourteen stories of which the book is constructed represent the unburdening of Handle’s heart. The sole organizing principle is the life experience and consciousness of the narrator, Herschale Handle. His voice and style—humorous, intelligent, ironic, self-conscious, self-reflexive, and self-deprecatory—are those of the peddler and are apparent from the outset in “Handle! Old Clothes,” the introductory story:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the honour of introducing myself, Herschale Handle. (“Handle” is the international colloquialism for the profession of hawkers, and is a cry to attract customers). Of course, I have another name, too, a correct one, a real name which is entered in different places in different official books. In these important official books is registered, in most beautiful handwriting, precisely and truthfully, everything worth knowing about me, such as birth and marriage dates, as well as other dates too. Thank God! I can’t get lost to the powers that be. So my feeling of being sheltered in this world is not a vain one. But I hear and answer as far as I can (because I’m slightly deaf) only to the name of Herschale Handle. This I have become in all these years which the Almighty in His immeasurable grace has granted me . . . I beg of you, what on earth have I in common with a name stamped in some remote official books? (Jubal 7)

The contrast between Handle’s real, official name and the unofficial one he has assumed highlights the dichotomous nature of his identity as both individual and stereotype, a condition about which he remains acutely aware:
As a matter of fact, Ladies and Gentlemen, I ought to be quite well known to you; if not personally, at least as a type. Surely, you have met some hawker at some time or another? We all look alike, at least outwardly, and are represented in any city worth mentioning. I don’t think that there are many who have not heard our battle-cry “Handle! Old Clothes!” (At this opportunity I should like to add that I pay highest prices—or as the Englishman says, “Cash on the spot”—for cast-off clothes). Naturally I don’t restrict myself to the purchase of second-hand clothing only. I buy anything which is not clinched and rivetted. Ladies and Gentlemen, Herschale Handle buys everything.

(Jubal 7-8)

As a type, the itinerant Handle recognizes his role within a society in which he is very visible, but unrecognized, except negatively:

... On the other hand, I must admit that there are people, fine people, first-class people who do us the honour of noticing us. Have you ever come across such signs as these: “Beware of the dog!” or, “No hawkers or canvassers allowed!” Ha! Ha! That goes against us! So I console myself: if fine, first-class people spare neither trouble nor cost in having such notices put up, then there must be something about us. I think it is perhaps, a certain twinkle in our eyes which makes them uncomfortable. We move about too much. We see too much. We remind them of too much. (Jubal 9)

This sardonic comment underlies the paradoxical nature of the Handle’s role. He is necessary to the society whose castoffs he collects; at the same time, he does not belong to
that society: he remains always an outsider. Ironically, it is precisely because he has been
cast as outsider that he is able to perceive the very things in that society that unnerve and
threaten it the most. He acts as society’s surrogate conscience and, thus, by definition, can
never belong.

That this is a specifically Jewish conscience and consciousness and a quintessentially
Jewish fate, Handle makes very clear:

After having roamed about the world, and tried various things and achieved
nothing, after having dreamed and willed and fought, and suffered shipwreck
on the rocks of Jewish destiny time and time again, after all this you find out
one fine day, the law of this destiny, and you learn to adjust yourself to it. You
throw a sack over your shoulder, or rather a sack grows out of your back, you
take a stick in your hand and you drag yourself down streets and up alleys,
shouting, “Handle! Old clothes!” The profession of a hawker, Ladies and
Gentlemen, if I may be permitted to coin a phrase, is one of adaptation. Like
an animal, one adapts oneself to given circumstances. After all, everyone has a
certain instinct of self-preservation. The Handle is the modern incarnation of
the eternal Wandering Jew. (Jubal 10)

As wanderer, foreigner, immigrant, Jew, and therefore “different,” Handle arrived in
Australia and now resides at the “Mimosa,” an apartment-house at “12 Lobby Street,
Carlton, Melbourne, Australia—I pay highest prices, cash on the spot, and so on” (Jubal 11).
From this lobby to the Australian society at whose periphery he works and lives, Handle
perceives the unravelling of Jewish fate, a fate which was always precarious, but which is,
in the post-Shoah world he now inhabits, even more significant.

Although its locus may be elsewhere and its signification absence, even in this introductory story the Shoah is a palpable presence. According to Herschale, a Handle’s most important asset is “a nose for people. A big, long, sensitive nose for people!” (Jubal 11). As an example of his nasal sensitivity, Handle relates the story of his encounter with a young man, a “foreigner,” (Jubal 11) who, although originally from Gwozdziec, Poland, now also lives in the “Mimosa.” Handle invites him for a glass of tea with lemon “(Where I come from we always drink tea with lemon)” (Jubal 13). During their conversation, it becomes apparent that Handle knows the young man’s father, Moses Schachter, also known as Moses Klesmer:

... And what is your father doing, still playing his fiddle? Where is he?

His prominent cheek-bones trembled violently as if he were going to cry.

After a while he replied: “Over there...”

I didn’t ask any further.

I knew everything.

“Over there” Jews were being exterminated.

Moses Klesmer’s fiddle was dead.

Had his son saved those melodies? (Jubal 14-15)

This brief, understated exchange subtly expresses the enormity of the Shoah. Moses Klesmer, whose metonymic name signifies European Ashkenazic Jewry, as symbolized by its klesmer music, has been silenced. Like those who played and lived them, the melodies have not been saved. Each of the conversers silently “swallow[s] his ‘Zores’ (an
Just as Handle attempts, paradoxically, to approximate inadequately in English the untranslatable Yiddish word “Zores,” so too he tries to translate his Jewish existence from the Old World to Australia. Yet, now he belongs neither to the European Jewish community, which has been incinerated, nor to Australian society, which stereotypes and marginalizes him. “Zores,” despite its inadequate authorial gloss, signifies the unbridgeable cross-cultural gap between Handle and Australia and functions synecdochically for Jewish linguistic difference and “Otherness.” His syncretic mother tongue, Yiddish, is likewise symbolic of Handle’s hybridized existence.

Ironically, it is his very Jewishness which justifies his presence in Australia, as Handle explains in “Ladies and Gentlemen! I Thank You”: “How do I happen to find myself in Australia? That’s a comical question! Ladies and Gentlemen, please don’t forget: I am an Israelite, a Hebrew, a Jew—and that ought to explain everything” (Jubal 21). However, Handle speculates sardonically that even Australia may not be his ultimate destination. As the old Yiddish proverb teaches, “Man proposes and God disposes”: Oh, no, Ladies and Gentlemen! You do not know the old Jewish God. His way of disposing so complicates the life of his “chosen people,” that no amount of proposing can help them. Already as a child I began my journey to Australia, it proceeded in jerks, which means I was tossed from country to country, and it lasted all my life. And who can assure me that Australia is the final goal of my journey? Shall I stay here? . . . Ladies and Gentlemen, meet me, the involuntary world-traveller, the pleasure-tourist without pleasure, the
forced pleasure-tourist of the world! . . . (Jubal 21, 22)

For this pleasureless pleasure-tourist, whose forced pleasure-tour began when he was eighteen, however, there is no place where he feels truly free:

I wanted to find somewhere on this round earth a corner, where I could work freely and breathe freely like a man amongst men. I was no speculator. I was no smuggler. I was neither a grasping Jew nor a war profiteer. I wasn't even a hawker . . . I had a clear head and powerful arms, I carried dreams in my soul and I still believed in you and your world, Ladies and Gentlemen.

To-day it is different, I do not believe any more. I don't dream any more. Or perhaps I do! Perhaps . . . But differently. (Jubal 24-25)

The antisemitic stereotypes of the Jew to which Handle refers in this passage are false identities projected upon him by the world and through which that world may recognize and despise him, caricatures which, when rationalized by those who create them, permit the mass extermination of Jewish people. The acrid separation between "your world" and the one in which Handle is forced to reside prevents communication or community. Handle is thankful to be alive, but his optimism is flavoured with pain and despair, as the derisive ending to this particular story demonstrates:

Decades have passed since then. I have become old and weak. I have been thrown between frontiers and over frontiers. I had to learn so many languages that I can hardly speak any one, and I still have to be thankful that I am alive. I thank you. I thank you very much, dear God. I thank you, dear people. I thank all countries and nations of the world, individually and collectively. Did
I leave anybody out to whom I owe a debt of gratitude? . . .

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you!

Herschale Handle thanks you all . . . (Jubal 25)

Although his words may be bitter, the fact that they exist at all is testamentary to the survival of this self-styled "clothologist" (Jubal 20).

The relation between Handle and the country of his adoption is humorously imagined in his encounter with a native Australian. The "Australian native" of the sketch titled "Kookaburra, Kookaburra" is a bird which, to Handle's astonishment, laughs, and with whom he converses (Jubal 27). Handle tells the kookaburra, who regularly perches on the chimney of an adjacent apartment-house, the "Maria Stuart," that he is also a bird, "only a migrant bird . . ." (Jubal 28). At first, the bird appears to be interested in his interlocutor:

As a born Australian, he is, of course, somewhat shy and discreet, but after a while he seemed to get used to me and now he even comes to my window to see what I am doing. (Jubal 28)

Handle feeds him his breakfast crumbs, but the bird is a fussy eater, eschewing "some Continental dishes, for which you can't blame him. He is not used to them and why should he force himself?" (Jubal 28). However, after their initial encounter, the kookaburra begins to snub Handle and his generosity:

Recently I noticed that he had changed his attitude towards me. He wasn't so friendly any more and laughed in the opposite direction. Perhaps he, too, had been affected by the propaganda poison of the old Continent? It hurt me very much and I decided to talk it over with him frankly. (Jubal 29)
Handle tries to get the kookaburra to divulge why he no longer likes him. He explains to the bird:

‘I have wandered over the earth, I have seen a lot and learnt a good deal. And I have suffered very much, my friend, very much indeed, and in spite of this I still believe in the good and great. I believe in you and your youth. I have in my wanderer’s sack, not only cast-off clothes...’ (Jubal 29)

The bird once again looks at him, and his laugh is once again friendly. The story ends with a question: “Could you tell me, Ladies and Gentlemen, how to interpret that laughter?” (Jubal 30).

This symbolic avian fable epitomizes Handle’s uneasy acculturation to a new continent reminiscent in its poisonous (but not murderous) antisemitism of the Old one he, as a perpetual pleasure-tourist, was compelled to vacate. His life in Australia is as much an act of interpretation as it is one of translation. Handle’s search for meaning is simultaneously a search for both language (English), in its specifically Australian context, and its culturally-correct interpretation. What is local is foreign to Handle, and this relativity of language distinguishes the insider from the outsider, the native from the immigrant, the Australian from the Other, the Jew. To acquire the language, however, is not necessarily to belong. There are still lingering question marks and an inscrutable, open-ended laughter which may signify anything from malevolent ridicule to benevolent condescension to benign neglect. Yet, Handle’s voice, through his writings, not only forcefully expresses the Jewish fate but also confronts and accuses a world whose unchecked antisemitic violence may ultimately consume all of humanity. For this
wandering and oppressed Jew has seen how threadbare and thin the clothing of human
civilization really is. He collects this veneer and has seen the abysmal depravity it barely
conceals.

From the transient laughter of the kookaburra, Handle segues to “[‘"]the expression of
[his] life-philosophy[‘"]” as evinced by his smile (Jubal 33). In “I Am Not Mona Lisa,” a
painter literally appears unannounced in Handle’s flat and announces his desire to paint
Herschale’s smile (Jubal 32). The painter perceives in a smile the measure, life, and
character of the person and translates them through his medium of expression. He interprets
the smile of Herschale Handle: “‘Your smile moves on lines which are usually the path of
tears,” he said slowly and with emphasis. ‘Tears have frozen into a smile . . .’” (Jubal 33).
Handle, clearly very moved, silences the painter, and the chimera disappears, perhaps the
creation of Handle’s imagination. Handle opines, questioningly, that “perhaps this smile of
mine, as he described it, is the inner attitude of a Handle towards life? . . .” (Jubal 34). If so,
the juxtaposition of tears to produce a smile is a suitable expression for a Jewish Handle in
the post-Shoah world.

The Shoah and the tears it engendered figure specifically in the seven stories which
immediately follow “I Am Not Mona Lisa.” In “Mother,” Handle explains why he carries
the one piece of clothing he “would not sell for any money at all. It is [his] mother’s frock”
(Jubal 35). His father dead, “a hero on some field of honour in the first World War” (Jubal
37), Handle honours and mourns his mother, who died violently during the second World
War:

In the year 1943 after the birth of Christ, my mother was murdered by
Hitler’s hordes.

Why?

Ladies and Gentlemen, why?

I don’t know where the human remains of my mother are. I only hope that the blood of her heart will flow into the veins of a new world so that other mothers and their sons may lead a happier life, worthy of man... (Jubal 37-38)

The unanswered and unanswerable question Handle poses demands a reply; his response is simple: hope, life, and the optimistic belief in a new world.

“Noemi,” “Daniel Soldat,” and “Frischling, Watchmaker” are all stories of acquaintances of Handle who lived in or near his little township in Europe during World War II. Noemi emerges “from the archives of [Handle’s] memory (department ‘Pleasant Memories’)” both because of her kindness to him as he plied his hawking trade in the township and because of what happened to her:

What happened? Not much. A few million Jews had been “liquidated” by various ways and means. One doesn’t only liquidate unprofitable business, one can “liquidate” innocent people, too. I find the word “liquidate” is a devilishly clever choice. If a person dies a natural death, one mourns, but the “liquidation” of millions of people does not impress anybody. Well, one day Noemi’s family was “liquidated.” Her husband was no Jewish swindler, he wasn’t even a Communist, but something was wrong with his blood. So this blood was spilt. The child, too, was “liquidated.” The child who always
laughed as if there were no tears in this world, and who certainly would have become a good and fine human being was "liquidated."

Noemi escaped death by chance. (Jubal 41-42)

Noemi becomes a partisan leader and fights and kills "the enemies of mankind" (Jubal 42).

Handle adds this caustic postscript to her life:

She fought so that you, Ladies and Gentlemen, may live comfortably and pleasantly, that you may print newspapers, have supper engagements and dances, and may talk about great ideals. She went hungry and thirsty, that trade and traffic, export and import, might flourish and that you, Ladies and Gentlemen, may from time to time rail against the people with whose blood something is wrong.

On the day the enemies of mankind were beaten, the guerilla-girl, Noemi, committed suicide.

It is a pity.

But I can understand her, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Noemi . . .

Noemi is dead. (Jubal 43)

Handle's accusing of the Ladies and Gentlemen who read his words is a stinging indictment of the entire non-Jewish world's complicity in the Shoah. By focussing on a single person, Noemi, Handle personalizes and particularizes the horror suffered by millions of Jews at the hands of the Nazis. Although the sketch is spare both in detail and style, its emotional impact is devastating. The telling of Noemi's story insures that the memory of her and her
life will never be liquidated.

“Daniel Soldat” is the story of “the live clock of [Handle’s] township,” the man who woke the Jews early in the morning so that they could attend Shacharit (morning services) at the synagogue (Jubal 44). The story begins with a brief exposition of Daniel Soldat’s job in the small township beside the Dnjester River where he and Herschale Handle lived. Then the story begins again, but this time the style and diction are evocative of a fable:

There was once, for instance, a township, a tiny dot on the map. It was built of wood, stone and lime, it had houses and churches, streets and gardens, it had Jews in caftans and Jews without caftans, it had children and old people, and they multiplied themselves and died, they sang and quarrelled—and now it is no more. There was once, for instance, a Jew called Daniel Soldat, who was quiet and modest and god-fearing—and now he is no more. (Jubal 45)

However, because there is and can be no moral to the story of Soldat’s murder by the Nazis, the fabular mode is stunningly and parodically reversed. Instead, Handle presents a “counter-moral” in which the destinies of the Jews and the world are ineluctably intertwined:

Jewish destiny seems to be an eternal problem.

I ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen, what is the use of all this culture and civilisation, all the startling discoveries of great minds, if, again and again, millions of people fall upon a small group of unarmed men and women, humiliate them, persecute them and torture them to death? Don’t say, “We can’t help it!” No man can be freed from guilt for the tragic fate innocently
suffered by other men. This must be made clear to the world. This must be written in the school-books of our children, this *eleventh commandment*!!

(Jubal 62)

And as this destiny inflicts itself on Daniel Soldat and his township, Handle points to the complicity of the world’s inhabitants and what they failed, and fail, to understand:

For one day arose a madman, a dangerous fool who belonged in a mad-house and shouted with a hysterical voice: “Exterminate the Jews!” And they were exterminated. They were murdered singly and they were murdered in masses, they were murdered slowly and they were murdered quickly—they were murdered with lust. Honoured science, with painstaking precision, worked out the modern methods of liquidation. And the world was silent. The big men were silent and the little men were silent. They lived their normal lives. No less beer was consumed and there was no less gambling. Birth-rate figures did not fall for this reason. It was sad, was the general opinion, but what could one do! . . . As it affected only Jews, I beg of you, how could the mighty nations of the world who have inscribed on their banners the rights of man, democracy and other rights and freedoms, intervene in the sovereign internal affairs of another country?

They did not want to realise that our world had become one and indivisible. The so-called “progressive” part of humanity had always been cursed by shortsightedness and this time too, it did not see the “Mene Tekel” of history . . . (Jubal 62-63)
In this counter-fable, however, Daniel’s translation and interpretation of the cryptic Aramaic words which appear on the wall during the Nazi’s Belshazzarian banquet of defilement, profanation, and orgiastic mass murder are overwhelmed by the bombs which destroy European civilization. The Temple of the township, symbolic of the twice-destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, remains unscathed. As the Nazis approach it, the Temple is suddenly illuminated by an other-worldly luminescence; the dead sing with God and nature (Birds) within its walls. Daniel Soldat, dressed in white, wrapped in his tallit (prayer shawl), and carrying in his arms the Sefer Torah (Scrolls of the Law), appears on the roof of the Temple. As the same moment as the Nazi beasts of prey shoot at him, the entire structure explodes and collapses:

The place where our township once stood is now a heap of ruins. A point on the map has disappeared. Under its ruins many Jews are buried. The Temple is Daniel Soldat’s grave. The Scrolls of the Law remained unscathed. They are indestructible.

The waters of the Dnjester are red . . . (Jubal 65-66)

The Temple becomes the gravesite of the Known Soldier, Daniel Soldat, and Handle’s story his epitaph. However the eternal hope of the world, the Torah, cannot be destroyed, despite the despicable efforts of its enemies to erase it.

Frischling, in the story “Frischling, Watchmaker,” escapes the Nazi German tyranny with his family by fleeing to the woods and living in a cave. Within the Edenic forest setting, Frischling develops an Adamic relation with God and his natural creation. He joins a partisan band led by his former Rabbi. At the end of the story, his only son and heir dies
in his arms; the story is the tombstone for both the dead son and the severed generations of Frischlings, watchmakers. The story ends with the intoning of the first words of the *Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer of the glorification of God, recited by mourners for their dead.

Moshele Prophet, the sarcastic nickname for the central character in “Kill the Golem,” is a supposed madman who rails against the “[‘]Golem of the world[’]” (Jubal 85). Handle retells within this story the fable of the Golem of Prague, “[‘]a local, Jewish affair and fundamentally a legend,[’]” and contrasts it with the Golem of the world, “[‘]an international catastrophe and no legend[’]” (Jubal 85). The Golem of the world “[‘]dethrone[s] God, feelings, love and dreams—everything great in man,[’]” erecting in its place “[‘]the empire of the body[’]” (Jubal 85). Handle wonders if Moshele Prophet was mad or not; still the Golem of the world, whether manifested externally or psychologically, raves.

“Finkelstein and the Tower of Babel!” tells the tale of Finkelstein the Hunchback, and is set in Handle’s township before the *Shoah*. With “Not Invited . . .,” the setting returns to Handle’s apartment in Carlton, a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood in Melbourne. Handle reads in the newspaper that a major conference of all the nations is to be convened. He seems to hear a knock at his door and in step the Jewish dead: “Dead people and the living dead, people who had paid for the lunacy of our time with their blood and their youth—victims of the glorious twentieth century” (Jubal 97). They are not invited to this conference, and they ask Handle to attend and represent their case by speaking for them. Handle accepts, travels to the theatre in the city in which the conference is to be held, bribes the Porter to gain entry at the stage-door, and takes his place. Horrified to discover “that the
people, who were gathered here to build a better, nobler, more beautiful (and so on) world, stank of the old and rotten one” (Jubal 102), Handle suddenly feels as though [his] tails, put together from odd tails, and [his] ridiculous top-hat had dissolved themselves and disappeared and a sackcloth of mourning had enveloped [his] body. (Jubal 103)

In this state of Jewish ritual mourning, he speaks for the dead, the murdered, and thus silenced, conscience of the world:

“Gentlemen, I am the uninvited guest. I have no passport (except the one with the red ‘J’), no papers at all. My name is Herschale Handle and I am a hawker by profession. I have come here to speak for millions of dead, who can no longer speak for themselves and for millions of living people, who are dead.

“What have I to say? I have to tell you, that we don't want you.” (Jubal 104)

The delegates disappear in a flash of thunder and lightning, and the dead, also wrapped in the sackcloth of mourning, take their places. However, their attempt to repair the world is short-lived. The Porter bursts in and begins to laugh and shriek. In the streets, others pick up his cry and begin to shout, “Capitalism! . . . Socialism! . . . -ism! . . . -ism! . . . -ism! . . . -ism!” (Jubal 106). Handle realizes that the “old clique was busying itself with the loom of the old chaos” and that “the world does not change” (Jubal 106). Then he awakes from his dream and begins to weep. Handle weeps for the Jewish condition because he knows that on it depends the destiny of the entire world; unfortunately, nothing has been learned from the Shoah.

In the penultimate story in the collection, “I Have Stolen a Day from God . . .,”
Handle behaves as if he “were no forced pleasure-tourist” and takes the day off (Jubal 118). He packs “lots of food, bread, cream-cheese and sour pickled cucumber (in Australia, called Jewish cucumber) all ‘Made in Carlton’” and takes a train to the country to Mount — (Jubal 119). The destination is unclear:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I don’t know, but I sometimes have the impression that the Australians don’t understand English. At any rate, they don’t understand my English, because the man in the ticket office said that no such place existed. (Jubal 121)

When he attempts to leave the train, the porter tells him, “‘That’s not your destination!’” (Jubal 123); however, Handle disembarks at the town and proceeds to walk in any direction which pleases him. As he experiences the world “full of sun and colour,” he communes with God’s natural creation (Jubal 125). Although he is sixty years old, Handle begins to feel like a boy, “a happy, voluntary wanderer” (Jubal 126). His food tastes “like manna,” containing “every imaginable taste” (Jubal 127). As he eats, Handle is accosted by a fellow wanderer, a swagman and his dog. Their encounter, echoing that between Handle and the kookaburra in an earlier story, signifies the relation between the Jewish migrant and the migrant Australian native. In Handle, the unnamed swagman recognizes a fellow traveller. To his question “‘Swaggie?’” Handle replies affirmatively “without understanding what he meant” (Jubal 127). The swagman eats and tells Handle stories of the Australian bush: “I did not understand him, and yet I did” (Jubal 128). Though their meeting is amicable, Handle cannot fully understand the swagman; there is a sense of connection, perhaps, but even at the periphery of Australian life Handle is peripheral, and it is this difference which
ultimately prevents his belonging.

Upon his return to the city, Handle discovers his flat burgled and ransacked: “This was the fate of a man who had stolen a day from God” (Jubal 129). (He later learns that the thief was actually his landlord [Jubal 133].) The unbounded joy and optimism of this story is tempered by the sardonic humour of the final story of Handle’s book and his life, “With the Deepest Respect I Remain . . .”

Handle forwards this last fragment “from the other side. As, owing to technical reasons, I was unable to inform you ahead of the last event of my life (it came unforeseen), I am doing so at a later date” (Jubal 130). His bereavement notice is touched with the pathos which underlies many of the stories he has told:

“I, Herschale Handle, stateless Jew of the twentieth century after Christ, last residence: Apartment House ‘Mimosa,’ 12 Lobby Street, Carlton, Melbourne, Australia, hereby give notice that after lifelong suffering I peacefully and painlessly passed away. As all my relatives were gassed on the Old Continent, I leave behind me no loving mourners. Peace, perfect peace.

H.H.” (Jubal 130)

Yet, in explaining the details of his how his heart just stopped while he was walking in the street, Handle’s humorous and entertaining sense of irony remains. As he is carried into a nearby house, he remarks:

I nearly shouted a warning “Stop!” because I discovered a notice on the door: “No Hawkers or Canvassers allowed!” and “Beware of the Dog!” but I remembered just in time that I was dead and kept silent. As a matter of fact, I
maliciously enjoyed my entrance through the door. Ladies and Gentlemen, I beg of you, when would I ever have dared to enter a house with such an inscription, if not as a corpse? (Jubal 132)

And from the other side, Handle, the Jew, pleads for humanity:

Am I sorry to have left the earth? Actually not, Ladies and Gentlemen. But I have a certain yearning for the world. It is a pity that her beauty and greatness and her opportunities for living are not granted to me and others of my kind. I believe that the world should be thought over and humanized from “A” to “Z” by common people. It must be possible to humanize the world. Life would then be worth living. I don’t say all this in self-interest, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am dead... (Jubal 134)

On his Judgement Day, he is found not guilty by the President of the Court for stealing a day from God. And he ends his final missive with a postscript about the beautiful weather and the lack of North winds.

This metafictional final story marks the site of Herschale Handle’s unexpected death. The sudden revelation that Handle now inhabits the other side, beyond this incarnation, is unsettling. More disconcerting is the comic paradox of Handle’s relating the details of his own demise. His apparent ability to live and to write, after “death,” indicates an inconsistency or disjuncture in the fabric of reality. However, within the broad thematic concerns of the entire work, this disjuncture is no more fantastic than the universal breach in reality that permitted the Shoah in all its horror. Jubal’s abandonment of verisimilitude in Handle’s last tale does not diminish the fact of the Shoah; indeed, it emphasizes the mind’s
inability to make the extraordinary (un)reality of such an event intelligible. The logical paradox of this final story’s telling is another rhetorical analogue to the thematic trope of fragmentation. For paradox, the juxtaposition of mutually exclusive statements or events, is a variety of fragmentation and alienation. And, despite its self-contradictory nature, a paradox may also be true. Thus Handle, as the archetypal Jew, must live within the ambiguous parameters of paradox: outsider and insider, marginal and central, exile and citizen, immigrant and emigrant, dead and living, alien and Australian.

The dominant tropes of fragmentation and absence are reflected at the grammatical level by Jubal’s very frequent use of ellipsis throughout the book. Not only does such punctuation interrupt the text, but it also indicates and symbolizes omission and/or expurgation. Handle hawk's his remnants of both clothes and memories—of a hard life and a destroyed world. Similarly, he represents the meagre remnant of Jewish survivors of the Shoah.

Herschale Handle’s stories, sketches, anecdotes, digressions, experiences, and memories constitute Jubal’s counter-discursive protest against oppression, violence, and genocidal mass murder. Jubal creates in Handle his soul’s anguished cry of resistance to the inexorable and seemingly inevitable Jewish destiny. Handle, the wandering and representative Jew, stands outside history, outside the nations to which he has been exiled, outside the Australia to whose society he can never belong, and, at the end, outside life itself in order to accuse, to warn, to remember, to teach, and, ultimately to movingly comfort the surviving remnant. Handle’s predicament is both existential and linguistic: he feels at home neither in Australia nor in its English language. In an article about the Australian
architectural environment and the (im)migrant’s place and meaning within it, Paul Carter describes the predicament of Italian Australian writer R. A. Baggio—in terms which apply equally well to Herschale Handle, and perhaps to Jubal himself:

[He] has never felt ‘at home’ in Australia; his surroundings here have not provided him with a satisfactory body image, a mothering space that both nurtures him and helps him define his own difference. But the psychic deprivation he feels as a migrant to Australia is not only haptic: it is also linguistic. The instability he experiences arises from a sense of not being at home in language; he does not dwell in language, language does not shelter his innermost thoughts. Language, like architecture, is a means of structuring reality. The naming of things, like the imposition of perspective, is a means of defining one’s own place and identity. But if one’s own name is unstable, then so, too, is one’s sense of place. . . .

In Australia, his name ceased to be a fixed point of reference and identity: it acquired the migrant virtues of adaptability and self-effacement. (12)

In a similar way, the erasure of Herschale’s handle parallels the situating of Jubal’s text outside canonical Australian literature, its particular Jewish difference elided with, and exiled to, the effacing category “migrant.” However, The Smile of Herschale Handle is an emotive and evocative work of fiction, and, within the parameters of this critical commentary, a paradigmatic post-Shoah Jewish Australian text, a prototype for the alien sons and daughters which follow its publication.
In the 1940s, two Eastern European immigrants who wrote fiction in Yiddish, Pinchas Goldhar (1901-1947) and Herz Bergner (1907-1970), were living in Melbourne. They were joined there by a third writer, Odessa-born Judah Leon Waten (1911-1985). Goldhar edited Australier Leben, the first Yiddish newspaper in Australia, from 1931-1933. And in 1939, his Derzeilungen fun Australie [Stories about Australia] was published in Yiddish in Australia. Bergner’s novel Zwishn Himl un Waser was translated into English by Waten and published by Dolphin Publications, a publishing house founded by Waten and Vic O’Connor, in 1946 under the title Between Sky and Sea. This novel won the Australian Literature Society gold medal for best book in 1946, “an enormous achievement for a non-Anglo-Saxon writer” (Hammer 120). Waten’s family had migrated from Odessa, Russia, to Perth, Western Australia, when Waten was still an infant. Although Waten was educated and raised in Australia, “[h]is cultural and political loyalties were strongly Yiddish and decidedly left-wing, in the Russian tradition instilled in him by his mother, who always felt alienated in Australia” (Hammer 79). At Goldhar’s urging, Waten wrote his fictionalized, semi-autobiographical memoirs as a series of interrelated short stories which were eventually collected and published in 1952 as Alien Son.

The environment which proved so conducive to the success of Alien Son owed much to Jewish immigration both during the 1920s/1930s and after World War II:

Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews began to arrive here in numbers in the 1920s. About 8000 . . . Jewish refugees from Hitler were allowed to settle
here between 1933 and the closing of the sea lanes (as well as Hitler's 'Final Solution') in 1940-41. After the War, perhaps 25-40 000 European Jews who survived the Holocaust came to Australia, together with others from Egypt, the Soviet Union, Israel, South Africa as well as Britain. Demographically, the Jewish community here was transformed between 1933 and the 1950s; additionally... the Jewish community was fundamentally altered by these new migrants, such that it is clear that, historically, two Jewish communities have existed here... More basically, the older Jewish community here was in imminent danger of near-extinction by assimilation and intermarriage, and has been rescued from this fate only by the migration of Eastern European Jews since the War and the establishment of a far-reaching Jewish day school system. (W. D. Rubinstein, Introduction 4-5, 6) 

In addition, in the wake of the Nazi German Third Reich, World War II, and the Shoah, Australian perceptions of, and attitudes towards, Jewish immigrants became somewhat more sympathetic. However, Alien Son's immediate popularity led to its being enshrined as the archetypal example of what is now called “migrant” writing:

> Certain conventions appear to be attached to migrant writing. Under this rubric, writers, particularly those who draw attention to their awareness of languages other than English, are perceived in the main as dealing simply with their own life-stories, as providing material primarily of interest to sociologists or oral historians. The playfulness or reflexivity in their writings... remains largely unacknowledged. Those few writers who are generally recognized to
constitute the field of ‘migrant writing’ are usually restricted to a realist mode established by the first writer to be thus considered, Judah Waten, whose *Alien Son* was seen as the paradigmatic text. (Gunew, *Framing Marginality* xii)

To isolate *Alien Son* within the confines of the category “migrant writing,” an Australianism which did not exist prior to the book’s publication, severely limits its scope; to construct it as the progenitor of a quaint genre peculiar to all migrant writers eradicates the particular Jewish sensibility and historicity it encompasses.

Within the framework Enoch Padolsky devises to distinguish “ethnic minority” from ethnic majority writing within a national literature, *all* Australian writing may be presumed (im)migrant (26). However, pejorative labels persist, even to the present. In the Preface to the 1991 anthology *Neighbours: Multicultural Writing of the 1980s*, R. F. Holt writes:

> The heartening difference between this and the previous anthology [*The Strength of Tradition* (1983)] is the changed cultural environment into which it will be received. In the 1980s so-called multicultural writing, both poetry and prose, became increasingly accepted as a natural, valid part of mainstream Australian literature—at least in the pragmatic sense of its being increasingly and routinely published, reviewed and read, (although in terms of the academic, received Oz Lit. canon of significant writing it is perhaps still viewed as a marginal curiosity). (ix-x)

The words following Holt’s em dash represent a rather large qualification of what is meant by being part of the “mainstream.” The parenthetical aside indicates that multicultural or migrant writing in Australia in the 1990s is still considered peripheral to the creation of both
the nation and its national literature. In order to liberate *Alien Son* from the constraints of its “migrant” categorization, it must be reappropriated as both Jewish and Australian literature. Only in this way can its relation to the canon of “Oz Lit.” be re-evaluated.

In an insightful article about the “‘literary occasion’” (102) which allowed *Alien Son* to be both published and enormously popular, David Carter asks: “What space was available [post World War II] for the ‘Jewish-Australian’ or ‘Australian-Jewish’ writer?” (104). As he attempts to answer this question, David Carter discerns in the very duality of Waten’s hyphenated positioning a fortuitous conjunction of twin influences and circumstances which shaped the literary moment in which *Alien Son* was created:

We can find evidence, then, of two sets of influences or models (models both for writing and for a literary career) available to Judah Waten in the mid 1940s. And we can see the complexity of the literary occasion of the writing of *Alien Son*. Waten was already, consciously, a writer and his literary career was already a diverse and public (if marginal) one. His writing was neither an unstructured activity nor simply the result of direct experience (that is, the ‘migrant experience’), as many later critics would have it.

On the one side, we can see the influence of the Yiddish writers, Goldhar and Bergner (and the painter Yosl Bergner as well). On the other, we can see the influence of a group of ‘Australian’ writers in Melbourne: Nettie and Vance Palmer, Frank Dalby Davison, Alan Marshall (plus [Brian] Fitzpatrick, and painters [Vic] O’Connor and Noel Counihan). Through the former, we can imagine the active presence of a Jewish-Yiddish literary tradition—not as a
matter of nostalgia or mere cultural birthright but as an immediate and political presence. Waten repeatedly told the story of how it was Goldhar who suggested to him that he write stories about his own Russian-Jewish immigrant experience, rather than the stories about Aussie battlers and Aborigines which he had been attempting. . . .

Through the second group of fellow writers and artists, we can imagine the presence of an Australian literary tradition, as suggested before—a tradition also felt to be an immediate and political force, a contemporary intervention, not merely an inheritance. As is suggested by the involvement of the Palmers with Bergner and Goldhar, the two sources of possible influence could be complementary as well as potentially contradictory. (105)

Both these sets of influences exert "a pressure towards the short story": "Palmer, Marshall and Davison, Waten's closest contacts, all wrote realist stories with identifiably Australian settings; the first-person narrative voice is common; and the stories, while clearly literary, are also popular in address" (D. Carter 105). However, realism per se is not the exclusive domain or trace of Australian literary tradition. It has always been as much a part of Jewish (literary) consciousness—steeped in the stark reality of Jewish history and experience from theophany to expulsion and exile to Inquisition to pogrom to Shoah—as it has been of Australian literature. Waten writes as much from this perspective as from a particularly Australian one. The assimilation of the two perspectives creates the "doubleness" which David Carter understands as crucial to the mediation the stories in Alien Son enact: "If there is a sense in which Waten wants to speak from the position of the Jewish immigrant
community, he also wants to speak to an Australian literary community (and through it to an
Australian public)” (106). Thus, Carter understands the stories as being

... written under the sign of assimilation, enacting their own ‘merging into the
life of this country’ (to paraphrase Vance Palmer’s review). But we can also
say that their position of mediation, of being both inside and outside, is
precisely what defines the effective cultural intervention of Alien Son. It is the
quality suggested by the perfectly judged title of the collection (given to Waten
by Davison or Palmer—depending on the anecdote): the son shares the
alienation of his parents but is also alien to them. On a larger scale, it is this
doubleness which ‘invents’ a position for the migrant writer within, or at least
 provisionally within, the field of Australian literature.

To put this in another way, I would want to argue that what enabled Alien
Son to be written, and what has kept it in print ever since, is not so much its
discovery of original subject matter but its discovery of a point of view. (106)
Indeed, assimilation functions thematically, emotionally, and metaphorically throughout
these stories about the various migrations and experiences of a Russian-Jewish family newly
arrived in Australia as a paradoxical sign of the (im)possibility of belonging. However,
there is another a sign, one more compelling than that of assimilation, a silent subtextual
nuance under which these stories are conceived and written: the Shoah. For Alien Son,
despite its retrospective framing and chronology, is a post-Shoah Jewish Australian fiction,
and thus demands to be seen in its relation to B. N. Jubal’s The Smile of Herschale Handle,
a text which in style, content, and consciousness—though not critical, literary acceptance or
popularity—it resembles and with which it may be interestingly compared.

The superbly oxymoronic title *Alien Son* encapsulates the paradox of belonging which is central to the Jewish Australian experience. The title’s juxtaposition of the strange with the familiar, the foreign with the familial, the illegitimate with the natural, the Other(worldly) with the native (son), the demotic with the sacred, the exile with the citizen, foregrounds estrangement and fragmentation: the dislocation between belonging elsewhere and belonging, innately, *here*. And the *here* of Waten’s stories is within both Australia and the unnamed narrator’s anonymous family.

Just as B. N. Jubal uses the narrative framework of the posthumously found and published autobiographical stories of Hershale Handle as a distancing device, so Waten’s stories are framed as the reconstructed memories and experiences of an adult recalling and narrating himself as a child. In both texts, this deliberate narrative distancing functions as a correlative not only for a sense of dual perspective, but also for an exilic and existential sense of not belonging.

The opening story of the thirteen which constitute *Alien Son*, “To a Country Town,” begins with the first of a series of exoduses the child-narrator’s family experiences throughout the book and foregrounds the collection’s thematic concerns with family, community, and the conflict between assimilation to Australian life and the affirmation of Jewish identity:

Father said we should have to leave the city. It was soon after we came to the new land that he had been told of a town where he was sure to make money if he opened a drapery shop. He had tried to find something in the city but failed,
and he was anxious to make money. The possession of money, he said, would compensate us for the trials of living in a strange land. . . .

No, Mother wouldn’t go into the wilderness; she wouldn’t leave the coast. Ever since we had come to this country she had lived with her bags packed. This was no country for us. She saw nothing but sorrow ahead. We should lose everything we possessed; our customs, our traditions; we should be swallowed up in this strange, foreign land. She had often wheeled my sister and me to shipping offices to inquire for ships leaving for home. And once she almost bought passages for us but she didn’t have quite enough money.

(Waten 1)

This ongoing familial conflict between the narrator’s Mother and Father contributes significantly to the emotional tension prevalent in the stories. And although the Mother’s fears for her children may appear in hindsight to have been realized by their remaining in Australia, within the narrative frame of the book, the family’s return to Europe would likely have meant the loss of their lives. For the unmentioned alternative to immigration to Australia is the Shoah, a catastrophe which, although it post-dates the historical events recorded in the stories, nonetheless maintains an ironic and rhetorical position at the core of the book’s composition.

The migration of the narrator and his family to the unnamed country town exacerbates both the interparental and intergenerational familial tensions. Here, “on the very edge of the world” (Waten 6), the narrator describes the sense of shame and humiliation he experiences when he is perceived as different by the other Australian townschildren:
I was impatient to join the children whom I had seen the previous night. But as soon as they saw me they burst out laughing and pointed to my buttoned-up shoes and white silk socks. I was overcome with shame and ran back into the house where I removed my shoes and socks and threw them into one of the empty rooms. I would walk barefooted like the other boys. And when I heard Mother calling to me from the kitchen to play in the back-yard and not to go into the street, I pretended I didn’t hear. (Waten 6)

On the street, the narrator joins the other children while they watch an elderly man backing his horse into a cart: “The boys mimicked him in a childish gibberish as he mumbled to his horse in the only language I knew” (Waten 7). This itinerant, Yiddish-speaking peddler, a “Bottle-oh” named Hirsh, forms with the narrator’s family the nucleus of a tiny Jewish community within the town. The Mother is temporarily overwhelmed: “‘There you are, you find our people in the farthest corners of the world. Perhaps this place is after all not the end of everything. We might have a community here yet’” (Waten 8).

However, Hirsh soon disabuses her of this particular fantasy, reinforcing her feeling that Jews can never belong in Australia:

“Believe me, this is a very hard, foreign, inhospitable land for a Jew to live in.”

Mother looked up from her sewing. Hirsh was right, it was a foreign country. How could we ever learn to know the people here? At least in Russia we knew where we stood, pogroms and all. The devil you know is better than the devil you don’t. (Waten 11)
The Mother’s sense of the foreignness of Australia—geographically, culturally, and, most importantly, linguistically—is beautifully and ironically structured in the free indirect discourse of this last quoted paragraph. In terms of literary form, the narrator usually speaks in the stories in the first person singular or plural: “I” or “we.” However, he here modulates his authoritative, omniscient voice to convey the first-person attitudes and thoughts of his Mother. The emotional, filial entanglement between the narrator and his Mother, symbolized in the grammatical use of “we,” is further emphasized by his putative knowledge of his Mother’s thoughts, feelings, and the linguistic rhythms of their internalized expression. Thus the form—free indirect discourse—functions metaphorically at the level of content as an internalized example of the trope of migration, of exile, as the son grows more alienated from his Mother’s position and their native tongue. And the locus for this alienation is language—more precisely, English. For the irony of this paragraph inheres in its status as a translation from the Mother’s Yiddish, the *mama-loshen*, to the narrator’s (Australian) English. Translation is also a trope for migration, dislocation, fragmentation. In Australia, the Jewish immigrant does not know where he or she stands; at least in Russia, despite the imminent and immediate danger of murder, there was an imagined sense of communal security in suffering.

The proverb which ends this paragraph is typical of the Yiddish speech patterns and rhythms in which the Mother thinks, comprehends, and constructs her environment. Similar to the language in Jubal’s *The Smile of Herschale Handle*, the proverbial, oral quality of Waten’s language also has its roots in the Yiddish writings of Jewish European authors such as Mendele Mocher Sforim (1836-1917), Sholom Aleichem (1859-1916), and I. L. Peretz.
and signifies in its demotic vernacular a sense of Jewish community and consciousness lacking in the Australian wilderness. The Mother's refusal to even attempt to learn English symbolizes both her allegiance to a lost communal Jewish solidarity and identity Yiddish signifies to her and the estrangement of her alien(ated) son:

But Mother was afraid at the thought that Hirsh might leave. Apart from him she hardly saw another strange person. With him she talked in Yiddish of Russia and the life they had left. She could still not understand one word of English and she said she had no intention of ever learning the language; she would not become a part of the new land. And when she heard me chattering in the new language, or Father breaking his tongue over strange words she became alarmed as if both of us had made our peace with enemies and were about to desert our faith. (Waten 14)

For the Mother, English is equated with capitulation and assimilation. Yet, ironically, it is her very refusal to acclimate to Australia and its language that exacerbates an increasingly claustrophobic and tense family situation, which further isolates her and, ultimately, forces her narrator/son into the impossible position of trying to live up to her unattainable standards while simultaneously maintaining a suitable distance from the new land, its customs, and its language.

As the family's home becomes the meeting place for other Jewish hawkers in the district, a sense of community does develop. However, Hirsh's son, jailed for theft, dies, and with him dies Hirsh's dream of their moving to Palestine upon his release. His grief drives Hirsh to despair, and he flees the family's home in a state of semi-insanity. With his
departure and that of the other guests, the possibility of a community disappears:

“This is the end of our community,” Mother said. “Comes the first puff of wind and it blows away. How can we build on shifting sands? If we can’t go back home immediately we must shift to a big city. I can’t bear to think we inherit old Hirsh’s place.” (Waten 21)

And in the third story, “Looking for a Husband,” the family does leave, temporarily without Father, by ship for an unnamed city.

What David Carter refers to in his article on Alien Son as the stories’ “position of mediation, of being both inside and outside” (106), could equally refer to the function of both language and narrative within the book. The grafting of an oral, Yiddish-based, proverbial discourse onto that of literary realism produces a hybridized English text which foregrounds alienation, “asymmetry” (D. Carter 107), and dysfunction. The stories have tended to be read either sociologically or autobiographically, free of complexity or paradox:

The ‘simplicity’ of Alien Son, a quality on which all the critics comment, is the result of a complex manipulation of distancing in the stories, of a point of view that is at once distance and intimacy. The narrator as the child-within-the-family, for example, means intimacy and community. But the child is also distanced from the Mother and Father (the words are thus capitalised, and we never learn their names or the narrator’s); and so distanced from their tenuous community as well. More accurately, the narrator is not a child at all. These are stories of recall from an adult perspective, and this further doubleness adds another level of intimacy within distance or distance within intimacy.
The composite child-narrator figure throughout the stories is both observer and observed, both innocent and implicated, and both inside and outside any possible community. (D. Carter 107)

This acute sense of alienation and self-consciousness recurs throughout the stories in the experience or trope of shame/embarrassment/humiliation.

The narrator frequently finds himself in public situations where his parents' words or actions mortify him. Even from the narrator's adult perspective, the pain of these experiences is still very vivid and a significant factor in his growing disaffection with his family. Before boarding the ship that is to transport him, his Mother, and his sister to the city in “Looking for a Husband,” the narrator struggles to free himself from his Father's emotional farewell embrace:

... Father blindly rained kisses on my little sister and then on me, raising me high in his arms until I was on a level with his face.

I had all this time kept looking around and wriggling in his arms to see if we were being watched, so ashamed was I of Father's display, and I felt relieved when he at last left us and followed Mr Hankin down the gangway . . . .

(Waten 43)

On board, “absorbed in thoughts of how to escape” (Waten 45), he tries to avoid his parent and her new acquaintance, Mrs. Hankin, an Orthodox Jewess looking for a suitable Jewish husband for her twenty-five-year-old daughter Bashka: “Shameful thoughts of hiding, running away, pretending to be deaf, whirlled through my mind, but I was cornered and irresolutely I edged towards the alcove” (Waten 49). The voyage becomes a confrontation
between the Orthodox, Jewish practice of the Old World, Europe, represented by Mrs. Hankin, and the virtual impossibility of its transplantation in the New World, Australia, as voiced by the Mother. Believing that she now belongs to Australia, Mrs. Hankin is determined to stay exactly as she is, despite her fruitless search for a Jewish husband for Bashka. To the Mother's observation the "[t]he old ways couldn't be kept here" (Waten 57), Mrs. Hankin replies: "'They will be... Let the world take it this way or that!'" (Waten 58). The rift between the two women remains unresolvable at the story's end:

Tomorrow morning we would land and go on forever our different ways—Mother to beat her wings against an enclosing wall and Mrs. Hankin to go on relentlessly upholding the old ways in the new land. (Waten 58)

Yet neither feels she really belongs. Interestingly, the narrator's "way," differing from that of both women, does not give him any firm sense of belonging either.

Although because of its retrospective framing the Shoah is absent from these stories, Waten's and our consciousness of it creates a subtextual nuance which has its traces within the text itself. The coming of war in "Big Events" precludes the family's returning to Russia. At the shipping office, where the narrator acts as translator for his Mother, they learn that impending hostilities will soon make travel by ship both difficult and extremely expensive. The approaching war is, in fact, World War I. However, its correlative at the time of the book's publication, World War II, is also suggested. Likewise, the thematic patterns of both the Old versus the New World in the stories, and the ongoing indecision about whether to stay in Australia or to return to a Europe which Waten and his readers know is on the verge of conflagration, strongly imply a continuum of Jewish history which
is inextricably bound up with the Shoah. The otherworldly strangeness of Australia suggests imminent transformations of the Europe of their memories: “Mother and Miss [Fanny] Cohen talked with pathos of the life they had left behind; here everything was so different from what they had known before—even the sky, the trees, the very earth” (Waten 74). Despite his constant business failures, the Father has a much more realistic and pragmatic approach. He advises a family friend, Mr. Sussman, who is contemplating joining the Australian armed services: “‘Make up your mind quickly. Take my advice Sussman, don’t live in two worlds! My wife does. But it’s no good’” (Waten 75). This doubling of worlds and perspectives (and wars) leaves the Jew belonging nowhere: “‘[‘]You [Sussman] won’t belong over there any more.’ Then Father added, ‘We belong to this new earth. It has sucked us in whether we know it or not’” (Waten 78). Although the Father’s immediate referent is Australia, the implication that a “new earth” exists into which Jews are knowingly or unknowingly being sucked is a menacing one, suggesting the traces of the modern devastation wrought by two world wars. This sense of geographical alienation, of Australia’s earth and sky being part of an otherworldly planet, is analogous to the existential alienation the family feels on this new earth. Indeed, Mr. Hankin, the immigrant Hebrew teacher in “Looking for a Husband,” places the blame for his students’ estrangement from Judaism on the Australian atmosphere:

But his pupils were not the same as he had known before. They only stayed with him a short time and they resented losing even those few precious hours of playtime. It took him a long time to realize that the new country was quite different from the one he had left. He shrugged his shoulders and made a
remark that he was often to repeat as one after another of his pupils left him,

“It’s the Australian sky; it draws my pupils away from the ancient learning.

Somehow it is a different sky from the gentle one we left behind.” (Waten 42)

And, paradoxically, Jews do not belong under this new sky or on this new earth either, but rather sucked into it.

The narrator’s asymmetrical perspective is especially acute in the ninth story, “Neighbours.” The Smutkevitch family moves in next door to the narrator’s. Benny Smutkevitch, about eleven years old and nicknamed “‘Chinaman’” (Waten 116) because of “[h]is straight black hair and his narrow slits of eyes” (Waten 115), quickly asserts his street supremacy over the previous “leader,” Joseph. As the boys of the neighbourhood solicit Benny’s favour and become his followers, Benny leads them on various escapades and adventures unbeknownst to, and thus unsanctioned by, the children’s parents. After an altercation with another group of boys, who insult Benny’s gang with cries of “‘Ikey Mo!’” (Waten 122), a derogative epithet for Jews, the narrator is confronted by his Mother:

My disreputable appearance loomed tragically in Mother’s eyes and she spoke scathingly of this new land where children defied their parents and roamed the streets like wild dogs. (Waten 122)

Intergenerational discord and alienation is the dominant theme in the story and in Benny’s relation with his father, an Orthodox Jewish immigrant who tries to assert his dwindling control over his son by means of physical and emotional abuse.

One morning, the narrator comes to the Smutkevitch household to accompany Benny to school and observes the male members of the family praying Shacharit, the morning
prayers. Mr. Smutkevitch and his elder sons wear the tefillin (phylacteries) and tallit (prayer shawl) Orthodox Jews put on for this service, but the narrator notices that

... the phylacteries seemed a burden on the two older boys. They continually fingered the leather-covered cases and gabbled the prayers with sullen expressions on their faces. With sleepy eyes they shot malevolent glances at Benny, and I guessed they were filled with envy of him, who would soon run freely into the street while they would have to go to their daily work, the elder to help his father on the bottle-cart, the other to a tailor’s shop. (Waten 123-24)

This division between traditional Jewish religious practice, now imaged as a burden, and its abandonment under the pressures of assimilation to a non-Jewish milieu reaches its climax later in the story.

During the following Shabbat’s services, Benny leaves the synagogue to meet his friend Martin Gallagher, with whom he converses “in some strange gibberish,” an invented language incomprehensible to the other boys, who have followed Benny from the synagogue (Waten 125). By utilizing this secret code, Benny allies himself with Martin, deliberately setting himself apart from his Jewish friends and identity. Martin invites the other boys to come with him and Benny, but not before making them swear not to tell their parents. For the narrator, this is an excruciating and poignant decision:

I crossed my heart fearfully, with one reluctant finger, feeling all the world like a traitor and an apostate and imagining that the beadle was standing on the steps of the synagogue and watching my heretical motions. (Waten 125)
The boys' destination is an anti-conscription rally, which devolves into a riot. The narrator remarks that

Mother was not at all surprised. . . . She had a premonition, she said, that her son would become like Martin if we stayed in this country. In a few years' time Benny and her own son would be strangers to their parents. (Waten 127)

This process of estrangement reaches its climax on another Shabbat, when Benny's absence from the synagogue prompts Mr. Smutkevitch to search for his son. The narrator knows Benny and Martin have gone to attend a fair in a neighbouring church hall. He finds Benny waiting in the church doorway:

I looked up at the plain wooden cross above the door. My heart fluttered with terror as I sidled closer to Benny. . . . I was terrified of looking inside. I trembled at the thought of standing under the cross on the sabbath.

Benny seemed no more comfortable than I was, but he was unable to make up his mind to leave. (Waten 130, 131)

As the two boys wait at the threshold to the church, Mr. Smutkevitch approaches, beckoning to his son with his finger. The narrator and Benny face his father:

There was a stubborn, angry look on Mr Smutkevitch's face as he cast a last glance at us. He turned away slowly, his shoulders momentarily hunched as if he had suddenly become an old man.

As his broad back and bowed legs became smaller in the distance Benny ran into the street as if to follow his father. Then he stopped. There was a look of anxiety in his dark, nimble eyes and we did not speak to one another as we
walked on, but neither of us knew that there could be no reconciliation with the ways of our fathers. (Waten 131-32)

The epiphanic moment with which the story poignantly ends conflates the narrator's later adult knowledge with his childhood experience. The negatives in the final sentence reinforce the alienating rift between father and son, old and new, then and now, and magnify the loneliness such an abandonment induces. Ultimately, both Benny and the narrator stand entirely alone, their fathers' backs toward them; paradoxically, neither understands where he comfortably belongs.

The thirteenth story, "Mother" (cf. the identically titled story in *The Smile of Herschale Handle*), is the final vignette in the collection. The narrator, literally his "Mother's interpreter" (Waten 181), here reinterprets her life from the twin perspectives of his adult understanding and his reconstructed childhood impressions:

> From my earliest memories of Mother it somehow seemed quite natural to think of her as apart and other-worldly and different, not of everyday things as Father was. (Waten 169)

The narrator's embarrassed sense of his Mother's difference stems from her (selfish) refusal to accept her own decision to immigrate to Australia. Unlike his Father, before his Mother "was one day off the ship she wanted to go back. . . . She would have nothing of the country; she would not even attempt to learn the language" (Waten 178, 179).

Consequently, she estranges herself from her son and daughter. Her conscious choice to be a perpetual stranger in Australia reinforces the state of impermanence—echoed in the fragmented, anecdotal structure and tone of the book—evident throughout the childhood of
the narrator.

The narrator’s compassion for his Mother and the biographical details of her difficult life shows; however, the psychological and emotional impact of her isolation tells:

Our house always looked as if we had just moved in or were about to move out. An impermanent and impatient spirit dwelt within our walls; Father called it living on one leg like a bird. (Waten 170)

This sensation of precarious imbalance symbolizes the paradox of belonging thematized in the book. To plant two feet firmly onto Australian soil is to be exposed to “the soulless influences of this barren land” (Waten 180), to be assimilated. Yet, to remain on one leg is an ironic and, finally, an unsupportable posture. In either case, to belong is to be alienated. And the idealistic humanism the Mother espouses is, in the end, empty rhetoric—an emotionally dishonest nostalgia for an imagined and embellished past in Russia.

This story ends with the narrator, having now reached the significant age of thirteen, the age of a bar mitzvah, and knowing “so much more about the new country that was my home” (Waten 185), arguing with his Mother:

She spoke obstinately. It seemed impossible to change her. Her vision was too much obscured by passionate dreams of the past for her to see any hope in the present, in the new land. (Waten 185)

Consciously living in the there and then, the Mother cannot relate in the here and now. Although the narrator honours his Mother and her memory, the story and book end with her turning away from him:

She turned away, her narrow back stooped, her gleaming black hair curled
into a bun on her short, thin neck, her shoes equally down at heel on each side.

(Waten 186)

The three past participial phrases emphasize grammatically the psychological finality of this last action. In addition, the Father’s continual acquiescence to his wife’s wishes, moods, and idiosyncrasies also enacts a turning away from his offspring. Even the treasure of Jewish tradition and religious practice proves inefficual:

... the red, silk-lined box was my father’s treasure chest which he had clung to all his life. All the written history of the pair, the marriage certificate, passport, birth certificates, letters from Father’s parents, photos, even gold links and studs and an old-fashioned pocket watch with a blue cover studded with small pink stones, a prayer shawl, and phylacteries reposed in neat order between the silk lining around which clung the smell of moth-balls. Father said there would always be something in that box to fall back on. (Waten 3)

However, these links are not strong enough to sustain the family in Australia, on the very edge of the Diaspora. In the end, there is nothing for the narrator to fall back on—except memory and writing.

In terms of the doubleness of perspective contained in the oxymoronic title of the book, the narrator is no longer a stranger to either Australia or the English language. As David Carter notes:

From the perspective of the narrator’s recall in Alien Son, Australia is no longer a foreign place. And yet the stories are still pervaded by an apprehension that, in Waten’s own phrase, ‘in the twentieth century the Jewish
migrant has been the symbol of the oppressed and the migratory person'. This political and symbolic dimension is why, far from being nostalgic recollection or quaint family anecdote, *Alien Son* can still seem to be the text that separates us from the time ‘before the migrant writer’. And in more than one sense it is the text that made Judah Waten’s literary career possible. (110)

However, despite the narrator’s present familiarity with Australia, its lack of "foreignness" from his vantage point, his sense of comfort and belonging remains paradoxical. He both belongs and does not; he is both alien and son. This is also true, literarily, of *Alien Son*’s position within the national literature:

What Judah Waten manages with *Alien Son*, it seems to me, is to discover a speaking position, a point of view, which invites these readings in terms of autobiography and the migrant story and yet refuses to be contained wholly and simply within them. It is both inside and outside the immigrant Jewish cultural sphere, both inside and outside the field of Australian literature as then constituted. To put it another way, and so as not to be caught out romancing the margins, the position of migrant writer, if it were not to be perpetually in translation, perpetually foreign, was only possible via an accommodation within that Australian literary field. (D. Carter 109)

However, *Alien Son*’s “accommodation” remains confinement to the superficial category “migrant,” its complexities and artistry subsumed to its (supposed) autobiographical simplicity and artlessness, its particular Jewish sensibility erased. It still occupies this specific and constraining niche within the canon of Australian Literature, while,
paradoxically, simultaneously enjoying the accolade “Australian classic.” It is both alien and familial. But *Alien Son* did not emerge *sui generis*. It is not the product of an orphaned, disconnected Jewish Australian consciousness. It has antecedents, the most striking in its similarities of which is B. N. Jubal’s *The Smile of Herschale Handle*, a text which has been ignored by the Australian literary canon and on which *Alien Son* can constructively fall back.

**David Martin**

Ludwig Detsinyi (1915-) , Judah Waten’s contemporary, was born in Budapest, Hungary, and educated in Germany, whence he fled in 1934. At various points in his life, he has lived and worked in Holland, Israel (on a kibbutz), Britain, and India (Hammer 74). During the Spanish Civil War, he served with the International Brigade fighting for the Republicans (Keesing, “Jewish” 133). In 1949, he immigrated to Australia and under the name David Martin has become one of the most prolific (Jewish) Australian writers. Martin’s published work includes novels, short stories, autobiography, young adult fiction, children’s stories, poetry, drama, and non-fiction books on travel, sociology, and politics.

Australian bush township far to the west of Melbourne. A newly arrived letter from his
brother in Hungary informs Jack that his claims against the German Government for the
confiscation of his business and assets during the Shoah are “collecting dust in Bonn. A big
sum was involved, but his brother wrote that there was no hope of his getting a visa for
Germany to stir matters up” (Martin, “WMB” 115). A second letter, registered, from his
lawyer, arrives for Jack, informing him that the Australian government has approved his
application for a certificate of naturalization:

   Carefully, he folded the letter and put it in his pocket. It’s over, he thought.
   I am still the same man. My God! After so much wandering, so much dying.
   Prepared to grant you. He tried to calm himself and to be philosophical, but it
   was too difficult. He would have liked to go and tell somebody, perhaps that
   big landlord of his hotel with the strong forearms. But instead he walked on,
   smiling to himself and sighing. (Martin, “WMB” 117)

Marvelling at his new status as a legitimate Australian, Jack’s first encounter is with
an old Aboriginal man sitting at the entrance to his makeshift hovel by the creek. In
response to the man’s request for some tobacco, Jack ducks through a fence and hands his
interlocutor a package of cigarettes:

   A feeling as of pity welled up in Mr. Cowen. Also a consciousness of the
   strangeness of their meeting; here were they, the oldest and the newest
   Australian, and the new one had a right to be sorry for the old one. A right to
   be sorry! What good was it to the black man to be an Australian? What good
   indeed? Only to be left, rotting and abandoned, with a slum all to himself at

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the edge of the town. (Martin, “WMB” 119)

The old man asks Jack if he “[.]belong this place,[.]” and he is answered affirmatively:

“Yes, I belong here,’ he said smilingly, looking down on the questioner. ‘But I’ve come a long way. I am a Jew. You don’t know what that is, I suppose?’” (Martin, “WMB” 119).

The native ancient’s reply is the crux of the story: “‘I know Jew. Jew, him belong fellas kill Jesus?’” (Martin, “WMB” 119). At the moment of his officially belonging to Australia, Jack experiences belonging’s paradoxical sting. The ancient, corrosive calumny of Jewish deicide has plagued him in all his wanderings and now, though he believes he has crossed the fence which has symbolically kept him separate from Australia, its reiteration precludes his belonging to the country which he has just officially been invited to join. That this antisemitic Ur-sentiment is repeated by an Aboriginal outcast to a Jewish outsider, a survivor of the culmination in the Shoah of two millennia of just such Jew-hating repetitions, is supremely ironic. The thematic focus on where both an (Australian) man and a Jew belong is the only similarity between this powerful vignette and the novel which followed.

Where a Man Belongs is a complex (and somewhat ponderous) metafictional novel, an artist parable in which the Jewish artist/writer, Max Stiegelman, manipulates the “real” lives of Paul Burtle and Gudrun Gravers while simultaneously reconstructing them in the fictional form of the novel we read. Max’s machinations take place within his own personal odyssey back to the Germany he fled as a young man before World War II, a journey of self-understanding in terms of his relation to both his abandoned native land and his dead father, a quest for the place where he can feel he truly belongs.
The novel unfolds retrospectively, ten years distant from the events Max describes. Paul Burtle, the Australian bookkeeper whose office in the bowels of Mr. Gossberg's music store in Melbourne abuts, and is connected with, Max's, is a true Anzac, raised in the bush, a member of the Returned Servicemen's League, who fought at Gallipoli and was gassed at the Somme during World War I. His obsession in life (he is "pushing fifty-nine" [Martin, *WMB* 13]) is to have sexual intercourse with a woman; this is his rather misogynistic concept of the proof of a woman's love. As a result of his answering a personal ad, Paul has been corresponding with Gudrun Gravers, a German war widow, but he cannot summon up the nerve to visit her, let alone marry her. The lives of Paul and Max become enmeshed when the former asks the latter, a German Jewish writer who runs a private writing school by correspondence from the adjacent office—his "Kafka Cubicle" (Martin, *WMB* 3)—to help translate Gudrun's letters into English. Max is forty-two, recently separated from his wife, Hannah, and experiencing severe writer's block. He befriends Paul and assists him with his letters to Germany; however, his motives for doing so are suspect. He encourages Paul to visit Gudrun, finally proposing that they travel together to Germany where Max has business pertaining to war reparations to which he must attend. The bulk of the novel details their journey by ship to Europe and the various relationships that develop as a result of their encounter with Gudrun upon arrival in Germany.

The novel focusses on several major thematic motifs—memory, perception, representation—all of which are present from the outset:

It is strange that I, who knew Paul Burtle so well, cannot remember the colour of his eyes. Since, to some extent, I regard myself as responsible for what
happened to him later, I should have thought this was something I could not possibly have forgotten. Does it mean that I am particularly unobservant? I do not think so. For instance, at this moment I could not, with any certainty, tell the colour of my own eyes without taking off my glasses and having a good look in the mirror. This I do not want to do because it might tempt me to imagine that his eyes were like mine, so making it still harder to keep a clear distinction between him and myself, which is important but which I can see already will be difficult. It is only a small detail which no doubt will come back to me in time. At least, I hope so, for it troubles me, though I cannot say why. (Martin, WMB 1)

The present inability of Max to distinguish between himself and Paul, his Australian doppelgänger, mirrors the moral ambiguity of his involvement in Paul’s life and death. Although Max realizes that the “adventure appealed to [him] for its hidden potentialities . . . for what it might teach [him] about human weakness” (Martin, WMB 21), and that he “would have been an oaf not to see the artistic possibilities in what [he] was doing, the latent story beneath” (Martin, WMB 24), he does express severe misgivings:

I was seized by something like panic. What was I doing to this helpless man, this stranger? What had forced me to play God to him, to infuse passion into his passionless courtship? It was a crime to take him away from his roll-top desk and his vouchers, his dumb-bells and his beer. He had been content until he had met me. No—not content, but he had managed, like thousands of others. Perhaps it was not too late to withdraw. (Martin, WMB 36-37)
Nevertheless, despite his insight, he proceeds, less from an altruistic need to help Paul in his courting of Gudrun than from a need to overcome his own fears and solve his own problems.

Max literally and figuratively "return[s] to a graveyard" (Martin, WMB 29) in Germany, a place where his dead memories and fears have long been buried with the ashes of the majority of European Jewry. As he recalls his fleeing to London before the war and his internment there and, later, in Australia, his estranged relation with his father (Henry, formerly Heinrich; "David" to Max's hirsute "Absalom" [Martin, WMB 54]) resurfaces, entangled within the memories and experiences of a childhood within a dysfunctional family. As the family's Berlin solicitor, Dr. Loewe, remarks: "'It seems to me that you have brought your body back to Germany, but not your soul. That's understandable, but be careful you don't mislay it altogether[']" (Martin, WMB 130).

Ironically, Gudrun and her singing of the German songs locked within Max's childhood memories become the vehicle through which he is able to reconnect with himself, free for a fleeting moment of self-doubt and self-hatred:

This is what I had returned for, these songs and this peaceful stillness, unsullied by a past that tears and blood could not wash clean. . . . For the first time I believed that I had a right to be where I was, that the world was still one, and that even Germany was still a part of it, after so much death. It was a surrender, a spaceless depth into which flowed an emotion like love. It was without longing. I could at last think calmly of my unresurrected self, lying in a grave at Weissensee, on which the snow had fallen and from which it had melted many times while I was fleeing. Here, in Gudrun and her singing, was
the forgiveness I needed and could not grant myself. I did not have to ask for it any more, nor could I have asked for it, but I could accept and take it. I could accept it also from the ones I needed it most of. For ever I had sought and refused it, in Greta [his step-mother], in Hannah and in every other woman: absolution for a crime which every cell in me wanted to confess, but which I could never name. But why give it a name? Though I did not know what it was, it existed and had no need of one. (Martin, *WMB* 170-71)

The text suggests that Max’s crime is a deep-seated shame and guilt at his surviving both his family and the Shoah. And although Gudrun tells Max, “[‘]You are your own country’” (Martin, *WMB* 168), it remains for him, paradoxically, one in which he does not feel he belongs.

Max’s meddling results in disaster. With the help of Dr. Loewe, Max learns that Gudrun was a Nazi and that both her husband, Siegmund Gravers, and her lover, Gauleiter Hahnbein, were SS war criminals. Gudrun flees to Hamburg and writes to Paul that she will not marry him after all. Paul follows Max to Istanbul, suffers a series of heart attacks, including one while performing with an Indian prostitute in Bombay, and flies home to Australia with Max. Subsequently, Paul dies in a Melbourne hospital. In a letter from Maria, Gudrun’s daughter, Max learns that Gudrun committed suicide on her way back to her home in L____ from Hamburg.

Symbolically, Max is caught between Australia/Paul, his adopted refuge, and Germany/Gudrun, his native land. His tutee and lover, Marion, writes from Australia:

[‘]Are you looking for something which doesn’t exist, a home for your soul?
You, sweetie-pie, must get used to the fact that a man with too many lodestars in the end has to be his own. You’ve got to finish this book, and you know that Australia is the place for that. You have made your bed. Come back soon and lie on it, and in mine if there’s still room then, but that’s by the way. If Australia breaks your heart you must let it; there’s no other way to be one of us. It’s got to break you all the way down before you can get up again. Like those God-awful boulders here, compressed to the irreducible.[‘] (Martin, *WMB* 138)

On the other hand, Paul, the true Aussie, tells Max that as a foreigner, a Jew, he will never understand nor belong to Paul’s Australia: “His answer was always the same. Australia was and would for ever be his country, and Australians were made of ironbark, which I, polyglot chameleon who changed his passport and language as others changed their shirts, could never be expected to understand” (Martin, *WMB* 221). Yet, neither does he belong in Germany, his native land—because he is a Jew and, as a result of the Shoah, it has become a Jewish graveyard.

However, even Max’s Jewish identity is ambiguous. As a German Jew, Max is assimilated; during his childhood his family celebrated both Christmas and Chanukah. In Melbourne, he does not practice Judaism. The symbol (for males) of belonging to the Jewish covenant and family—circumcision—has never been performed on his body (Martin, *WMB* 205), yet he had a bar mitzvah when he was thirteen. In the rather maudlin, and perhaps disingenuous, denouement to the novel, Max declares his (somewhat homoerotic) allegiance to Paul/Australia, his “mate,” despite their love/hate relation: “I wanted to take
him in my arms, to hold him as no woman had held him, that never again would he have to be afraid. In his fear my own would melt and be dissolved: this would make him whole, because we were one and belonged to each other. Paul! My dear one" (Martin, *WMB* 228). Max’s journey/quest ends back in Melbourne, and this would seem to be the place where he feels he belongs—despite his father’s admonition that Australia is “the land to which no one went of his own free will” (Martin, *WMB* 53). However, it is an affiliation fraught with unresolved ambiguity, paradox, guilt, and alienation.

**Morris Lurie**

Both June Factor (1936-) and Morris Lurie (1938-) have published prodigious numbers of books from the 1960s until the present. Factor was born in Lodz, Poland, and arrived in Australia when she was three. She is a “senior lecturer in English at the Institute of Early Childhood Studies” in Melbourne (Hammer 157). In addition to her academic publications, she has compiled, edited, co-edited, and written over twenty children’s stories and collections of Australian children’s chants and rhymes. Her short story “The Wedding” has been widely anthologized. Lurie’s parents emigrated from Poland in the 1930s and settled in Melbourne, where Lurie was born in 1938. “He lived abroad for eight years, chiefly in England, but also in Greece, Copenhagen and Tangier,” and is now a freelance writer based in Melbourne (Keesing, *Shalom* 237). He is one of the most successful and popular Australian writers, having published over twenty-five works, including novels, short stories, non-fiction pieces and reportage, drama, autobiography, and children’s stories.
Morris Lurie’s *Flying Home* (1978) is another artist parable, whose thematic concerns encompass home (as the title suggests), family dysfunction, and Jewish identity in a post-
*Shoah* world. The protagonist, Leo(n) Axelrod, like Herschale Handle and Max Stiegelman a wandering Jew, narrates/creates his autobiography retrospectively while, in the present of the story, he sits naked in a “foul room” (Lurie 17) “put[ting] down everything” (Lurie 68) after having fled Lindos (Rhodes, Greece) and his English girlfriend, Marianne Smith, aboard “some foul Turkish boat,” “staring into a wilderness of waves” (Lurie 13), and having returned via the same boat weeks later to find her gone.

The oral, proverbial, anecdotal, yet ironic and bitter, voice that B. N. Jubal created in *The Smile of Herschale Handle* informs Leo(n)’s voice in Lurie’s novel. The stories within stories within digressions create a sense of displacement which is reinforced by the fractured discontinuities of time and place—within Leo(n)’s journeys and wanderings—and by a fragmented self/identity—within himself. As he reconstructs his escape from Australia and arrival in Europe, Leo(n) undergoes a symbolic rebirth. He eliminates his previous identity by truncating his name and effaces his Australian home/origin by adopting a European one:

> But that was Leon and Leon is no more. Leon never existed. Leon is dead. I came down the gangplank of the ship at Piraeus, threw down my bags, set first foot on European soil. “Leo!” I shouted. “Call me Leo!” I threw out my arms, threw back my head, breathed deeply, filled my lungs for the first time with the smell of the land, the smell of dust and oil and sun, the smell of Europe. I laughed. I strode. I lit a cigarette, and then, too excited to smoke, threw it away. They say you feel the heave of the sea for days after you land, and I had
been at sea five weeks, but I didn’t. My legs were solid. My shoes rang as I strode, firm as iron. I was never at sea. I had never left. I was home. (Lurie 61)

However, Leo(n)’s bravado, denial, and his doubling of names and homes conceals a crippling unease and loneliness which his transcontinental, transhemispheric transplantation cannot heal. His sense of duality is, literally, genetic:

I come in two halves, a Mediterranean physique, the sunny south, though my parents were not from there, they were from Poland, and to explain it I sometimes think that my genetic cells must hark back to sephardic forebears, ousted from Spain, fled to the North, pushed into Germany, Hungary, Poland, Russia, molested, decimated, bred out, spread out, sliced at the roots, thinned in a thousand ways, but in me they have a home, in me they persist. (Lurie 15)

At the same time, this bifurcation is also emotional and psychological: Leo(n) is haunted and abused by the ghosts of his deceased parents and zaydeh (his paternal grandfather), and they pursue him relentlessly throughout his European travels:

I didn’t become Leo until I was twenty-five, when my father [Sam] had been dead for a year, buried beside my mother in that bleak cemetery where trains shunt past behind a thin stand of pines and the wind is always blowing, in exile, in Australia, and I came down the gangplank at Piraeus, threw down my bags, set first foot on European soil. “Leo!” I shouted. “Call me Leo!” And Leo I have been ever since, though in my dreams, waking and asleep, I am still the other. “Oh, Leon, Leon,” wails my mother, swimming before me in sorrow.
and despair, "what will become of you, where are you going?" To my father, who appears no less frequently, I am neither Leon nor Leo, neither the old nor the new. I am "The Genius," said with a sneer, I am "The Scholar," disparagingly, I am "The Gentleman," "The Prince," "Gelernte Mensch," with that offhand sarcasm that was my father's stock in trade. Or, the coin flips, his mood is different, the bitterness unconcealed, and I am "Pisher," "Gornicht, "Dreck."

They swim before me, crowding, press down, my mother anxious and alarmed, her eyes circled with darkness, deep with concern, my father hard-faced, mocking, a ceaseless critic, damning and dooming, or worse, saying nothing, too contemptuous to speak, but watching, both of them, my mother and father, always there, whatever I do, wherever I go. . . .

Zaydeh.

His is the third face that oversees my wanderings, my nights and days. To him I am "Leon!"—an order, a command—though he doesn't even have to do that. He turns. I see his stern face. I see his eyes. I stop at once whatever I am doing. He doesn't need to speak, to call my name. His presence is enough.

(Lurie 16-17, 18)

And as Leo(n) travels with Marianne from London to Paris to Switzerland to Italy to Yugoslavia to Lindos, (double-)crossing the countries through which he had travelled during the lonely year he had been in Europe after his arrival at Piraeus, his geographical dislocations begin to mirror an intense internal psychodrama. Lurie's frequent use of two
ungrammatical structures—the fragment and the comma splice—represent, at the level of form, the symbolic fragmentation of identity which Leo(n) feels. The duality he experiences within occurs as a result of his identity’s being emotionally spliced to the psyches of his parents and grandfather. In a similar trope, Leo(n)’s sense of (non-)belonging to Australia is spliced to his mother’s sense of (Jewish) Europe as home—though it has now been destroyed by the Shoah—and his father’s sense of Palestine as home—though it is now Israel—thus leaving him an alienated, lonely, and rootless wanderer (“a pleasure tourist” [Jubal 22]), belonging, paradoxically, between worlds.

In Como, Italy, he begins to explain his feelings of estrangement to Marianne: “It says on my birth certificate I was born in Australia but that’s a lie. I wasn’t born there. I’m not Australian. That’s the whole trouble, the whole thing. That’s what’s wrong. I wasn’t born anywhere” (Lurie 109). However, the force of his denial reveals the source of his alienation: Leo(n)’s emotionally abusive and dysfunctional family. As he recalls for Marianne where he was really born, he reconstructs a social evening at his family’s home when he was fifteen years old:

[“]I’d felt it before, probably millions of times, but that night I could practically see it, right there in front of me. I knew then that I didn’t belong to these shouting people in our garden, I had nothing to do with them, I never had, they were like some strange primitive tribe that had descended out of nowhere. I couldn’t even understand half the things they were shouting. They were foreign. They had nothing to do with me. And then I looked at our neighbours, sitting there so quietly in their neat front gardens, and I knew that I
didn’t belong with them either. I didn’t belong with anyone." (Lurie 110)

And although Leo(n) realizes that his parents’ feelings about Australia have been spliced to his own, internalizing their attitudes both denies him access to their (Old) European world and disallows his participation in the (New) antipodean one:

["""]They didn’t like Australia. Well, it wasn’t even a matter of like. They ignored it. They pretended it wasn’t there. Australia was an unfortunate thing that had happened to them, that Hitler had done, that’s all it was to them. An accident. A terrible accident. It wasn’t the real world. The real world was Bialystock, Poland, Europe. Well, that’s what it was for my mother, and for her brothers and sisters, for those family friends. For my father it was Palestine. Israel."" (Lurie 111)

Even his curiosity about his parents’ world is obstructed, leaving him ignorant and angry:

["""]But they didn’t want me to understand. They didn’t want me to know. It was private. Theirs. It was like showing a child a toy and then quickly snatching it away, laughing in his face. See that? Well, you can’t have it. But they wouldn’t let me into the other world either, into Australia. That was zaydeh, my grandfather. I’ve told you about him, what a bitter man he was, how he wouldn’t let me move, wouldn’t let me breathe, wouldn’t let me do anything, chased my friends away, and by the time he left it was too late. So that’s where I was born, that’s where I grew up, that’s where I lived. Nowhere. In a black cage."" (Lurie 111)

Where Leo(n) was born, grew up, and lived is thus less a physical place than an emotionally
charged locus of repressed feelings, self-hatred, and self-doubt which are continuously, negatively reinforced by the uninvited guests who cleave to him and haunt his consciousness and identity: "[.]They're here now, they sit in the back of that car as I drive across Europe. I don't know what they want from me, I don't know what they want. They won't go away"
(Lurie 116). There can be no exorcism, however, until Leo(n), the wandering Jewish artist and writer (of this fictitious autobiography), returns to the spiritual home he has never visited and gains the insight he needs to begin to free himself.

As Leo(n) sails from Greece (in Part Two of the novel) and wanders the "wilderness of waves" (Lurie 13), he symbolically re-enacts the exodus from Egyptian slavery into the wilderness his ancestors originally enacted millennia ago. His ship arrives in Haifa, Israel, on the eve of Pesach (Passover), the holiday commemorating the original exodus and the first Pesach. As he rushes by taxi to his father's brother's family seder in Jerusalem, he begins the process of overthrowing the emotional slavery to which he has been subjected all his life.

The reaction of his Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rivkeh upon his arrival at their Jerusalem home alters Leo(n)'s physical and psychological self-perceptions:

I had brought back to Israel my father's face. The same smile. The same look. The same way of moving my head, my eyes, my mouth. But more than that. My father had sailed from Haifa when he was twenty-six, my age now. Forty years had disappeared in a second, had never happened. My father had returned to Palestine. Unaged, unchanged, he sat and smiled in his brother's Jerusalem flat. (Lurie 151)
Pleased that he is not “like zaydeh at all” as he was brought up to believe, Leo(n) doubles as his father (Lurie 156). However, while visiting bobbeh, zaydeh’s bitter, eighty-seven-year-old widow, Aunt Rivkeh informs Leo(n) that he had an Uncle Leon—the favoured, first-born son of zaydeh and bobbeh—who died of cholera at eighteen: “[‘]His name is your name. You were named in his honour, to remember him, to keep him alive.’ . . . ‘His name was Leon,’ she said. ‘Leo’” (Lurie 178). Thus his father Sam’s enmity towards Leo(n) may be understood as a projection of the hated older brother, favoured by Sam’s father, onto the next generation—Leo(n). And zaydeh’s face was “the mask of mourning he wore for Leon, for his dead son” (Lurie 180).

The splicing together of both the physical features of his father, Sam, and the name of the dead uncle for whom his life was to be a substitute creates an impossible identity for Leo(n), one which becomes an emotional and psychological burden he can no longer shoulder. And with understanding comes the perception that he no longer wishes to: “I had seen everything. I had seen enough” (Lurie 179). Despite Aunt Rivkeh’s assertion that “[‘]his is your home!’” (Lurie 152), Leo(n) departs Israel from Haifa and sails back to Greece: “I understood it now, at last. I searched for their faces in the stars, to apologize, to show them that I understood, and now I saw them clearly, and they were just the same” (Lurie 181). It is Leo(n) who has changed. Back in Greece, he “can still hear them shouting, or worse, their silences. Their loveless lives” (Lurie 192). But Leo(n)’s search for someone to love him has led him to find love in himself and to feel it for his family. At the end of his European wanderings and Greek island writings, he informs his haunting ghosts that he chooses life and love:

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[""""]I’ll tell what I’m going to do. I’m in love with a girl and I’m going to marry her. It’s as simple as that. I’m tired. I’m tired of dragging you around with me wherever I go. I can’t do it any more. It’s enough. It’s finished. The past is the past. I have to live now. Do you understand this? Let me, please. Please. Tell me that you understand. You have to tell me because I love you. Please. I love you. I love you.” (Lurie 200)

And, having made this decision, and having discovered that the home to which he truly belongs is within himself, Leo(n) flies back to London and (perhaps) to Marianne.

Flying Home explores the psyche of an alienated Jewish son, Leo(n), and finds the source of his discontent in the dysfunctional tangle of unresolved filial and familial relations to which he has been subjected. The novel’s insights emerge from this consciousness of psychological understanding. Leo(n)’s painful search for identity and love culminates in his changed perceptions of himself and the environment which shaped him. He changes in positive ways. However, his choices of both expatriation and assimilation—in reaction to his family— estrange him from both Australia and Judaism, thus severing his roots.

Dr. Serge Liberman

In the 1980s, Sydney-born Alan Collins (1928-) published Troubles: Tsorres (1983), a collection of twenty-one often autobiographical short stories. His experiences of five years spent in a Jewish children’s home are poignantly fictionalized in two young adult novels: The Boys from Bondi (1987; published in the U.S.A. in 1989 as Jacob’s Ladder)

Many of Liberman’s short stories are concerned with the experiences of Jewish (im)migration and exhibit a remarkable intertextual resonance with Waten’s stories in *Alien Son*. The opening story of *On Firmer Shores* (hereafter *OFS*), “Two Years in Exile,” is framed by an unnamed adult narrator as a retrospective reconstruction of his childhood experiences and memories as a new Australian in post-World War II Melbourne. Like Waten, whose narrator recalls and narrates himself as a child, Liberman employs a similar narrative structure, deliberately distancing his narrator’s adult self from the child persona the adult invokes, thus creating a doubled perspective and foregrounding major thematic concerns with perception, memory (and its representation), exile, assimilation, and home.

The family—Mother, Father, and child/narrator, all unnamed—live in Nothcote on the suburban margins of Melbourne, their “newer distant home” (Liberman, *OFS* 3) where the parents eke out a livelihood in the sweat shops of Flinders Lane. As in Waten’s stories,
there is a tremendous divergence between the Mother and her son with respect to their individual perceptions of their mutual state of exile. For the Mother, Melbourne is “a tail torn from the rump of the world” (Liberman, *OFS* 5), “a wilderness” where she “feels as if she were in a country town, a Siberian sovchoz or a displaced persons’ camp again” (Liberman, *OFS* 6). The Mother, a death camp survivor of the Shoah, lives between worlds, belonging to neither: “Mother cannot forgive Melbourne, upon which, she says she has merely stumbled. Nor Europe, now left behind. And even while her feet tread the dry dusty earth of this firmer quieter shore, the ship of her existence floats, homelessly, on an ocean of regret and dejection, of reproach and tears” (Liberman, *OFS* 3). On the other hand, the son thrives in the new Australian environment:

"But I, a bird on the rafters soaring high, thrive and flourish and grow within that wilderness. For the wilderness, the vacant lots, the wooden scaffolds, the quarry, the mounds of loam, even the ringwormed patches where puddles form belong to me. Its melody I have adopted, I know its silences, which are not truly silences, and treasure the emptiness. More than Mother could know. It has its own taste, a taste of that deeper more remote Australia that Mr. Cook teaches about. The Australia of open spaces, red deserts, towering gums, shearers, swagmen, jumbucks and wheat. Inspired by his mission to make me one of his Aussie kids, Mr. Cook brings me books, pictures, stories by Lawson, odes to Clancy and to the man from Snowy River. My appetite he cannot satisfy. He tantalises my nostrils with the scent of eucalyptus and I swallow in mouthfuls whatever he feeds me. And—Mother should never know— I grow

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to love this country with the fervour of a proselyte, for the wilderness is mine.

(Liberman, OFS 7-8)

However, the Australia that Mr. Cook constructs and inculcates is as remote from the narrator as it is from his Mother; neither can possess it. The Mother feels herself to be a “foreigner Jew in an Australian marsh. Like satin in tweed, perfume in tar, crystal in clay” (Liberman, OFS 5). These similitudes are reversed for the ten-year-old child/narrator as, through the story’s development, he realizes that his sense of belonging is tenuous and paradoxical and that, from an Australian’s perspective, he is the migrant tweed, tar, and clay which diminish Australia’s idealized self-portrait.

Brian Simpson, Russell McLean, and Jim Reilly (“Fisticuffs Jimmy to the boys”) quickly disabuse the narrator of his delusions of being, or ever becoming, “[‘]a regular Aussie[’]” (Liberman, OFS 8). In the wake of his beating by his classmates, the narrator bitterly admits that “the legend called Australia . . . has become remote, something not of my world at all but something that merely winked and taunted me with scented promises,” and he weeps “for the loss of a treasure that might have remained mine” (Liberman, OFS 8).

The narrator’s sense of estrangement extends to both his family and his very identity. When he denies to his classmate and suburban neighbour Colin Walter that he is a Jew, the Mother demands that the family move from “civilisation’s perimeter” (Liberman, OFS 11): “‘What a country this is. There is no God here. See, now, what a shegetz is growing up under our roof.’ . . . ‘We must move from here. See what this wilderness, this wasteland is doing to your son[’]” (Liberman, OFS 14, 15). However, the family’s exodus from the margins of Melbourne to the more Jewish environment of St. Kilda proves problematic also.
The narrator bids farewell to Northcote: “Goodbye, my wasteland. I loved you once. Before your people, with their special venom, ruined my love” (Liberman, *OFS* 17). But, in his newer home, he begins to act like Colin, bullying and victimizing Joseph Leibholz, the Jewish classmate whom he originally befriended in St. Kilda. His Mother believes that her son has brought the wilderness with him and again accuses him of being a “[‘]shegetz,[’]” the derogatory male equivalent of the female *shikse* (Liberman, *OFS* 20). The climax of the story occurs when, in his imagination, the narrator drowns Colin and stifles the Walters family, emblematic of the true Australia(n) to which he can never pretend, the retrospective voice of the adult narrator merging with the voice of childhood memory: “... I purge myself of the wilderness, of that wasteland, where a splinter of my childhood has, in our wandering, been lost” (Liberman, *OFS* 21). Like Waten’s Jewish protagonist, Liberman’s narrator is an alien(ated) son, an exile, wandering the borders of assimilation in an Australia which both promises and refuses his naturalization.

The split between the immigrant’s world and that of Australian’s, between tradition and assimilation, is further explored in “Tinsel and Dust.” Another retrospectively told tale, the story charts the progress of the only two migrants in Mr. Chandler’s classroom, Morry and Dieter, both twelve years old. Their mutual condition as outsiders unites them: “Difference unites Dieter and myself; difference cuts us off from the class” (Liberman, *OFS* 181). As Mr. Chandler tells them, “‘You migrants have much to learn in this country’” (Liberman, *OFS* 181). However, their allegiance is tenuous. Morry is a Jew and Dieter Schmidt is a German. And although both are taunted by contemptuous ethnic epithets spoken by their Australian classmates, and although Dieter protects Morry from bullies and
he in turn saves Dieter from drowning in the local swimming pool, their respective historical positions (reinforced by negative parental attitudes) result in complete estrangement.

Mrs. Greta Schmidt’s rabid antisemitic hatred towards all Jews is counterpoised with Morry’s Mother’s deep mistrust of the German annihilators of European Jewry. Dieter’s mother teaches her son the age-old calumny of Jewish deicide. Morry’s unnamed parents show him the photos of their relatives—all murdered during the Shoah:

And in the descending brooding oppressiveness that binds my parents and myself in an intimacy but rarely repeated thereafter, I become familiar with ugly horrible frightening words, words like Hitler and Nazis, gas chambers and crematoria where all of those whose photographs I now hold were killed because they were Jews.

‘And now,’ Father says, ‘you, child of our martyrs, you are friends with one of them;’ [sic] while Mother, raising my chin towards her own firm steady barely mobile face, adds with the force of a conviction deep-seated and passionate, ‘The Germans, they hate us. Such people are not our friends.’

(Liberman, OFS 192)

Morry and Dieter fight, and as they part the former calls the latter ““Fritz””—to which he replies ““Yid,” “uttered so softly that it lacerates more strongly than the sharpest razor” (Liberman, OFS 197). The story suggests there can be no reconciliation, or forgetting, in light of the Shoah. Further, the processes of the Jewish memory of exile, annihilation, and estrangement are integral to Jewish identity and survival. And, finally, the belief in a Jewish “home” in the Diaspora is a dangerous assimilationist fiction.
The final story in this eclectic collection, “Home,” contrasts the narrator’s sense of home with that of the Mother. Like the Mother in *Alien Son*, the Mother in this story is caught between worlds, homeless, her only safe refuge her memories. The narrator accepts living in the Australia his Mother can never accept:

> Myself a boy avidly laying an ear to the new terra firma of Terra Australis, I came to learn that home was where the feet ran most freely; home, for Mother, object now of hopeless and hungry hankering, was where she had been at her fleetest. (Liberman, *OFS* 198)

For Mother, home is Praga, Warsaw, now demolished, and can never be Australia: “What to me was solid and real was to her conditional. What to me was certain was to her precarious, fraught with monstrous uncertainty, like a voyage at sea” (Liberman, *OFS* 203). What remains certain for both Mother and son, however, is memory. For Mother, the war “. . . had not succeeded, could never succeed, in annihilating memory which proffered securer anchorage than the firmest foothold to be had on the Australian shore” (Liberman, *OFS* 199). For the son, memory is the process which allows him to imaginatively reconstruct pasts—his own and his parents’—which he can only fully understand in retrospect.

Because the narrator’s “feet ran fleetest” in Australia, “this was home” (Liberman, *OFS* 202). However, it is a home where he has learned that his “Jewishness, after what had happened, was not a matter for pride,” nor “wholly a matter for shame. A defect, to be sure, . . . a thing to be observed, when observed at all, behind closed doors, behind approximated curtains and with muted voice, among one’s own” (Liberman, *OFS* 199-200). Thus the
narrator is as caught between worlds and identities as his Mother and Father are. What he understands now about his Mother applies equally to himself:

But if Australia, to Mother, could never be home, nor could Warsaw, where her tread had known it securest anchorage, any longer stake a claim. . . . What it had been it could no longer be. And whatever the pleasure, whatever the pain, it was in memory alone that Mother could ever attain to ‘home’.

(Liberman, OFS 203)

For his parents’ memories have become those of the narrator and now constitute the firmer shore, the tidal demarcation between the naturalized Australian present and the displaced, decimated, dead European past, the ebb and flow of a post-Shoah world. Memory, by both framing and structuring the narrative, allows the narrator to be simultaneously inside and outside the events he recreates. Like the narrator in Alien Son, Liberman’s narrator is similarly positioned, belonging, paradoxically, to two worlds, neither of which accepts him, and where, in each, survival means the denial, diminishment, or abandonment of one’s innate Jewish identity.

The 1980s and 1990s

The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed an explosion of publications by Jewish Australian women fiction writers. Yetta Rothberg (1919-) was born in Carlton, Melbourne, to Jewish Russian immigrant parents. In 1980, she published Thousands of Years through the Eyes of a Child. Janka Abrami (1921- ), born in Poland and arriving in Australia in


Many of these writers arrived in Australia during the massive immigration which followed World War II. In order to recognize this displaced group of postwar immigrants and to make them more visible, Kateryna O. Longley has coined the term “Fifth World.” One of her aims in so naming this group is to

create a stronger communal identity for a vast, world-scattered migrant population of disempowered people who have lost their cultural, linguistic and political bases. The words ‘immigrant’ and ‘migrant’, by referring to the moment of displacement, implicitly define people as not belonging where they are and also as being on the move. (19-20)

The term “Fifth World,” however, elides differences and homogenizes varying experiences under the rubric of (im)migration and displacement. As familiar as they were with the millennia-old Jewish history of persecution, exodus, and exile, Jews caught in the Shoah...
were made acutely, horrifyingly aware of how little they were wanted by, and how little they belonged to, this world—no matter how numbered. Jewish Shoah survivors' experiences are so unique that to subsume them to a “Fifth World” construct is to equate them with the experiences of all other post-war displaced persons (including “former” Nazi Germans) and thus to de-emphasize, or even to erase, them. For the offspring of the Jews who survived the Shoah, however, the term Second Generation has become commonplace.

Lily Brett

Lily Brett is the daughter of Auschwitz survivors, and her powerful fiction closely examines the contemporary Melbourne community of aging Shoah survivors and their Second Generation offspring. Brett's Things Could Be Worse (1990; hereafter TCBW) and What God Wants (1991; hereafter WGW) are each composed of interconnected short stories about post-Shoah Jewish survivors and the lives of their families in Carlton, Melbourne, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the penultimate story in the latter collection, “We Are All Brothers and Sisters,” Brett highlights one of her central themes: family dysfunction. Every Thursday, from 8:00 pm until 11:00 pm, Minnie Brot, Sadie Greenfield, Fania Frishman, and Fela Plotkin get together, ostensibly to play gin rummy, but also, concurrently, to argue, kibbitz, and kvetch—usually about their husbands and children. Fania, who survived both Auschwitz and Mengele’s “medical” removal of one of her fallopian tubes and other “experiments” on her, later, incredibly, gave birth to a single child, Rachel. During the card game, she remarks:
"I used to think that Jews stuck together," said Sadie. "Looked after each other. They do stick together, but only when it suits them. When it doesn’t suit them, they turn away. Jews use Jewish lawyers, doctors and accountants. If there were Jewish hairdressers, they would use them too. But they use the Jewish lawyers, doctors and accountants only because they trust them more, not because they want to help them by giving them business."

"I’m sorry, you are wrong," said Fania. "We had a Jewish plumber, here in Caulfield. He was from South Africa. He had to go back to South Africa. He was very good, but the Jews didn’t use him."

"Of course they didn’t use him," said Minnie. "Jews know that Jews know nothing about plumbing."

"But he was a good plumber," said Fania.

"How were we supposed to know that he was a good plumber?" asked Fela.

"We should have given him a chance," said Fania. "He was one of us. A brother." (Brett, *WGW* 240-41)

The juxtaposition of the Jewish plumber with Jewish lawyers, doctors, and accountants is both humorous and revealing. For these comfortably well-off senior citizens inhabit an upwardly-mobile, middle-class Jewish Melbourne which is as shtetl-like in its intrigues, gossip, and scandals as its Eastern European prototype in the Yiddish fiction of Sholom Aleichem. However, the original shtetl has been obliterated by the Shoah, and its rich, ostentatious counterpart, transplanted in, and translated into, the Australian suburbs, has lost its former knowledge of, and acquaintance with, poverty, piety, manual labour, and Jewish
Plumbing, therefore, in addition to its role as a marker of class, functions as a trope for the depths of Jewish memory, history, and survival. In addition, it connects with other thematic strands: analysis—the therapeutic plumbing of a psyche which has been informed and malformed by dysfunction within the family; and excrement—the physical plumbing of bodily functions, which is a preoccupation of some of the characters in the stories and is intimately related to the scatologically dehumanizing landscape of the death camps where, for the Jewish inmates, the formerly internal and private became humiliatingly and degradingly external and public. Fania left Europe before World War II; Minnie was born in Australia. However, Sadie’s insights into the lives of their children stem from her death camp experiences and survival, and her understanding that even within the larger Jewish family she does not really feel a sense of belonging:

“We all mixed our children up. We thought we could create a perfect world for them. We thought we could create new families for them. We asked them to call our friends Aunty and Uncle. Aunty This and Uncle That. Rachel had so many aunts and uncles. The truth was that she didn’t have one aunty or uncle. And all the pretend aunts and uncles didn’t turn out to care about her at all. We gave her so many relatives, and not one of them felt related to her. They all cared about their own children and their real relatives. And I guess that is fair enough.

“I wanted Rachel to have a big family, like the families that Leon and I grew up in, but what I learnt was that you can’t create families, you have to be born
into them. And Rachel was born into a family that were all murdered."

(Brett, *WGW* 239-40)

Fania’s answer to Sadie is, “‘Where you have got Jews, you have got family’” (Brett, *WGW* 240). And, although the stories attest to the truth of this statement, there is much that is wrong within the family—both on an individual and a communal level.

Communally, there are the problems of assimilation, marrying out of the faith, and the loss (or abandonment) of Jewish identity, tradition, and religious practice. Fania’s son, Jack, has married the quintessential symbol of Jewish assimilation, a *shikse*, aptly named Christine. However, acknowledging that Christine is a *shikse*, Fania admits that

...[“]she is a very good daughter-in-law. I can’t complain about her. When I think about how upset Joseph and I were when Jack told us he was going to marry her. She is more of a mensch than Jack is. He is lucky to have her. She sends the boys to Bialik to learn Hebrew and to learn about their Jewishness. You think Jack would do this? Never. What does he care about his Jewishness?[“] (Brett, *WGW* 235)

After a brief discussion about the traditional matrilineal descent of Jewish identity, and the acceptance of patrilineal descent by the North American Reform Judaism movement, by whose standards Jack’s children would be accepted as Jewish, Fania again takes up the theme of her son’s apostasy and its relation to his estrangement from his mother:

“Jack? Pheh!” said Fania. “Do you think he cares about his Jewishness? He doesn’t care. Do you think he cares about his mother? Of course not. He is a big shot. A doctor. A gynaecologist. He belongs to the South Yarra Tennis
Club. He plays tennis, my Jack. He is more interested in his tennis than in his mother. A big gynaecologist he is! I told him that I have got a problem, right down there, in his area. Does he listen? No. He says, ‘You’re fine, Mum.’ Fine. I could be so fine that I could drop dead. I had to go to my GP. He referred me to a gynaecologist.” (Brett, WGW 235-36)

The humour of this monologue stems from both its content and its intonation. The strains of the stereotypically long-suffering Yiddishe mama complaining, rhetorically, about her ungrateful son, a doctor no less—from whom she should derive great merit and honour, are instantly recognizable. Despite the comic touch, however, assimilation does represent a very serious threat to both the Jew, the Jewish family, and the inextricable link between the two.

Minnie Brot’s grown children, Eddie, Susan, and Gloria, are also having their problems. Susan’s husband, Harry Silver (né Chaim Silverberg) is having an adulterous affair with another shikse, Diane Burnett. As Michael Berman explains to his father in “Something Shocking”:

“Dad, . . . you think that the family who eats cake together stays together.
You’re so naive. Harry Silver is having a mid-life crisis. His little dickie got weighed down with chulent and kishke and children and mothers-in-law. He took a look at it one day and thought that he better use it while he can. (Brett, WGW 15)

The “something” that is so shocking is a hand-painted sentence of protest that Susan Silver applies to the family house. When her neighbour Wendy Fairweather asks about the
religious significance of the sign, Susan explains and translates: “It says “My husband is shtooping a shikse”. In English that means my husband is fucking a non-Jewish woman.’ Wendy Fairweather flushed and rushed off” (Brett, WGW 14). The sisters Malka and Bronka Berger, on the other hand, encounter, and react to, the cryptic “Yinglish” message somewhat differently, both linguistically and emotionally:

“She should be ashamed of herself,” said Bronka.

“It is something shocking,” said Malka.

“Do you mean that it is something shocking that she painted such a thing on her house?” Bronka asked her sister.

“Of course,” said Malka.

“I thought that maybe you thought that it was something shocking that Mr Silver is shtooping a shikse.”

“Everybody is shtooping somebody, dear Bronka, so what is the big occasion?” (Brett, WGW 15)

Despite Harry Silver’s success as a lawyer, and despite his ability after elocution lessons to speak “so beautifully he could pass for a gentile” (Brett, WGW 19), he has withheld “such a messy story, such a heap of shit” that an act suggested by Diane literally breaks him down, nauseous, weeping, and “bent over the toilet bowl” (Brett, WGW 21). Diane’s vehement demand that Harry urinate on her releases the pent up pressures that his suppressed experiences as a pre-teenage child in the Buchenwald death camp during the Shoah have imposed:

“On our first night in Buchenwald, a guard took my brother and me and
another boy to his cubicle. He made us undress and lie on the floor. Then he pissed on us. I bit him on the leg and he clubbed me so hard with his rifle that I was unconscious for two days. My brother carried me back to our bunk. The SS and the kapos had their choice of the prettiest boys. They were called ‘doll boys.’” (Brett, WGW 21)

By the time the elder women are playing their game of gin rummy in “We Are All Brothers and Sisters,” Harry has returned home to Susan with the knowledge that he always had loved her (“‘If everybody was so clever about knowing who they loved, why did he have to shtoop the shikse?’ said Fania” [Brett, WGW 238]).

In order to address the “heap of shit” of memories which haunt his consciousness, Harry (and Susan) undertake a plumbing procedure called therapy:

“Therapy?” said Fania. “Everybody is in therapy. You get a headache and you go to headache therapy. What did people do before therapy?”

“They suffered,” said Fela.

“They are still suffering,” said Fania. “Only now they are suffering in therapy.” (Brett WGW 238-39)

Brett may lampoon therapy as a substitute for personal choice and accountability, but she never diminishes the ongoing impact of the Shoah; it functions throughout the stories as a silent, subterranean presence which surfaces menacingly and disturbingly to break the spell of complacent normalcy and banal reality.

Eddie Brot’s wife, Ruthie (née Zimmerman), is also shtooping somebody else—Abe Lipshitz (husband of Dora) who is shtooping both Ruthie and a shikse named Zoe. Here
again, adultery acts as a metaphor for both individual and communal betrayal of the Jewish family. As Zoe remarks to Ruthie in “Moishe Zimmerman’s Wife”: “The thing about you Jews . . . is that you all complain endlessly about your families. You fight and argue and discuss with your mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters. But there you are, all together[’]” (Brett, WGW 4-5). The paradoxical sense of being together when, in fact, feeling apart characterizes the struggles within Abe’s psyche. His parents’ expectations drive Abe to succeed, but also alienate him from his parents, himself, and his identity. As a Second Generation survivor, he cannot escape the self-hating, yet, ironically, elating, burden of responsibility he constantly feels:

“Here I was, Abe Lipshitz, son of Shlomo and Rooshka Lipshitz, who’d come to Australia with nothing, who’d come to Australia after six years in camps and ghettos. Here I was, their son, studying law at the best university in Melbourne. I felt as though I was the representative of hundreds of dead Lipshitzes, and I had to work hard to do well for them. When I got tired I used to think of my father working as a cleaner. He worked as a cleaner in his first four years in Australia. He and my mother cleaned offices during the day, and at night my father cleaned factories. . . . They were the best years of my life, until now. Now that I’ve got you, I feel that same sense of purpose, that same sense of elation. . . . I’m not going to let you go, Ruthie. We’re going to be together.” (Brett, “Not a Simple Matter,” WGW 32)

However, Ruthie believes, ingenuously, as she states to Zoe, that “Jewish life is centred around the family. . . . It’s not so easy to break up a family. Judaism is based on family
life”” (Brett, WGW 34). Ultimately, Ruthie’s sense of Jewish morality prevails. After
meeting Abe for a Tasmanian tryst in “Wombat Lodge,” she breaks up the relationship:

“Oh, Abe, I’m so sorry,” said Ruthie. “I’m sorry that I’m upsetting you. I
think that whatever it was that made you feel responsible for your parents’
happiness is the same thing that keeps creeping between us. I don’t know what
it is. Guilt. Responsibility. I can’t name it. It’s a feeling in me that what I’m
doing, breaking up two families, is against the essence of Jewishness. And it
was because of that same Jewishness that so many people were murdered. And
what is that Jewishness? It’s not going to synagogue, or being religious. It’s
raising a Jewish family.” (Brett, WGW 227)

Again, by the time of the gin rummy game, Ruthie has ended the affair with Abe, and he and
his wife, Dora, have just left for a month-long vacation to Europe.

Throughout Brett’s short stories, there is the feeling that, as Rosa Cohen voices it in a
letter to Ellen Tennenbaum in “All Kinds of Things,” “it’s dangerous to be a Jew” (Brett,
WGW 182). This feeling of menace is exacerbated in Rosa’s case because she is the
daughter of Auschwitz internees, Mania and Moniek Cohen, who were the sole survivors of
their respective families: “When Rosa’s parents were transported to Auschwitz from the
[Lodz] ghetto in June 1944, there were still 114 members of their families alive. Only her
mother and father survived” (Brett, “On Different Fronts,” WGW 192). Rosa Cohen and
her family figure prominently in four of the short stories in the collection. “Hormonal
Imbalance” is a story of displacement and relocation. Rosa, a writer, leaves her therapist’s
office in Melbourne for the last time and a little over two hours later leaves Melbourne (and
her father) aboard a plane for New York with her husband Allan Richards, an artist.

There, with her children—Zeke, Poppy, and Kira—she begins a new life. However, in her baggage are the unresolved conflicts of her past. As she analyzes her five years of analysis, Rosa resurrects in memories and in dreams her dead mother and the intertwining of her parents’ lives with her own:

Rosa had never needed a reason to feel miserable. She had mostly felt very miserable with very little reason. Well, that was in the past, she thought. That was all behind her. She had sorted things out now. Her parents had been the victims, not her. They had been in Auschwitz, not her. They had suffered, not her. She had created her own suffering. It had been a sort of equalising manoeuvre, a redistribution of the pain in the Cohen household. (Brett, *WGW* 116)

In New York, she contemplates the various strands of her identity and reconstructs her displaced life: “She was looking for signs of progress in herself, signs that she was a different person after this analysis. In the last few months of the analysis she felt that she had been given back her life” (Brett, *WGW* 117). However, the stories which concern Rosa Cohen’s life are not Second Generation recuperative elegies. As she plumbs her own consciousness, she discovers that her goal of existential independence is elusive:

“Well, I’m not interested in independence as a theory. I just want to live a better life. I want to stop shackling myself. I want to stop paying a price for whatever freedom I have. Whatever I mean by that. All that shit I struggled with in my analysis about separating from my parents. Knowing that it was
they who had been in Auschwitz, not me. Knowing that I hadn’t suffered that damage. All I’d had were damaged parents. Well, I think I left the analysis too early. I think I haven’t really separated their experience from mine. I think that may be why I can still get so scared out in the world. I do know that I was never in Auschwitz. And I can go to the theatre now, and sit in the middle of a crowd without imagining that Nazis are going to appear and round me up. But when I think of walking down a street by myself, I feel I might be swept away. I might just float off, and blend into the air. I might disappear." (Brett, “The Alpha-Jerk Field,” *WGW* 140)

The highlight of “The Alpha-Jerk Field” is Rosa’s first unaccompanied excursion into the streets of New York City to the Cafe Orlin. She successfully overcomes her fears through this simple action.

Rosa’s fear of being erased is intimately connected with her ambivalent sense of Jewish identity. She had eschewed Jewish boyfriends, and she has married a non-Jewish husband: “[‘]I knew I would feel much safer with a non-Jew. I think I might have thought that it would be too dangerous to marry a Jew; we would be too Jewish’” (Brett, *WGW* 140).

The embedded subordinate clause constructions in this last sentence indicate her estrangement from Jewishness, a common theme in Brett’s stories. She feels she does not belong. Yet, at the same time, she announces to the world that she is a Jew:

“‘You publicly identify yourself as a Jew,” said Allan. “You write under your maiden name. You couldn’t get a more Jewish name than Rosa Cohen. And you write about Jewish themes. Remember how anxious your mother was that
you would provoke anti-Semitism by being so obviously Jewish? Remember, she suggested that you write under your married name. She wanted you to write as Rosa Richards. Then she suggested Rosemary Richards. Remember how furious you were with her?” (Brett, *WGW* 140-41)

Paradoxically, Rosa asserts a Jewish identity which she feels is both threatening and dangerous, while at the same time denying that identity through assimilation—marrying out of the Jewish family. The emphasis on memory in this passage is part of a thematic pattern throughout the stories. Rosa has a conscience and consciousness based on the millennia of Jewish memory (*a Cohen* is a descendent of the Jewish priestly family of Aharon). Yet, at the same time, she is plagued with memories of experiences which are her parents’ and not her own. Memory itself, therefore, is another paradox. It is both a source of strength and a source of terror, both a source of identity and a source of fear. It may contribute to one’s being “too Jewish.”

Rosa’s personal sense of belonging and not belonging is connected with her flight from Melbourne to New York. In “All Kinds of Things,” she writes from New York to her friend Ella Tennenbaum, who is also an expatriate Australian:

It is strange that we have both uprooted ourselves and left Australia, the country our parents struggled to get us to.

How are you managing? Managing is such a sad little word, isn’t it? Since I have been here, I have often felt lost. And I have often felt loss. A generalised loss. Loss of friends, acquaintances, local shopkeepers. God, I have even felt the loss of people I didn’t like much.
The loss hangs around me. It hangs low in the air, and if I’m not careful I bang into it. Once I do, I’m done for. I weep. I weep for my mother, I weep for my analyst, I weep for our house in Melbourne, I weep for our garden, I weep at the memory of the children walking around with bare feet. The truth is, I hardly spent any time in the garden, and didn’t like the children to wear no shoes. (Brett, WGW 171-72)

Her nostalgia, another form of memory (albeit embellished with false sentiment and self-pity), evinces the same paradoxical sense of belonging felt by her fictional counterparts in the Jewish Australian texts which preceded Brett’s. Rosa is an alienated daughter. And her self-knowledge, gained through the scatological struggles she experienced in analysis, always returns her to the source of that alienation—a family parented by Shoah survivors.

For Rosa, the extended “family” in which she grew up is a counterpart for the larger, national family of Australia. Neither genuinely cared for her. Neither truly saw her, and thus her journey from Melbourne functions symbolically as a search for both identity (self-perception) and language (self-expression). The process of this ongoing doubled search is expressed in Rosa’s confessional, (fictitiously) autobiographical, first-person narratives (courtesy of Lily Brett). In her letter to Ella, Rosa expresses her insight about the state of the communal Jewish family in which she grew up in the post-Shoah age of anxiety:

My dad is lonely in Melbourne. He misses us. He doesn’t see many people.

I don’t know what happened to the large group of friends my parents had.

I think of Mr and Mrs Menski, and Mr and Mrs Diksteen, and Mr and Mrs Jablonski, and all the others. I thought they were family. When I was a kid
they always seemed to be there. I would have sworn at least Mrs Menski loved me. All those sighs, and pinching of my cheeks. What did that mean? Not much, that’s for sure. She still smiles when she sees me, but basically she couldn’t give a shit.

The mistake was to think that Mr and Mrs This and Mr and Mrs That were our family. They weren’t. I guess they were a temporary family. Maybe we were all family to each other when we needed family. Later everyone built up their own real families. (Brett, *WGW* 181)

However, as the stories attest, even these *real* families are highly dysfunctional. And, four years after her mother’s death, Rosa is still left with the anger, sadness, and regret. She feels that her “mother’s death is the worst thing that has ever happened” to her (Brett, *WGW* 180). She writes to Ella: “I sound so potty, don’t I? And this is the new, mature, come-to-terms-with-myself, over-analysed me. Sometimes I feel so tired of carrying all this baggage. Suitcases of dead relatives and Nazis” (Brett, *WGW* 182). The text implies that this is now Rosa’s choice. In New York, she continues her analysis with Dr. Silver (“On Different Fronts”), commenting that “[i]t was like finding another mother, and good mothers weren’t all that easy to find” (Brett, *WGW* 193-94). However, the efficacy of therapeutic analysis, of psychic plumbing, depends on removing the detritus which blocks the flow of one’s energy, life, feelings and not on finding new or better mother-substitutes. Suitcases of old skeletons and fears can be jettisoned. Constant over-analysis keeps one perpetually pre-occupied and involved with the past, with the detritus, with the shit. Effective therapy means both choice and action.
Thrice-divorced journalist Ella Tennenbaum, Rosa Cohen’s estranged girlhood friend and epistolary interlocutor, is another of Brett’s alien daughters—still intimidated by her (now aged) mother. Like Rosa, Ella takes (a) flight from Australia, a place where she also feels she belongs and yet does not. Like Rosa, Ella is searching for a true glimpse of herself and the experience of her authentic identity. Her destination, however, differing from the New York of her double, is the true Jewish homeland: Israel.

In “A Glimpse of Stocking,” Ella leaves for Israel, feeling both “like a cross between a refugee and an escapee” and “as though all her disasters were behind her” (Brett, WGW 112). By the time she visits Rosa Cohen in New York (“On Different Fronts”), she feels that Israel is the home/family to which she ultimately belongs and in which she can be herself. Although she and Rosa “[w]ere two of the least Jewish Jewish girls in Melbourne” (Brett, WGW 186), in Israel Ella reclaims her innate identity:

“I certainly feel a Jew now,” said Ella. “I’m surrounded by Jews. The chemist, the podiatrist, the hairdresser, the librarian, even the car mechanic, they’re all Jews. Everyone is Jewish. I can’t get used to everybody being Jewish. There are even Jewish hookers. Would you have believed that? And, in the middle of all these Jews, I can see myself. I see myself in so many of them. I see my mother and father. I see so many Jewish faces of my childhood. And I see that I fit in.” (Brett, WGW 186).

She gets a job with the Jerusalem Post, and gets engaged to a Russian Jewish immigrant, Andrei, a violinist twelve and a half years Ella’s junior who has just been hired by the Israeli Symphony Orchestra. She feels happy, although she acknowledges that “[i]t’s a bit of a
scary business, this feeling of happiness” (Brett, WGW 199). Ultimately, the collection of short stories suggests that, for the Jews, despite the long odds, personal happiness and psychic wholeness and life are distinct possibilities; moreover, this is what God wants.

Both Rosa Cohen (WGW) and Lola Bensky (TCBW) are prototypes of Esther Zepler, the protagonist in Brett’s novel Just Like That (1994; hereafter JLT). Esther, the forty-one year old daughter of Shoah survivors Edek and Rooshka Zepler, is an expatriate Australian living in New York City with her non-Jewish husband, Sean Ward, an “abstract landscape painter” (Brett, JLT 2-3). Esther has two children from her previous marriage to Donald Hattam: Zachary, a twenty-one-year-old medical student studying in Australia, and Zelda, a sixteen-year-old secondary school student. Sean’s daughter from his previous marriage is Katherine (Kate), a nineteen-year-old “studying painting at the Studio School” (Brett, JLT 182). Both Zelda and Kate live with Esther and Sean in a SoHo loft in New York City.

Esther is the American obituaries reporter for the London Weekly Telegraph, a position she inherited from David Bloom, her former colleague at the Melbourne Age. She also writes for the Jewish Times, the Australian Jewish Herald, and the Downtown Bugle. For Esther, writing obituaries is the means by which she artistically shapes, orders, constructs, and controls both the deceased and the world—a place where she inevitably, agoraphobically (Brett, JLT 144), feels terrified and threatened:

By the time she had collected all the information, things fell into place, and the person’s life was as clear to read as a map. Esther often thought how strange it was that a perfect stranger like herself could put a man’s life together from forty to fifty lines of notes. . . . By choosing what to emphasise, and who to
call for quotes, Esther felt that she shaped the way the dead person was
presented to the world. (Brett, *JLT* 3, 4)

However, her parents’ past remains an ongoing and un(re)solvable mystery to Esther, which
causes her writing to function as a form of psychological displacement:

She found it easy to ask other people questions. She hadn’t been able to ask
her mother or father any questions about their life until she was almost thirty.
She knew that their past was out of bounds to her. So she channelled her
curiosity into other people’s lives. (Brett, *JLT* 53)

And, as in Brett’s short stories, displacement, both physical and emotional, is a recurrent
metaphor or trope.

Esther was born in a D.P. camp in Germany on August 24 (Brett, *JLT* 41). And her
expatriation from Melbourne to New York mirrors her original transoceanic migration to
Australia soon after the *Shoah*:

She had already, once, been displaced from her homeland, although she hated
to think of Germany as her homeland. Whenever she had to say she was born
in Germany, she went to great pains to point out that she was not German. . . .

The thought of being a German citizen had horrified her. (Brett, *JLT* 42, 43)

But Esther’s emigration is voluntary. Nevertheless, the view from her New York City loft
reminds her of the cottage at 575 Nicolson Street, Carlton, Melbourne, where she grew up.
And as New York becomes displaced by Carlton, so too Carlton becomes displaced by
Europe: “Instead of suburban Melbourne, the house now had the feel of pre-war Poland”
(Brett, *WGW* 35). Indeed, after a big snow storm, “Manhattan could have been pre-war
Poland or Russia” (Brett, *JLT* 9). Physical displacement is an analogue for Esther’s feelings of emotional displacement, and both suggest a past and an identity shaped by the Shoah.

Esther’s life is a palimpsest superimposed on her parents’ lives. Her parents are the sole survivors of their respective families:

> They had lost everyone. Lost everyone. What a strange phrase, Esther thought. Her parents hadn’t lost their families in the way one loses one’s coat or umbrella. These relatives weren’t misplaced. They were gassed, burnt, shot, mutilated, raped and butchered. (Brett, *JLT* 5)

Esther’s family is a gaping absence, and through the gaps in her life the lives of her parents intrude. Esther’s pre-occupation with the Shoah is reflected in her library of over four hundred books on the subject, of which she is currently reading *Facts of the Holocaust*. And Esther’s captivation by the facts of the Shoah in inextricably bound up with her mother, the survivor, “[c]rushed with pain, humiliation and rage” (Brett, *JLT* 60), who has been dead for five years.

Esther’s state of ongoing anxiety is connected with the recurrent tropes of analysis and excrement first seen in Brett’s short stories. As she tells her friend Sonia Kaufman (a lawyer and fellow Australian in New York whose graphically described adulterous affair with her colleague Fred Robinson leaves her pregnant with twin daughters of undetermined paternity), “I don’t spend my life absorbed in death. I spend my life absorbed in life. I have Sean, and I have the kids, and I have my father. And I have my analysis. I spend hours, every week, minutely examining what constitutes my life’” (Brett, *JLT* 401). In her unending grief, Esther confuses her life for her mother’s and lovingly takes on the burden of...
the anxieties and fears of her dead parent. She also takes on the excrement of Auschwitz, feeling herself dirtied in some inexplicable, vicarious way by her parents' experiences in the *Shoah*:

Esther felt grubby herself. When the documentary [about the liberation of Nazi concentration camps] had finished, she had taken off her clothes and showered. She'd stayed in the shower for half an hour. That night, she had dreamt all night that a toilet filled with shit was overflowing, and floating around her legs. In the dream, she had just put on a pair of clean white tights, which were now thick with shit. Shit was everywhere.

She shivered at the memory. (Brett, *JLT* 279)

Her anxiety and her speaking about her parents' past "stir[s] her bowels": “She had a big shit. Her anxiety was an asset as far as her bowels were concerned. She felt much better. She always did after a good shit. As though her faeces represented the shit and mess of her being” (Brett, *JLT* 112, 113). She tells Sonia, “I often feel grubby, fouled by my parents' past. Especially my mother’s[’]” (Brett, *JLT* 288). Analysis allows her to feel that her being is not polluted and that she is not excrement, in spite of the fact that the “thought of a huge happiness scares the shit out [her], . . . quite literally” (Brett, *JLT* 171). Analysis allows Esther to begin to disentangle her life from its incestuous resonance with her mother’s:

Why did she feel she was such a dirty child? Why did she have to feel so connected to the child she’d been? Or the child she imagined she’d been. Or was it that connection with her mother, again. Did she feel as smelly and dirty
and degraded as her mother had felt in the ghetto and in Auschwitz. (Brett, JLT 173-74)

The omission of question marks from these last two questions is grammatically emblematic of Esther's growing awareness of the process of her emotional progress from questions to insightful declarations. She is also aware that the psychic excrement which produces her anxiety and agoraphobia "[']could come back any minute. Just like that" (Brett, JLT 145).

The theme of Jewish family (dis)continuity is prominent in Brett’s novel. Esther’s family is an incinerated absence:

Her mother wouldn’t talk about her parents or her brothers and sisters. Esther knew them by their numbers. One mother, one father, four brothers, three sisters. There were also seventeen nieces and nephews, twenty-three aunties and uncles and fifty-one cousins. They were all murdered.

When Esther glued restaurant menus, candy wrappers and pieces of driftwood into scrapbooks, she knew they were a replacement for relatives. For the people that her mother wept for. People her mother wished she was with.

People Esther had no photographs of. (Brett, JLT 266)

All that is left is fragments, literally and grammatically. Through her tangled relation with the family in which she grew up, Esther comes to believe that the Jewish family, both individually and communally, is not marked by any particular difference. However, her identity is based upon the paradoxical attachment and estrangement she feels in both her family and her Jewishness. To be Jewish is a signifier of difference, albeit a negative one in Esther’s mind:
‘I feel I’m becoming less Jewish, if it’s possible for a Jew to be less Jewish. I
don’t care if my kids marry someone who’s not Jewish. I used to care. . . . It
doesn’t seem to me that there’s all that much to be gained from being Jewish.
My experience points to the fact that you’re better off not being Jewish. I used
to feel as though being Jewish meant you were part of one big family. But it
doesn’t. Other Jews don’t think you’re part of their families. Jews are just as
connected to their real families, and just as disconnected from other people, as
anyone else.’ (Brett, JLT 279-80)

Yet, ironically, Jewish continuity is extremely important to Esther. In order to both “protect
her children from the emptiness of an unknown and inaccessible past” and to “eliminate the
omnipresent absence of her parents’ past” (Brett, JLT 265, 266), Esther “force[s] all three
children to keep a diary. . . . She wanted her children to have documentation of their lives.
To have access to their own pasts. To have a history to hand to the next generation. As
though a clutch of diaries made up a past” (Brett, JLT 265). She wants to insure that her
children’s lives belong to them to counteract her feeling that her life has not belonged to her.

To have a history is part of belonging to oneself. Belonging to a country, however, is
less certain. Through all the migrations and displacements of her emotional and physical
existence, Esther maintains an ambivalent relation with Australia. She flees Melbourne,
only to seek out expatriate Australians, like Sonia Kaufman, in New York. She tells Sonia
she shares a “[‘]common cultural consciousness’” with Australians (Brett, JLT 286);
however, that “[‘]shared understanding of something[‘]” proves to be elusive—she cannot
figure out “[‘]what that something is’” (Brett, JLT 286).
Like the other alienated Second Generation daughters in Brett's fiction, Esther belongs and does not. Ultimately, she gains a fleeting glimpse of what it feels like to belong to herself. Like the marriage of seventy-six-year-old Moishe Zimmerman to Esmeralda (and her subsequent pregnancy) which concludes the final story in *What God Wants, Just Like That* ends with seventy-six-year-old Edek Zepler's marriage to fellow survivor Henia Borenstein in New York. Sonia Kaufman, committed again to her husband Michael, bears twin daughters. And Edek phones his daughter Esther to tell her that he told Henia’s disapproving son Samuel that he had to do the right thing and marry Henia because she was pregnant. The novel ends with the uncontrollable, life-affirming laughter of father and daughter as they both let go.

**Concluding Remarks**

Although the Jewish presence has been a part of Australia since the First Fleet landed, and although Jews represent the first and the longest-established European "ethnic" minority group in Australia, Jewish writers (in any genre) are still classified, pejoratively, as "migrant," or, if born in Australia, negatively, as "non-Anglo-Celtic." As Maria Lewitt remarks in an essay titled "Teething Pains":

Plenty of goodwill still exists towards migrant writers, contaminated now and again by patronising attitudes, but the fact remains that, though all writers ought to be equal, some are more equal than others. Namely, a migrant writer is not as easily accepted as one who was native born.
Writers in Australia are not classed according to chronological order, or the category of their work, but rather according to their origin. Instead of allowing new voices into our literature, we often strangle new talents by putting them into a special, second-class category. (Lewitt 68)

“Multicultural” is another second-class category, a currently popular label for “migrant” literature in Australia. However, this term is simplistic, reducing difference to a monotonous “sameness” which, though peripheral to the nation and its canon of literature, allows literary inclusion, assimilation, and control. As Rosa Safransky notes in “The Goulash Archipelago”:

Multicultural has become synonymous with Martian. The term denotes a literary kiss of death and sends academic critics scurrying for their bedside Virginia Woolfs. Ethnic or multicultural writers are little green men and women from Mars landing on Anglo-Celtic Australian soil with their foreign-sounding names and ray-gun typewriters.

A new energy is pouring into Australian writing, created by migrants and the children of migrants who are coming to grips with language in exciting and original ways. Their prose breaks through cultural stereotypes which relegate migrants to an intellectual and cultural backwater in Australia, labelled and defined by those who themselves have never experienced the traumatic, often long-ranging effects of uprootedness and displacement which have come increasingly to characterise the lives of so many people in the latter part of the twentieth century. . . . The cultural dislocation, confusion, alienation and inter-
generational warfare can take generations to work out.

The definition of what constitutes Australian writing and culture in the late 1980s has widened. There is not one voice, there is a multitude of voices. The writing indicates that it has not been a quick or easy path to assimilation, that Italian cuisine does not change to meat pies overnight, but why should it? Australian society itself has changed and is changing. The writing reflects this.

(Safransky 204-05)

And Jewish fiction writers¹² (including Lewitt and Safransky) are contributing to that energetic plenitude of other voices, and are thus changing both Australian culture and literature: “Thus in many and various ways the idea of a homogeneous culture imbued with universal values has been undermined by those many perspectives which, in the past, were marginalised and excluded from the frame of reference which sustained such a concept” (Gunew, Framing Marginality 52).

Invoking Jacques Derrida’s concept (via Jean Jacques Rousseau) of the “dangerous supplement . . . that redefines the whole domain” (Gunew, “PostModern Tensions” 28), Gunew argues

... that the addition of so-called migrant writing would eventually redefine the premises governing the formation of Australian literature. . . . Later research has simply confirmed this notion, and emphasised the continuing need to wrest these writings away from their allegedly ‘natural’ place in oral history and sociology, where they are read simply for their historical or sociological content, and in ways that render their textuality invisible. In other words, the
old battles to claim these writings as part of literature are still being fought.

(Gunew, *Framing Marginality* 12)

As just such a marginalized literary community, Jewish Australian writers are contributing to the repositioning and redefining of both Australian Literature and the tenets of its construction. Thus the multicultural margin, the place of both physical and literary exile, may be reconfigured as a locus of strength and change. ("[O]n the other [hand] it can operate to reinforce the claims of a self-styled centre" [Gunew, “Introduction” xx].) For the Chinese-Portuguese Australian writer Brian Castro, multiculturalism is “the idealisation of pluralism. And the ideal pluralism is when everybody exists on the margins, because the centre, which is like the centre of writing itself, is an absence” (Castro 7). In this paradigm, then, all Australian writing is marginal and thus contributes to a post-colonial national literature peripheral to the construct of a Eurocentric “World Literature”—one of its alien sons.

Post-*Shoah* Jewish Australian fiction is populated with alien sons and daughters whose paradoxical state as, simultaneously, citizens and exiles within both Australia and the world may be seen as a metaphor for the existential sense of dislocation, displacement, and alienation which characterizes the consciousness of an increasingly anxious and fragmented post-World War II world. The consciousness of Jewish marginalization and difference, as reflected in the Jewish Australian fiction examined in this chapter, correlates to the larger world consciousness. For these Jewish Australian authors, writing as Jews, “express the Jewish fate, set it before others, and to a certain extent even make them accept it” (Memmi, *LM* 175-76). Their fictions serve not only as a redefining supplement (dangerous or
otherwise) to the constructs of Australia and the canon of Australian Literature, but also as a "true Jewish literature...of explicit accusation and revolt" (Memmi, LJ 178) against a Jewish condition imposed/dictated by a world whose own fate, ironically, is coterminous with that which it has inflicted on its Jewish Other. In addition, Jewish Australian fiction contributes to, and thus supplements, "Jewish Literature," and its antipodean themes and tropes reverberate through both Jewish South African and Jewish Canadian fiction.
CHAPTER 3

Zulus and Zeides:

Jewish South African Fiction and the Apartheid of Self-Hatred

The Jewish community in Australia began with the transportation and internment of a mere handful of Jews in 1788. And as this embryonic antipodean community at the Anglo-centrically perceived edge of the British Empire grew—within the rapidly increasing Anglo-Celtic immigrant population—the stigma of its penal origins gradually subsided among its members. As former “convicts” became the unshackled citizens of a “new” country, Australia, unimprisoned, reimagined itself as a free, egalitarian, and open society. In contrast, although the provinces of what became in 1910 the Union of South Africa were not established as penal colonies, the rigid categorization of their various aboriginal and settler populations by race and colour became a political, ideological, and social structure within which the emerging Union was, and has been, imprisoned.

The paradox of belonging that Chapter 2 examined in relation to post-Shoah Jewish Australian fiction has many parallels in Jewish South African fiction of the same period. However, the thematic concerns and tropes of the former, though present in recontextualized forms in the latter, are subsumed within the overwhelming social and political realities of the uniquely South African racist apparatus: baasskap, and its subsequent incarnation as apartheid. And although tremendous changes in South African society in the last decade
have led to the official dismantling of its racist ideology; the first, free, and universal elections in its history; the release and election of the formerly incarcerated Nelson Mandela as the Union's first black President, in April 1994; and South Africa's readmission to the Commonwealth, "categorical attitudes" and thinking are still prevalent within both the society and the fiction in which it is reflected (New 67). Thus, most post-Shoah Jewish South African fiction, mirroring that of non-Jewish writers, thematizes the racially segregated relations between Blacks and Whites within a politics of social liberation and eschews any Jewish ethos whatsoever. Moreover, those Jewish South African writers whose fiction does encompass Jewish themes and characters often construct stereotypically negative portrayals of Jews no less offensive than those created by their non-Jewish counterparts. These Jewish writers recurrently depict within their Jewish characters a covert (or sometimes an overt) existential separation from an innate Jewish identity, a form of psychologically internalized apartheid which manifests itself as self-hatred. 2 This depiction stems, in part, from the ambiguous position of Jews within the historical, political, and social framework of South Africa.

Origin, History, and Demography of the Jewish Community

From 1652 to 1795, the Cape was under the sovereignty of the Dutch East India Company. Because, under the Company's rules, European settlement was permitted only to those who belonged to the Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church), those few Jewish individuals who did settle in the Cape during this period were Christian converts. This
restriction was ended by the “Batavian [Republic] administration (1803-6) and maintained thereafter by their administrative heirs, the British,” who conquered the colony in 1806 and ruled it until 1910 (Shain 9). Several thousand Jewish immigrants from Britain (primarily from Whitechapel in the East End of London), Germany (often via London), and Holland immigrated to the Cape from 1806 until about 1880, many arriving with the first major group of British colonists in 1820. “Tikvath Israel, the Hope of Israel, clearly a reference to the Cape of Good Hope,” was established in Cape Town in 1841, the first permanent congregation in South Africa (Elazar 166). By 1880, the Jewish population numbered 4,000, constituting 0.8% of the total White population of South Africa (DellaPergola 105). Most of these Jews

were of Anglo-German origin. They were acculturated (modeling themselves on the British), bourgeois, and, by and large, well ensconced in Cape and Orange Free State society. . . . The Jewish community, in other words, reflected the lifestyle and communal patterns of their “enlightened” coreligionists in western Europe. Religion was a private matter and primary allegiance was accorded to the state. The community, moreover, personified the values and norms dearest to nineteenth-century English liberals: loyalty, obedience, civic virtue, charitableness, and, above all, enterprise. (Shain 12)

This demographic profile changed dramatically after 1880.

A combination of factors led to a massive Jewish immigration into the provinces of South Africa from 1881 to 1914, an influx which enlarged the Jewish population to what the first official census of the two Crown Colonies and the two Boer Republics in 1904 recorded
as 38,101, an increase of 852.5% in just twenty-four years (DellaPergola 106). By 1911, the first census made after Union, the Jewish population reached 46,919, 3.7% of the total White population; in 1918, these figures were 58,741 and 4.1% respectively (DellaPergola 105).

The first of these factors was the 1867 discovery of diamonds in the vicinity of what became the city of Kimberley:

Not only were Jews prominent among the prospectors in Kimberley, but much of the infrastructure such as the miners’ stores, hotels and coach services between the diamond fields and the coast were Jewish-owned. More significantly, the marketing of the stones was largely controlled by syndicates of German-Jewish gem experts, which helped stabilize a highly volatile market. (Arkin 58)

From this intimate relation between Jews and the diamond trade evolved the association of the former with the illicit diamond dealing prevalent at the time. The stereotype of the unscrupulous, Jewish Illicit Diamond Buyer (IDB) became a commonplace in the contemporary popular culture, attested to in “fiction as well as in memoirs, satire, and cartoons” (Shain 13). This antipathy towards the Jewish immigrants was exacerbated by the financial collapse of Kimberley in 1881.

The second factor conducive to the burgeoning of Jewish immigration was the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand (Transvaal) in 1885-1886. The Rand, or the Reef, became the new focus of Jewish life in South Africa, and, by 1904, there were 10,800 Jews, representing 12% of the White population, in the city built by the gold rush: Johannesburg.
(Shain 52). Many nicknamed the growing city “‘Jewburg’” or “‘Jewhannesburg’” (cf. “Jew York”) (Leveson 16).

The third factor, and the primary motivation for Jewish immigration, was the series of pogroms unleashed on the Jewish communities of Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881. Between 1881 and the beginning of World War I in 1914, some 3,000,000 Jews emigrated from the Jewish Pale of Settlement, a Russian-controlled territory in Eastern Europe encompassing parts of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia to which, and in which, Jewish residence, travel, employment, freedom, and every aspect of life were restricted and regulated. The majority emigrated to North America, primarily to the United States; however, many settled in Latin America, Western Europe, Australia, South Africa, and the Jewish Yishuv in what was then called Palestine. Coincidentally, this Jewish migration to South Africa occurred at the same time as the mass immigration of non-Afrikaner, non-Jewish, white Europeans.

Of the 42,000 plus Jews who immigrated to South Africa after 1881 and were counted in the census of 1911, the majority were Yiddish speakers who emigrated from the shtetls of Lithuania, then under Russian domination:

They left to escape pogroms, discriminatory educational and conscription laws, as well as the natural catastrophes of floods and cholera epidemics. The underlying economic cause for Lithuanian Jewish immigration to South Africa (while the Jews of central Europe were streaming towards America) was to be found in the structure of the economic society from which they were fleeing. While many German and Polish Jews had already become factory hands and
could thus easily adjust to wage employment in the garment workshops of New York, the Jews of pre-industrial Lithuania were shopkeepers, peddlers and craftsmen. South Africa offered great scope to these non-wage earners. (Arkin 59)

Different in speech, dress, and custom, these “Litvaks” (Lithuanian Jews) were perceived by both the assimilated Anglo-German Jewish community and the larger, urban, non-Jewish populace as “fundamentally alien” (Leveson 15).

In the northern, southern, and eastern Cape Colony, the figure of the wandering itinerant peddler, the smous, became a common sight and the locus for antisemitic prejudice, a negative South African incarnation of the stereotypical Wandering Jew. During the recession in the Cape (1902-1910), the presence of these Eastern European Jewish greeners (newcomers) evoked much social, editorial, and political hostility. Smouses were imaged as exploiters and swindlers (Boerverneukers) of the unsophisticated Boer farmers among whom they peddled their wares. In the Oudtshoorn District, centre of the ostrich feather industry, licensed Jewish hawkers, dealers, and buyers “were viewed with great ambivalence, if not outright hostility,” leading to their stereotypical representation “as subversive, dishonest, and exploitative” (Shain 23, 25). Similarly, in the Witwatersrand, Jews hawked, traded, and opened near the Rand mine works small shops and eateries (kaffireaters) catering to the Black labourers. These small enterprises were eventually also perceived by the non-Jewish population as unsavoury, manipulative, and unscrupulous.

In Johannesburg, these Jewish victims of European persecution lived “within a three- mile radius of the Market Square” (Shain 27) “in the slums of Ferreirasdorp and lower
Commissioner Street" (Leveson 16). Denigrated by both the Anglo-German Jewish establishment and the non-Jewish population as “Peruvians,” these Eastern European, Jewish Uitlanders (foreigners) “rapidly became associated with the evils of Johannesburg and more especially with the city’s problematic liquor trade—one specific barometer of depravation and degeneration” (Shain 28). When, on January 1, 1897, the South African Republic banned the selling of liquor to Blacks, “Peruvians” lost a substantial market and thus became involved with illicit liquor dealing (ILD), often through Jewish-owned kaffireaters. “Peruvians” were “also associated with unsanitary living and the seamier side of [both] Johannesburg’s nightlife” and criminal underworld (Shain 30). Similarly, in Cape Town, the “Peruvian” was made the scapegoat for a plethora of unseemly social conditions. In an especially egregious and vicious cartoon drawn by the German-born Heinrich Egersdörfer and published in the Owl, a Cape Town weekly, on May 6, 1904, a motley group of dishevelled, bearded, caftaned, hatted, hunched, and hook-nosed Eastern European Jews are being examined by a doctor on board the ship which has brought them to the Cape. The caption is an exchange between the medical examiner and the “Owl”:

Dr. Gregory: “Twenty three per cent of immigrants into the Cape were aliens.”

The Owl: “At this rate you’d better print me in Yiddish.”

The cartoon is titled “The Coming of the Scum” (Shain Fig. 3 [77b]).

The popular image of Jewish criminal involvement with IDB assumed a similar form when, during the gold rush in the Witswatersrand in the 1880s, Jews were associated with Illicit Gold Buying (IGB). The stereotype of the fabulously wealthy Jewish mining magnate, investor, and speculator—caricatured as the “Randlord” or “Goldbug” and
popularized by Egersdörfer—became commonplace. As the further encumbrances of “capitalist” and “plutocrat” rapidly accrued to the Randlord stereotype, it began to resemble its European progenitor, the International Jewish Financier, who, in his sinister and megalomaniacal quest for world domination on behalf of International Jewry, conspired with his South African counterpart to control South African society and manipulate its economy for evil and selfish purposes. And although Jews fought on both sides of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), and although that conflict ruined the Transvaal economy and uprooted thousands of Jews (who, consequently, fled to Cape Town), Jews were nevertheless accused of inciting the conflict.

Another cartoonist, D. C. Boonzaier, borrowed a character named Max Hoggenheimer from a very popular musical comedy—*The Girl from Kays* by Owen Hall—which opened in Cape Town after a successful 1902 run in London (Shain 62). “Hoggenheimer,” the Jewish millionaire parvenu, became Boonzaier’s “Goldbug,” and was featured by the cartoonist throughout his nearly forty-year career at various newspapers (Shain 62). However, “Hoggenheimer . . . merely symbolized on a higher plane the machinations of the Jewish pedlar and the illicit diamond dealer”; he remained, under the respectability and power wealth conferred on him, a “Peruvian,” and his success was often attributed to guile and dishonesty (Shain 75).

As the twentieth century began, “the image of the Jew in South Africa was a multiple one” (Leveson 18). Of all the European immigrants to South Africa during this period, the “Peruvian,” evincing “a conspicuous and unmistakably alien identity[,] . . . stood out as the most prominent intruder. In short, he consolidated the image of the knave, which had been
evident in the 1880s and, in this sense, reinforced the arguments of those who associated Jews with illicit diamond buying and ‘boerverneuking’” (Shain 33). The massive ingress of Jewish refugees reinforced the emerging local variations of a Jewish stereotype which had been constructed over two millennia. A South African version of the cosmopolitan Jewish financier, the “Randlord,” “introduced a new dimension to the stereotype, that of Jewish power” (Shain 47). In contrapuntal relation to the “Peruvian” Jew was the acculturated, assimilated, Anglo-German Jewish gentleman; he had not disappeared. In dress, manner, accent, appearance, and identity, the “Peruvian” remained distinct, alien, even exotic. However, “eastern European Jews increasingly defined ‘Jewishness’ in the South African context. Distinctions between them and the acculturated Anglo-German Jewish establishment were increasingly blurred” (Shain 75).

The government of the Cape Colony passed the Immigration Restriction Act in 1902, by which Asiatic immigration was to be strictly controlled. This Act contained provisions for the exclusion of anyone who could not sign his/her name in European characters, thereby effectively curtailing the entry of Eastern European Jews, whose mother tongue—Yiddish—was rendered orthographically in Hebrew letters. However, in 1906, the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies persuaded the Cape government to accept Yiddish as a European language, a decision also reluctantly adopted by the governments in Natal and Transvaal (Leveson 17). This Act prefigured various other governmental decrees aimed at stemming the flow of Jewish (and other) immigrants. Nevertheless, the census of 1936 showed a Jewish population of 90,645, representing 0.9% of the total population and an unsurpassed 4.5% of the White population of South Africa.
In the aftermath of World War I, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the mining labour dispute in the Witswatersrand in 1922 which became known as the Rand Revolt, a new and paradoxical nuance was added to the "Peruvian"/"Randlord" praxis: the Russian Jewish "Bolshevist." Thus capitalist magnate and socialist revolutionary became self-contradictory aspects of an increasingly paradoxical stereotype.

As anti-Jewish sentiment increased, The League of Gentiles was organized in South Africa in 1925, a precursor of the various fascist organizations modelled on the German Nazis which appeared in the 1930s. And in 1930, as the Great Depression began, the Nationalist-Labour government of the Union (following the lead of the United States) enacted the Immigration Quota Act, legislation which cleverly imposed a quota of fifty immigrants from each of six countries—Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Palestine. The Act was clearly aimed at the sources of Eastern European Jewish immigration; however, the word "Jew" does not appear in the Act (Leveson 22). Because Germany was deemed to be a non-quota country by this Act, 5,534 German Jews escaped Hitler by emigrating to South Africa before the outbreak of World War II (Leveson 23-24). In 1937, the J. B. M. Hertzog-Jan Smuts, South African party-National party fusion government passed the Aliens Act, thereby closing the loophole and ending Jewish immigration.

In 1933, South Africa’s most prominent Nazi-inspired antisemitic organization, the South African Christian National Socialist Movement—the "Greyshirts"—was established, under the leadership of Louis T. Weichardt. According to Shain’s thesis, the political and social factors which precipitated the shift from antisemitic rhetoric to the actual political
practice of antisemitism cannot adequately account for its eruption in the 1930s: “It was the preexisting widely shared negative Jewish stereotype that prepared the way for popular outbursts and programmatic antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s” (142). Further: “[T]here is a connection and a continuity between anti-Jewish sentiment as manifested in images of the Jew before 1930 and the anti-Jewish outbursts and programs of the 1930s and early 1940s. Without the specific traumas of the 1930s, the earlier sentiments may not have been translated into public or political policy” (Shain 150).

In the aftermath of both the Nazi German defeat in Europe and the Shoah, the South African fascist organizations lost power. In the same month as the declaration of the state of Israel (May 1948), the Afrikaners achieved political power for the first time with the election of Dr. D. F. Malan’s National Party. However, once elected, the new government ignored the “Jewish Problem” with which it had previously been preoccupied and, rather, devoted its attentions to the official entrenchment of apartheid. The election of the National Party

inaugurated a new era of anxieties and moral dilemmas. The innovative aspect of Malan’s new government lay not in the invention of the system of white domination and racial segregation—this long preceded Malan’s ascent to power—but rather in its ideological rationalization and in the institution of far-reaching social engineering to fortify it against the winds of change in Africa. The term “apartheid” entered political usage in the mid-1940s. Although at its crudest level it signified the preservation of baasskap, meaning white domination in all aspects of South African society, it underwent a steady
Shain concludes that “antisemitism was never a defining feature of South African culture,” because, “[i]n the final analysis . . . the relative security of the Jews was ensured by the presence of other target groups. As in the American South, blacks served as the lightning rod for racism” (151, 152).

After World War II, Jewish immigration declined; between 1946 and 1970, approximately 14,000 newcomers arrived. The Jewish population grew from 104,156 in 1946 to its high water mark in 1970 of 118,200; however, as a percentage of the total and of the White populations, the Jewish population fell from 0.9% and 4.4% in 1946 to 0.6% and 3.1% in 1970 (DellaPergola 105, 107). The Sharpeville massacre in 1960, and the Soweto riots of 1976 led many Jews to question their future prospects in apartheid South Africa, and approximately 39,000 emigrated to Israel, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada between 1970 and 1991 (Dubb 21). Jewish immigration from Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Israel largely offset this egress, so much so that the 1980 census showed only a slight drop in the Jewish population, to 117,963—0.4% of the total population and 2.6% of the White population (DellaPergola 105). However, by the 1991 census, the Jewish population of the country was shown to be declining.

Unlike previous censuses, the 1991 census was flawed because of both technical problems and the reluctance of 20% of the White respondents to answer the question about their religion (Dubb 2). An “inflated” figure of 91,859 was determined by demographers, based on the assumption “that the proportion of Jews who had not stated their religion was the same as that of other whites”; in addition, a second estimate, based on projections from
the 1980 census figures, arrived at a figure of 106,000 (Dubb 2, 3). The former figure represents 0.3% of the total population, and 1.8% of Whites, while the latter figure represents 0.3% and 2.1% of the respective populations (Dubb 3). Using a 1991 averaged figure of 100,000 Jews, projections for the year 2001 indicate a further decline of between 4,000 and 14,000 persons (Dubb 4). If South African Jewish emigration and Australian Jewish immigration maintain their present rates, it is quite probable that the Jewish population of South Africa will fall below that of Australia before the end of the 1990s.

This brief outline of the sociodemographic history of South African Jewry highlights both its distinctiveness amongst Diaspora communities and the manifold ambiguities of its position within a society predicated (at least until 1994) on institutionalized racism. The categorical nature of the stereotypical constructions of the Jew in both South African political practice and the popular imagination exacerbated the minority status of the Jews and reinforced their exclusion as “Other.” However, within the hierarchical power structure which the principle and practice of categorization has constructed in South Africa, the Jews are privileged and thus complicit in supporting the categorical thinking which, paradoxically, both accepts their minority affiliation with the dominant White minority and, simultaneously, rejects them as Jews, as “Blacks.” Within the context of South African apartheid, the nature of “category” itself both includes and excludes Jews. Thus, despite their collective memory of European discrimination and persecution based on just such categorical injunctions, Jews acquiesced to the “mandatory pluralism” of South Africa and, free from the determining stigma of a non-white pigmentation, benefitted from its practice (Shimoni 5).
Jewish Self-Hatred: Theory and Practice

Within the bifurcated Afrikaner-English polity in White South Africa, and in the absence of any “unhyphenated South Africanism,” the relatively homogeneous (Lithuanian) and strongly Zionist-oriented Jewish population retained a strong communal identity (Shimoni 6). And, although, as a community, Jews “showed little concern for the underprivileged racial groups, not even for the Indians whose fate occasionally touched theirs,” concurrently (and in inverse proportion to their minute percentage of the overall population) Jews, as individuals, “predominated among those few whites who were dissenters and took up the cause of the underprivileged masses” (Shimoni 8). Nevertheless,

[i]t must be borne in mind that the involvement of Jews in the opposition to the apartheid system, notwithstanding its public salience, actually reflected the attitudes of only a very small segment of the total Jewish population. With compelling inherent socioeconomic factors reinforcing their position within the white racial group, for the most part Jews conformed to the norms of English-speaking whites. (Shimoni 12)

In the light of two millennia of antisemitism, and in the aftermath of the Shoah, “[t]he crucial question,” especially for South African Jews, for whom the multiple ambiguities of their lives had become emotionally and morally untenable, “became whether one condoned or opposed a societal system based on legally enforced racial discrimination” (Shimoni 27). The irresolution of this moral double bind, combined with the internalized, stereotypical negative images of themselves with which Jews had been assailed, manifests itself as an
insidious form of *apartheid*: self-hatred. In her unique, comprehensive, and seminal
analysis, *People of the Book: Images of the Jew in South African English Fiction 1880-
1992* (1996), Marcia Leveson, a writer and a professor in the English Department of the
University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, points out that “‘Jewish self-hatred’—or
Jewish anti-Semitism—continues to be reflected in South African fiction” from the earliest
Jewish writings of the late nineteenth century right “up to the present day” (50).

The psychopathology, history, and ideology of Jewish self-hatred have been astutely
documented and analyzed by Sander L. Gilman in *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and
the Hidden Language of the Jews* (1986). Gilman finds in the unique example of Jewish
self-hatred the representative conditions of its universal deeper structure (1). He defines
self-hatred in terms of its inherently psychological process:

Self-hatred results from outsiders’ acceptance of the mirage of themselves
generated by their reference group—that group in society which they see as
defining them—as a reality. This acceptance provides the criteria for the myth
making that is the basis of any communal identity. This illusionary definition
of the self, the identification with the reference group’s mirage of the Other, is
contaminated by the protean variables existing within what seems to the
outsider to be the homogeneous group in power. (Gilman 2)

This categorization as Other results in an internalized, insoluble paradox:

Those labeled as different react in the classic double bind situation. Anyone
faced with a set of such conflicting, inherently irreconcilable signs represses
this conflict, saying, in effect, The contradiction must be within me, since that
which I wish to become cannot be flawed. Perhaps I truly am different, a parody of that which I wish to be. The first sign—be like us, and you will become one of us—implies accepting one's own difference. But the more one attempts to identify with those who have labeled one as different, the more one accepts the values, social structures, and attitudes of this determining group, the farther away from true acceptability one seems to be. For as one approaches the norms set by the reference group, the approbation of the group recedes. In one's own eyes, one becomes identical with the definition of acceptability and yet one is still not accepted. For the ideal state is never to have been the Other, a state that cannot be achieved. (Gilman 2-3)

By projecting its perceived anxieties onto the Other, the reference group attempts to protect its ability to define, manipulate, and implement the hierarchical categories of (its) power and privilege which the Other's very presence supposedly threatens.

By trying to erase its sense of difference and alienation, the Other, in turn, projects its implied and inescapable deficiencies onto another target, a secondary Other, who symbolizes the despised aspects of identity of which the former is trying to be rid:

This projection of Otherness, with its implied definition of what is or is not acceptable within the reference group, is accepted by the outsiders as the definition of both what they should not be and what they should become. In subconsciously integrating their rejection into their definition of themselves, they, too, proceed to project their sense of the unresolvable dichotomy of the double bind, but they project it onto an extension of themselves. . . . In
projecting this Otherness onto the world, they select some fragment of that
category in which they have been included and see in that the essence of
Otherness, an essence that is separate from their own definition of themselves
and embodies all of the qualities projected onto them by the power group...
The fragmentation of identity that results is the articulation of self-hatred.
(Gilman 3)

Thus could the acculturated and assimilated Anglo-German Jewish community in South
Africa project its sense of its “former” Jewish difference onto its refugee Litvak co-
religionists, whose appearance, practice, and language were “foreign,” or Other, even to the
established Jewish community.

Gilman further argues that “[a]ll the qualities in the vocabulary of Otherness are
present at all times” and, thus, “any quality can become another quality, even its antithesis,
instantly,” regardless of its assumed immutability (5). In this way, the Christian conflation
of Jews with Blackness throughout the common era has its contemporary resonance in the
colonial iconography of Blacks and Whites:

That blacks are black, that they are the antithesis of the mirage of whiteness,
the ideal of European aesthetic values, strikes the reader as an extension of
some “real,” perceived difference to which the qualities of “good” and “bad”
have been erroneously applied. But the very concept of color is a quality of
Otherness, not of reality. For not only blacks are black in this amorphous
world of projection; so, too, are Jews. (Gilman 6)\textsuperscript{5}

And “[s]eeing the Jew as black reflects the protean nature of all perceptions of difference”
(Gilman 12). However, although colour is undoubtedly a general construct of Otherness, the
equating of Black and Jew has a much more specific and powerful resonance when removed
from the European sphere of Gilman’s study and recontextualized within the political
domain of apartheid South Africa.

Gilman’s model illuminates the process of the fragmentation and deterioration of
Jewish identity which self-hatred executes. The unconscious (or conscious) presence of the
trace of self-hatred in Jewish South African fiction is a recurrent motif in Leveson’s
exhaustive analysis of the Jewish stereotype in South African fiction. She demonstrates that
non-Jewish writers frequently construct antisemitic caricatures based on both European
models of Jewish Otherness and specific local variations of those paradigms which have
emerged in the course of Jewish settlement. Moreover, Leveson illustrates that the same
types of stereotyping occur in the Jewish fictions of (at least) nominally Jewish South
African writers, who have evidently internalized the mirage of Otherness projected on them
by the larger reference group (who until 1994 controlled every aspect of South African
political and social life) and projected that chimera into their fiction. Self-hatred is not
specifically thematized in these works; however, its subtextual nuances can be detected
remarkably frequently, suggesting that the conditions in South Africa were much more
conducive to its expression in fiction than they were in either Jewish Australian or Jewish
Canadian fiction. This may be attributable to the internalized moral and ethical ambiguities
of the Jewish presence in South Africa, the untenable dichotomy of being Other—both
privileged White and penalized “Black”—within apartheid South Africa’s “mandatory
pluralism” (Shimoni 5). Another mitigating factor, which may be found in the specific
situation of the Jewish South African writer, is the relation of the Jewish writer in general to language. For, central to Gilman’s model of Jewish self-hatred, “[i]t is in language, then, that the tensions of Otherness and thus eventually of self-hatred can best be examined” (Gilman 15).

The process of identity fragmentation, leading to Jewish self-hate, begins with the internalization and acceptance of stereotypes imposed upon Jews by the dominant non-Jewish reference group. Through a similar, parallel process, the internalization and usage of the language through which these stereotypes are expressed perpetually imprisons the Jewish Other within the language which defines his/her status as outsider. Historically, “[w]riting [has] play[ed] a central role in defining Jews against the preconceptions of the world in which they find themselves” and “is a general model for the articulation of Jewish identity in the West” (Gilman 15). However, for the Other to truly possess the language of those who define him/her, it would be necessary not to be an Other. This paradox also applies to Jewish experience in the Diaspora:

Western society stresses the centrality of the written word as the icon of “civilization,” or “culture,” and believes that the Other does not—cannot—share in this most holy and civil of acts, the act of writing (and the parallel acts of reading and interpretation). The Other cannot ever truly possess “true” language and is so treated. They therefore are at pains to constantly stress their ability to understand, to write, on levels more complex, more esoteric, more general, and more true than do those treating them as “inarticulate Jews.” The reference group sees them as inarticulate because while they use the language
of their environment, they can never possess it. Why? Because they have their own hidden language, the language that is the true articulation of their Jewishness, the language of Otherness. (Gilman 15)

At the outset of the Diaspora, Jews were necessarily bilingual, speaking the common, secular language of the linguistic environment in which they settled and knowing (usually) the “hidden” sacred language of their holy texts: Hebrew. However, “it is clear that the fable of this hidden language, and how it was defined, may have drawn its external structure from the fact of Jewish bilingualism but drew its substance from the quality of language always ascribed to the Other. The Other’s language is hidden, dark, magical, dangerous, private. So, too, is the language of the Jews” (Gilman 16). Thus the problem of language inheres in the exilic condition of Diaspora Jews.

In the Middle Ages, Hebrew, the language of Jewish liturgy and religious practice, was perceived as the hidden, magical language of the Jews. However, “[a]s the Jew became less and less the medieval magician and more and more the object of Christian economic interest, the focus shifted from Hebrew to Yiddish, a tongue that European [Ashkenazi] Jews spoke long before it became the ‘secret language of the Jews’ in the seventeenth century” (Gilman 18). Yiddish, and its Sephardic Jewish counterpart, Ladino, both contain traces of Hebrew vocabulary and usage, and are written in Hebrew characters. However, unlike Hebrew, the holy language, both Yiddish and Ladino are demotic languages of the Diaspora, pidginized forms of High German and Old Spanish respectively in which the “secret” language of Hebrew has been suppressed. In pre-Shoah Eastern Europe, Yiddish was emblematic of the inferiority of the Jewish Other and the suppressed Jewish culture.
This does not mean that Yiddish itself was, or is, a marker of Jewish self-hatred. Rather, it signified Jewish difference or Otherness as discerned and defined by the non-Jewish cultures in which Jews lived. As a sign of Otherness, Yiddish and its usage in non-Yiddish Jewish literature may equally likely be celebratory of difference as it may be condemnatory —reviving the spectre of the hidden language of the Jews. On the other hand, self-hatred is inextricably linked to the “Jews’ consciousness of the myth of the difference of their language” (Gilman 19). If language is understood as a symbolic system of representation, then it need not literally be Yiddish or Ladino (or even the ability to speak them) which marks Jewish self-hatred, but, rather, the very self-consciousness of Jewish difference itself becomes symbolic of the hidden “language” of Otherness, a “language” of innate identity which, if repressed and disowned, festers into self-hatred.

For the Jewish writer who foregrounds Jewish themes, the problem of language is further exacerbated:

This model for the rise of self-hatred out of the myth of a hidden language of the Jews can be examined only in very specific contexts. For if the anxiety felt by Jews as writers centers about their internalization of this myth and their projection of it in the world, then only in those moments in their writings when they choose (or are forced) to deal with “Jewish” topics will this sense of anxiety surface. Suddenly they are dealing with that category which they have successfully repressed through the very act of writing and which now draws this success into question. The Jew as writer reasons, I write for an audience that recognizes my ability as a master of a specific discourse. Once I deal with
the "Jewish Question," I raise the specter of the hidden language of the Jews and thus draw my own mastery into question. At such moments the text reveals its inner fabric, enabling the reader to examine self-hatred and its projection into the fiction of the text. For within the text is played out the sense of the loss of control, of the rending of the mask that enables the Other to function in spite of being rejected by the group that defines them. They become one with their ability to control their language, to show their difference from the image of the Other that they have internalized. (Gilman 20)

Although Gilman states that the concept of the hidden language of the Jews "can exist only if there is an antithesis between the idea of the nature of national language and that of the language of the Jews," and that the definition of the Jewish Other in terms of his/her secret language can function best in societies which have constructed overarching national myths of linguistic homogeneity, and that in more heterogeneously self-defined societies "such a simple reduction does not work," his argument presupposes that an actual Jewish tongue different from that of the reference group is still necessary (Gilman 20). But the symbolic "language" of Jewish difference and identity can be expressed in any tongue, including English. Thus the concept of the hidden language of the Jews may be understood—both literally and symbolically—as an aspect of self-loathing.

To recontextualize into a South African context the paradigm of Jewish self-hatred Gilman describes, the issue of language is conjoined to the matrix of internalized ambiguities which confront the South African Jew. The predominantly Yiddish-speaking Jewish Lithuanian immigrants generally allied themselves with the English-speaking White
community rather than that of the White Afrikaans speakers. For the most part, Jews, though subject to antisemitism, enjoyed White status and privilege in a society demarcated more by race and colour than by ethnicity. However, despite their mastery of English, South African Jews were portrayed as irrevocably Other, their suppressed “language” being less Yiddish than Jewish identity itself. Yet, being perceived as different, as Other, by the White reference group within a polity predicated on degrees and categories of pigmentation which served to define the quality of Otherness (and not reality) meant that the categorization of Jews as White Others could easily shift to allow their redesignation as Black Others. The expression of antisemitism (and its attendant European iconography) took new forms in the rigorously racially segregated South African society, forms instantly recognizable by Jews seeking to escape their lethal prototypes in Europe. However, in their acceptance of apartheid, Jews had to forget or disavow the ethical and moral precepts of their religion, had to forget that they had been the kaffirs of Europe, had to repress their identity as Jews (their true hidden language), which had acted as their conscience. This fragmentation of, and separation from, Jewish identity may be characterized as a self-imposed apartheid of self-hatred.

Precursors: William Luscombe Searelle, Frank Danby, Louis Cohen, and Sarah Gertrude Millin

For many Jewish South African fiction writers, the suppression and rejection of their inborn identity is projected into their “Jewish” texts as self-rejection. This projection takes
many forms. Marcia Leveson enumerates the stereotypically negative markers of Jewish difference present in South African fiction: physical appearance, dress, speech (accent), manners, illicit activity, dishonesty, sharp practice, laziness, unproductivity, etc. In short, all the stereotypes of the Jew constructed in the popular culture of South Africa during the years of Jewish immigration find expression in its fiction. Leveson’s examples show that even the earliest fiction by writers of Jewish descent—Isaac Israels (1860-1907), also known as the impresario William Luscombe Searelle, who wrote Tales of the Transvaal (1896); Julia Frankau (1864-1916), who wrote Pigs in Clover (1903) under the pseudonym Frank Danby; and the very popular Louis Cohen (1854-1945), whose Shloma Levy and Other Vagaries (1913) is especially malicious—often invoked negative images of Jews (Leveson 46-50). Indeed, these three writers “were themselves those very assimilationist Jews who feature prominently in the fiction of the Gentile writers” during that period (Leveson 50).

Sarah Gertrude Millin

The first significant Jewish South African fiction writer was Sarah Gertrude Millin (née Liebson, 1889-1968), who, as a child, immigrated with her parents to South Africa from Lithuania. She is best remembered, and criticized, for her novel God’s Stepchildren (1924). However, not until the publication of The Coming of the Lord (1928) did Millin foreground Jewish themes and characters: “The novel is, as she intends, an exploration of the minutiae of inter-group relations, an analysis of the problems of prejudice and
marginality, and the consciousness of stigma and alienation” (Leveson 79).

At the centre of this multi-faceted exploration is the relation between Old Isaac Nathan, an immigrant shopkeeper in Gibeon, and his son Saul, a South African-born, English-trained, medical doctor. The physical doubling of characters, events, and groups in the novel—Old Nathan and the German immigrant with whom he plays chess every Saturday afternoon, Dr. Diethelm; Dr. Saul Nathan and his native counterpart, Dr. Tetyana; Jews and the native African “Levites,” who every Passover/Easter for the previous seven years have gathered at the Heights of Gibeon to practise their special religious amalgam of Jewish and Christian rituals—has its symbolic resonance in the disturbing doubleness Saul feels within his own divided identity:

He [Arnold Duerden] could not see that Saul Nathan was two men. One of him lived among the people in the big world, and had their interests and their conventions, and even their thoughts and traditions and standards and prejudices. And the other lived in a little ghetto, and suffered and enjoyed with his own, and looked out on the big world, and himself in it, with shame and amusement and satisfaction and sorrow and contempt. That really doubled his life. It made it peculiarly rich. Even the resentments lent it colour. (Millin, *The Coming of the Lord* 96-97)

This inner, psychological division—despite it peculiar richness—manifests itself most acutely in Saul’s troubled relations with his father. As Saul makes his assimilationist and self-destructive journey towards modernity, he becomes further estranged from his Jewish identity and its ancient traditions. This inner tumult is projected onto the familial relation
between them, as the Jewish past, embodied by Old Nathan, is abandoned in the present generation by his son. Near the end of the novel, Saul is killed at the camp of the Levites when it is destroyed by government troops, and Old Nathan mourns in the traditional Jewish manner. The doubling of Jewish self-hatred and assimilation with conflict between the generations is a recurrent theme in the Jewish fiction which followed.

Arthur Markowitz

Although Little Eden, by Bertha Goudvis (1876-1965), The Narrowing Lust, by Madeleine Masson, and Face to Face: Short Stories, by Nadine Gordimer (1923-), were all published in 1949, none foregrounds Jewish material. In the same year, however, the first post-Shoah Jewish South African novel to thematize Jewish concerns was also published: Facing North: A South African Novel (hereafter FN), by Arthur Markowitz (1910-).

Facing North is a malevolently satiric tale of a wealthy Jewish family living on Garden Avenue in Parkmead, an exclusive Cape Town suburb. The house is called “Ish-Tov, the home of the righteous man” (Markowitz, FN 24). However, as the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that Victor Freye, patriarch of the family and the home’s owner, is not a righteous man, and neither is his family’s life the paradise suggested by its Edenic address.

Victor is a Lithuanian immigrant, the son of Rabbi Moses Jonathan. However, as soon as he reached South Africa, he began to distance himself from his Jewish heritage by, symbolically, changing his name:

Thirty years ago, when he arrived in Cape Town, a tall, big-boned youth in
his twenties, Victor did not have the opportunity to indulge himself. In those days, with the squalor of Eastern Europe still a reality to him, he knew only one ambition. He wanted security and all that came with it: a wife, an obedient wife, to minister to his wants and to bear him children; a home as solid as the bare rock that protruded from the sides of Table Mountain; respectability and social position among his fellow men. As a first step to the achievement of his object he changed his name from Freydberg to Freye. It sounded less foreign and he wanted to be a good South African. (Markowitz, FN 15-16)

Victor begins his South African life as a *smous*, later establishing a store in Spoorplek which caters to the needs of the Black African mine workers. Yettah, the Polish Jewish immigrant he marries, brings him “luck” (Markowitz, FN 16). She opens a “‘kaffir-eatnik [sic]’” as an adjunct to the store (Markowitz, FN 23). However, their financial success is attained dishonestly. Yettah sews farthings into the pocket linings of the second-hand clothes for sale in the store. The Blacks are led to believe that the hidden farthings are sovereigns and thus pay exorbitant prices for the used clothing.

Markowitz constructs the Freye family background in terms of negative Jewish stereotypes common in both the popular culture and non-Jewish fiction of South Africa. For Victor Freye, the quest for wealth (imaged as gold, and thus conjuring up the image of the “Randlord”) is conflated with Jewish religious experience and practice, thus both establishing a new God worthy of human worship and sacralizing greed: “To the traders of Spoorplek the sight of these black men in their evil-smelling trucks was what a heavenly
vision is to the pious recluse: a self-imposed exile rewarded by a divine revelation, the god of gold come amongst his people” (Markowitz, FN 17). Through Yettah’s business acumen, Victor becomes “a noted financier” and, after moving to the coast, the Freye’s “Yevic Trading Company” evolves into “one of the foremost wholesale firms in Cape Town” (Markowitz, FN 58). Victor’s erasure of his Jewish identity, his stereotypical transmutation from Peruvian to Randlord to respectable member of the Benevolent Bureau is complete: “It was only the way he spoke English, the intonation rather than the accent, that betrayed his origin and linked him with the young immigrant from Lithuania” (Markowitz, FN 58).

The suppression of his mother tongue, Yiddish (last remnant of his Jewish origin and the hidden language of his difference), and its attendant accent de-Judaizes Victor’s identity and completes his assimilative transformation. Throughout, Markowitz unsparingly castigates Victor for his hypocrisy and self-delusions. After the Benevolent Bureau has, in its benevolence, turned down a loan request from a recently-arrived German refugee, Irmgard, who had fled Nazi Vienna when her name appeared on a list of proscribed members of a democratic organization, Victor offers her a ride home and then attempts to seduce her in his car. Irmgard, who is Victor’s elder daughter’s friend and role model, rejects the advantage taken of her: “I only wish Maxa could see you like this. My god, how it would open her eyes to your hypocrisy, how it would expose your cant about virtue and respectability” (Markowitz, FN 52). The effects of Victor’s personal duplicity and evident self-hatred are visited upon his three children, particularly the second-born, Maxa, around whom the story revolves.

Maxa, named after her Victor’s father, Rabbi Moses Jonathan, is a university student,
and the morning she is introduced by the author she sleeps in late and misses her Ethics class:

It was a day of commonplace routine that lay before Maxa. Yet, when she returned to her room, she dressed with meticulous care, spending almost an hour to complete her toilet. Surveying her appearance with a final glance at the mirror, she decided to apply a little more rouge, to darken the shade on her lids and to lengthen the line of her brows above them. This done she was at last satisfied and smiled because she thought that she looked exceedingly attractive in her pigeon-grey dress and high-heeled black shoes that were inlaid with a strip of grey suede. (Markowitz, FN 60)

Maxa’s wealth, status, and inordinate attention to personal appearance evoke another stereotype, the “Kugel,” the South African version of the “Jewish American Princess.” An explicit parallel is drawn between her and her father: “She was as proud of her body as her father was proud of his money” (Markowitz, FN 60). However, she is not happy. Her desire for freedom from parental control expresses itself in a self-destructive, self-hating, flaunting of her physical beauty and the power she can attain over men through seduction and sex.

Wishing to emulate her worldly-wise, European friend, Irmgard, Maxa initiates an affair with Robert Hipkin, a non-Jewish English grocer who owns a shop and property (and the status such ownership confers) at The Corner Block and whose South African wife is away on a holiday. They first meet when Maxa buys a newspaper at his shop:

He was attentive and meek and in his presence she experienced a delicious
sense of power. . . . In this setting, she thought, she could make herself indispens-able. She could make this lonely, pathetically grateful man her slave. . . . She realized jubilantly that she could rouse and restrain him, that she could whip him into excitement and lash him into submission, that she could rule and misrule him at her whim. (Markowitz, FN 120, 122, 125)

After the consummation of their affair, the omniscient narrative voice remarks of Maxa: “Life was her willing slave, and she fancied herself in the role of slave-master” (Markowitz, FN 154). Through this clichéd diction, reminiscent of that found in steamy romances, Maxa is portrayed as a dominatrix, combining within that persona stereotypical images of both misogyny and antisemitism: the female power of seduction and the wanton sexuality of the Jewess. Ironically, both father and daughter are independently seducing (and “screwing”) Hipkin. In a parallel subplot, Victor schemes to buy out cheaply the increasingly insolvent Hipkin, who owes him money, in order to obtain The Corner Block he covets as a location for a new block of flats. After obtaining the property and manipulating City Hall to change the zoning of the property to suit his purpose, Victor does build the Maxa Mansions.

When Victor reads a letter from Irmgard to Maxa, he discovers his daughter’s secret affair: “He had never suspected that there could be so much falsehood in a daughter of his” (Markowitz, FN 181). In his arrogance, hypocrisy, and disingenuousness, he blames Irmgard for Maxa’s actions: “And the rat of his smugness suddenly saw a way out of the trap of self-accusation” (Markowitz, FN 181). The rhetorical image of the rat, conflating Victor, a Jewish character, with vermin, is appallingly insensitive in the wake of the very recent experience of the Shoah, and especially unconscionable when authored by a Jewish

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After Victor nearly beats Maxa to death, Maxa dismisses Hipkin, her appetite for him sated: “She was like a diner who, having eaten to repletion, walks past a restaurant with a feeling almost of revulsion against the smells and noises of eating” (Markowitz, FN 197). Yettah takes Maxa to Johannesburg for a vacation. There, Maxa meets Eric, a twenty-seven-year-old Jewish photographer. Back in Cape Town, Maxa falls in love with Eric through their correspondence, and they agree to marry when Maxa turns twenty-one. However, she constantly wavers between fantasies of love and delusions of domination: “Yet, the desire for domination had not left her entirely, and beneath her thoughts of how completely she would give herself to Eric, she cherished the hope that by doing so she would make him utterly dependent on her” (Markowitz, FN 234). But Maxa’s sexual appetite is far from replete. She explores her “freedom” and carnal power through another affair, this time with Denzil Tiquin, a Eurasian architect from Mauritius, whom she encounters randomly at a meeting of the League of Progressives coincidentally taking place at the coastal Two Oceans Hotel where she is staying. Tiquin has been snubbed socially because of his racial categorization as Coloured; he revenges himself by seducing and discarding white women. Instead of Tiquin becoming Maxa’s slave, however, she becomes his. Again, ironically, Tiquin becomes the architect for Victor’s Maxa Mansions, the cornerstone of which is erected on Hipkin’s former property on Maxa’s twenty-first birthday.

Maxa accomplishes her total degradation after she runs away to Durban. While her distraught family “keep[s] up appearances for the sake of his [Victor’s] name,” Maxa
obtains a job with a Jewish firm and begins to have a series of affairs with the German-Jewish refugees who work there as salesmen (Markowitz, FN 311). These Jewish salesmen are portrayed as modern incarnations of the stereotypical “verneuking” Jew and viciously satirized:

Money alone could stop the sneers and insults to which they were exposed, and they devoted themselves to its acquisition with urgency and ruthlessness. High principles were luxuries which they could ill afford, and fair-play nothing but a brake on their ambition. (Markowitz, FN 317)

In another flagrant example of a trope of gratuitous malignancy, the author adds, “[t]hey were all drawn to her [Maxa] like flies to an open sore” (Markowitz, FN 321). Now “a slave to the pursuit of freedom,” Maxa becomes little more than a cheap whore while in Durban (Markowitz, FN 320). Upon fleeing to Johannesburg, she takes a room at “Talmage Court, Delport Street—right in the middle of tart-town[’]” (Markowitz, FN 339).

When the estranged Maxa finally capitulates to her father, he goes to Johannesburg and engages Charles Werdoff, a Jewish marriage broker, to find Maxa a husband. She is eventually matched with Joss Kittel, a Lithuanian-Jewish immigrant and Brakfontein shopkeeper, who wants to marry “an educated girl” (Markowitz, FN 365). Although she knows that marriage to Joss would be a farce, Maxa accepts his proposal and the respectability and power which she feels will accrue to her as a wife:

She wondered what Joss Kittel would be like in bed. She could not imagine that he would dare to assert himself even then. She meant to keep him as he was—an obedient slave waiting for her commands at the foot of the pedestal
on which he had placed her. She would see to it that his eyes never lost their
eexpression of begging humility, that his arms remained hesitant and his touch
apologetic. His meekness would restore her confidence, would make her
forget the insults she had suffered. . . . (Markowitz, FN 379)

David, Maxa’s older brother, tells his girlfriend, Rachel, that Maxa is marrying “[‘]a kaffir-
eatnik,’” a position once held by Victor and Yettah Freye (Markowitz, FN 390).

The tawdry climax of the novel is the wedding of Maxa and Joss at the Great
Synagogue in Cape Town. At the end of the ceremony, Joss has to stamp on the traditional
glass twice before it breaks; Maxa can barely conceal her contempt. This fraudulent
wedding functions parodically, as it legitimizes Maxa’s ritual prostitution within the
sanctity of a marriage. Once again, Judaism and Jewish religious practice, symbolized in
the wedding ceremony— itself a symbolic reenactment of the spiritual marriage between
God and humanity— are cynically debased.

The final scene of the novel presents Maxa and Joss at the outset of their honeymoon
at the Two Oceans Hotel, built on the spit of land separating the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.
The divisions within herself and her marriage overwhelm Maxa’s fragmented identity and
composure. As she breaks down in despair, her psychopathological self-hatred is projected
first onto the land and, then, onto her husband, the Jew, and she is revulsed:

All at once she felt slighted. The land seemed to be averting its face from her.
She was being driven into exile by a continent that thought her unworthy, that
had interned her in its southernmost tip. And now the sun was leaving her, too.
She did not want to be left behind in the dark; she did not want to be left alone
with this clumsy, doting stranger who had become her husband. She bit her lips. This marriage was more than she could stand. She had over-reached herself. She had over-estimated her endurance. Suddenly she felt weak. She had to hold on to the curtains. Tears were falling from her heavy-lidded eyes. They were dissolving the mascara on her lashes. She did not bother to remove the smudges. She began to sob.

“For God’s sake, my darling, what is the matter?”

She did not reply. His voice sounded alien to her and revolting. She had never quite realised before how badly he spoke. His accent grated.

Joss thought he understood. He came up to her silently, trembling with compassion. Her sobbing was very dear to him. It expressed all the sweet shyness, the delicate reluctance of a maiden alone for the first time with her husband. He would be very gentle, he vowed. He would be patient. Carefully, as if she were made of porcelain, he drew her towards him. Black streaks disfigured her face and her eyes were bathed in tears, but to him she was beautiful. He rested her head on his shoulder and kissed her hair. His emotions overwhelmed him.

“Doin’t be afreid, mine sweet,” he wheedled. “Doin’t cry, mine vife, I lov you . . . Doin’t cry . . .” (Markowitz, FN 399-400)

The cringing verb “wheedled,” combined with the Yiddish-accented English, signifies the hidden language of Jewish identity, which Maxa, in her self-hatred, denies in herself but sees and hears in Joss—the object onto whom she has projected her suppressed, fragmented,
and despised feelings of Jewish Otherness.

Leaving consideration of the dubious literary merit of Facing North aside, this text is still problematic. Jewish self-hatred is both projected onto the novel through the use of antisemitic stereotypes, diction, imagery, and tropes and introjected by the main characters portrayed in the text. The erasure of Jewish identity, the parodying of Jewish religion and practice, the parading of Jewish stereotypes, and the devastating intergenerational conflicts within an assimilated Jewish South African family are all thematic concerns satirized by the author. However, the satire is devoid of compassion; it is merely perniciously self-hateful. Leveson makes the salient point that "Markowitz sets out to expose his perceptions of Jewish elitism and Jewish business malpractices by manipulating the stereotypes of the foreign Jew, the dishonest Jew, the assimilationist Jew—the commonplaces of earlier fiction—in a text which could arguably be used to fan anti-Semitism" (128). Moreover, the Shoah is a palpable silence, a grotesque erasure, in this novel; although the story probably takes place just prior to World War II, there is no consciousness whatsoever that by 1945, a mere three years before the book’s publication, one-third of world Jewry had been annihilated in Europe. By ignoring such a momentous historical event, Facing North demonstrates the catastrophic apartheid of self-hatred and enacts its own form of Jewish genocide.

Markowitz’s second novel, Market Street: A Novel of South Africa (1959; hereafter MS), satirizes Jacob Silber as he transforms himself from (Kovno) Lithuanian immigrant to South African millionaire:

And the idea was to get hold of money, plenty of it and in a hurry. Jacob knew
it. He had identified himself with the idea of Market Street, and had made it his own. Jacob, the smart dispatch clerk, the alert little foreigner with his eyes on the main chance, Jacob who sold salmon sandwiches as a side line, Jacob the salmon, the tough-skinned adventurous fish who had crossed the ocean to leap up the cataracts of commerce, driven by an instinctive urge to get to the top. (Markowitz, MS 21)

The salmon metaphor reinforces the stereotype of Jewish avarice by implying that Jews are animal-like in their instinctive, innate, uncontrollable compulsion to acquire wealth by any means. Indeed, the mineral wealth (gold) which makes Jacob’s fortune is discovered at the very end of the novel on land Jacob previously obtained by pressuring an Afrikaner farmer, Deventer, to sell his farm. The image of the Boerverneuker underpins this transaction, as Jacob does not divulge to the vendor his suspicion that the land may contain gold.

Len Melman, whose name changes from the Hebrew “Arye” (lion) to the Yiddish “Leibel” (lion) to the English “Leonard” to the diminutive “Len,” is Jacob’s co-worker and friend, an artist totally out of place on Market Street. As a foil to Jacob, Mel describes the Jewish condition in South Africa:

You are hated for becoming assimilated or remaining unassimilated, for being a liberal or for being an extremist. You are called a traitor and a deserter, a kafferboetie [kaffir lover] and a jingo, a Judas, an enemy of the people. And you are hated. (Markowitz, MS 180)

Mel’s own tortured sense of identity is exacerbated by his impossible relationship with Oliya Patel, a “Coloured” woman.
Jacob’s self-hatred is expressed by his desire to shed his identity as (Jewish) foreigner, and he believes the way to accomplish this paradoxical task is by the acquisition of land. In this way, he hopes to become a proto-Boer:

["I see it [the dilapidated farm] as the real Africa, neglected and half-forgotten, but richer than any other part of the world. And owning this farm will make me feel a true South African. I’ll belong to the land, I’ll be one of the volk—I won’t be a foreigner any more. . . .” (Markowitz, MS 192-93)

However, within the “mandatory pluralism” (Shimoni 5) of South Africa, all are foreigners in a “land of foreigners” (Markowitz, MS 181), so Jacob’s dream of assimilation remains a fantasy.

Despite Jacob’s and Len’s enlistment and service in World War II, the only theatre of the war mentioned is North Africa; again the Shoah is unmentioned, a deathly silence. And although the satire in this novel is less savage than that in Facing North, the discourse of self-hatred is still manifest.

Victor Barwin

The eight stories contained in Victor Barwin’s collection, Millionaires and Tatterdemalions: Stories of Jewish Life in South Africa (1952) present glimpses of Jewish South African life at about the turn of the twentieth century. Thematically, the stories concern Lithuanian-Jewish immigration (“The Emigrant Ship”); Jewish immigrants who become rich magnates in the Kimberley diamond fields and the Johannesburg property
market ("Gold from Ophir"); an immigrant’s devastating encounter with South African antisemitism ("Rejected and Admitted"); the treatment of Jewish evacuees to Lourenço Marques during the Anglo-Boer War ("Subjects of the Czar"); a Talmudic student’s memories of an adolescent encounter with a girl in Vilno and his reconnection with her years later after moving from South Africa to Israel ("Memoirs of a Talmudic Student: A Tale of Tel-Aviv"); and two tales of assimilation and familial discord ("A Convent Jewess" and "The Call").

"A Convent Jewess" is, thematically, very similar to *Facing North*. The tensions present in the oxymoronic title foreground an irrevocable schism within the character so described. A comfortable Johannesburg mother and father are divided about their only child’s education. The mother is an aspiring social climber trying to erase her European-Jewish *shtetl* background and her immigrant status by adopting the attitudes and emulating the mores of her affluent non-Jewish neighbours. Her position is adamant: "I will not allow our child to remain in the common Jewish school and mix with all the scum of Fordsburg and Ferreira. We must send her to a high-class convent school and make a grand lady of her" (Barwin 81). Further, the omniscient narrator comments that the mother is motivated by "the preposterous ambition of seeing her child associate with the girls of the so-called aristocracy of her neighbourhood and ‘not mixing with the scum of Fordsburg and Ferreira’, as she herself put it" (Barwin 83). The *topos* of the viciously antisemitic notion of immigrant Jews equalling "scum" was common in the popular discourse and fiction at the time of the great influx of Jews between 1881 and 1914. However, put into the mouth of a Jewish character by a Jewish author, this twice iterated epithet betrays a distorted self-
conception projected self-hatingly onto an imagined, lesser, Jewish Other. Because she herself as a Jew feels like “scum,” it is imperative for the mother to find another to whom she feels superior and on whom she can unload her self-hatred. So, in her desire to have her daughter mingle with the “aristocracy” may be seen the mother’s wish to cleanse herself vicariously of her own plebian, “scummy” Jewish identity.

To the father’s protestations that “[‘]To be a Jewess is a pride!’” the daughter can only reply, “‘A pride, father! And why? Are not the Jews dirty old clothes dealers?’” (Barwin 88). Challenged by both his wife and daughter, the father capitulates.

Clearly, the mother’s attitudes have already been internalized by her daughter long before the issue of the convent school arose. And when, after five years, Sonia returns from the convent school to confront her parents, the erasure of her Jewish identity is complete, and her contempt for both her parents and all Jews is irreversible. Arriving with her non-Jewish fiancé, Sonia contemptuously mocks her parents’ disbelief: “‘... a Gentile, a gentleman and not a Shylock’” (Barwin 96). Protesting that she is not a Jewess, Sonia angrily intones, “‘The chain is broken’” (Barwin 96). And, indeed, as Sonia exits with her lover, the chain of Jewish tradition and identity from generation to generation has been severed by her self-hating act of apostasy.

In “The Call,” an assimilated Jewish man awakens on Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement); however, it is his servant who has to remind him of this day’s arrival. Having forgotten his mother’s blessing that “he be for ever ‘a good and pious Jew’” (Barwin 104), he now has a non-Jewish wife and children:

Neither did he lead them to the synagogue in the manner his father had led
him. His soul, his heart had become hardened, metallic, and was now locked up with his gold and diamonds. Mammon was his god, the 'Change his synagogue, and his prayers there had been answered sooner than all his tearful prayers and earnest devotions in the synagogue of his childhood—for was he not now the great man he had always striven to become, the possessor of millions, the mighty magnate? (Barwin 104)

Attached to their mother and her Teutonic love, his children see their father as a stranger in their home. Although the mother and children are to attend the consecration of a new church in his father-in-law's dorp, he invites his eldest son to join him at the synagogue. The mother's reaction is outrage: "'Come away,' she exclaimed. 'Your father is a Jew!'" (Barwin 107). The self-hatred of the husband is reinforced by the contempt his wife has for him. When his family leaves

[he was left alone—an outcast in his own home. Not the respected magnate of the 'Change and club, but the despised Jew; hated by his Gentile wife, feared by his un-Jewish children. (Barwin 107)

However, in this story, despite its melodrama, the theme of repentance—reflected in the image of Yom Kippur—effects a turning back towards Jewish identity. The husband finds his tallit (prayer shawl) and siddur (prayer book) and walks "to where his [dying] mother implored him to go, to where his own conscience now moved him to go—to his people, to his synagogue" (Barwin 111). However, the startlingly antisemitic reaction of the wife to the Jewish Other, her husband, remains unaddressed and unattenuated.
Two humorous books of short stories and sketches were published in the 1950s by M. Davidson: *My Jewish Clients* (1953) and *Jewish Merry-Go-Round* (1959). Although the tone is light in these stories of urban Jewish South African life, the satire is sometimes a little sharp. A story in the latter volume, "The Disrupted Seder," involves a familial dispute between Saul Bloomholtz and his second wife, Sylvia.

Saul wants to host the traditional Passover *seder*, the festival celebrating the freedom of the Jews from their slavery in North Africa (Egypt), but Sylvia, self-centredly, refuses to help with the preparations. Indeed, she dismisses the *seder* and, significantly, does not attend it. Instead, she telephones, interrupting the *seder* and ordering Saul pick her up at Warmbaths. He refuses, telling his wife that there has been a burglary. More concerned about the possible loss of her jewelry, Sylvia returns home and walks through the door which has just been opened in the traditional invitation to Elijah the Prophet to attend the *seder*. Most of Davidson’s sketches end with a witty punch line: Saul informs Sylvia that it was the *afikomen*—the piece of hidden matzah whose discovery and ingestion ends the traditional Passover meal—which was stolen (161). Beneath the humour of the sketch runs an undercurrent of marital tension, exacerbated by Sylvia’s self-rejecting refusal to participate in a Jewish festival celebrating, both symbolically and literally, physical and spiritual freedom from slavery and all its manifestations. The sketch suggests that to disparage Jewish practice through self-hatred is to remain enslaved, a concept with especially strong connotations in South Africa.
The use of Yiddish words transliterated into English is a common feature in the stories of M. Davidson, and he appends a Glossary to *Jewish Merry-Go-Round*. Likewise, David Dainow includes an extensive fourteen-page Glossary of Yiddish words and expressions at the end of his book, *Our Shadchan: Being the "Letters" of Reb Zalman Dreidel* (1954). *Shadchan* is the Yiddish word for a marriage broker, a matchmaker, “[t]he only ghetto character still remaining with Jews living in happier and more liberal countries” (Dainow xvi). In his Introduction, Dainow states that his construction of Reb Zalman Dreidel “is to give a peg to the author on which to hang some lines of harmless satire on certain aspects of Jewish life in the Golden City” (xvii). As a justification for the book, he adds:

While humour is an essential ingredient in our national personality, it is also an integral part of the ego of the individual Jew. Jewish communal life in South Africa is of a variegated character, but I often think that we are lacking a sense of humour. The following pages represent an attempt to pierce the gloom with the sharpened blade of Jewish wit. (Dainow xviii)

The book is structured as a series of letters which the *shadchan*, Reb Zalman, sends to the various parties involved in a potential match he is trying to facilitate. The letters are self-reflexive, full of puns, jokes, and wit, and infused with Yiddish intonations and vocabulary. The satire, however, is not always genial, often displaying a deep cynicism about Jewish interrelations (especially in marriage), and frequently drawing upon Jewish
stereotypes to reinforce such an attitude.

The two young people Reb Zalman is attempting to bring together are John Kelly Hamilton, a lawyer, "whose real name is Yankele Hurshowitzky" (Dainow 11), and Miss Gwendolyn Rosemarine Gelden-Steyn, a rich society girl:

  Gwendolyn Rosemarine was a proud child. She refused to have any sisters. Her brothers adored her. They are good Zionists. The older one Berel, who is a fine Jew, will not answer unless you call him Beverly. The younger one thinks Clarence Sedgwick is a good imitation of Chaim Zorach.

  It was then that Golda Rochelle became Gwendolyn Rosemarine and the family name was changed to Gelden-Steyn [from Geldenitsky]. Because she looks so like a shiksa Gwendolyn became one of the best players of the game of putting the ball in the basket. (Dainow 6)

The anglicizing of Jewish names signals the discomfort the various characters have about being identifiably Jewish and is a marker for the theme of assimilation. Gwendolyn is a stereotypically rich, spoiled "Kugel"; John "is in love with the rounded goldener figures in Gwendolyn's bank account" (Dainow 43). The juxtaposition of the Jew with the rapacious pursuit of money is also a common negative image.

When the two do eventually decide to marry, Rab Zalman writes to Gwendolyn and characterizes their future relation as husband and wife in a humorous way, but it is humour with a very sharp edge:

  May I wish you mazel tov on getting my young lawyer to give up his happy-go-lucky life to become a carpet to your feet. Before a man marries he does
not know where to put his head for worrying. When he is married he has no head to worry with.

I always think that a newly-made kalla [bride] should be proud her hunting days are over and a hecht [pike = fish] has been caught in the net. Soon the struggling is over. All the young woman has to do is to fry him in the oil of her poisonality. She can serve him up nicely for the rest of their lives with flour of praise and egg of affection. He then becomes a nice latke [potato pancake]. (Dainow 50)

Reb Zalman writes to Mrs. Gelden-Steyn that “marriage ... is often a strange grumble. Man is never complete until he marries; and then sometimes he’s finished” (Dainow 86). When the newly married Gwendolyn becomes unhappy, Reb Zalman writes to her about the role of love in marriage: “Remember that a Jew only loves the Almighty—and that takes a lifetime. You have picked up strange ideas from your goyishe [Gentile] neighbours. That’s the worst of living in a free country” (Dainow 107). And, as the book suggests, that sort of cultural interaction in South Africa results in various degrees of erasure of Jewish identity.

The shadchan, being an anachronism from the shtetl, cannot be expected to prevent Jewish assimilation into the surrounding White culture of South Africa. Yet, Reb Zalman advocates for his profession and the continuity of Jewish life and identity in the Diaspora despite his perceptions of the erosion of Jewish values and the secularization of Judaism. The ironic self-promotion of his vocation in the final letter of the book acknowledges the tensions and paradoxes inherent in his championing a disappearing Jewish ethos:

In the flush of modern life why should our young people trouble to do their
courting when a shadchan can do it for them for a fee? They can be better employed knocking a ball over a tennis curtain, or lifting a club to play a ball for tea or hitting shuttlecocks at the game of badminton at a Jewish sports club on Shabbos. (Dainow 109)

To the satirical humour intrinsic to the young Jews’ preoccupation with the pursuit of leisure activities at a Jewish facility, Dainow appends the cynical sting of the words “on Shabbos.” Jews cognizant of the importance and sanctity of the Shabbat in Jewish religious practice would not be indulging in activities prohibited on that day; neither would a Jewish sports club be open. The transformation of the Jewish Shabbat to the non-Jewish Saturday is a form of assimilation and de-sacralization which suggests a confusion of identity of which one of the symptoms is self-hatred.

Albert Segal

_Johannesburg Friday_ (1954), a novel by Albert Segal (1905- ), is a very tightly structured examination of a single Friday in the life of the Levanthal family. The four central Levanthal family members each has his/her own section, through which the perceptions of his/her day’s activities are recorded. The novel culminates with the family gathering at its suburban home to greet the arrival of Shabbat at sundown. Each of the four major sections of the novel—The Mother, The Son, The Father, The Daughter (plus a short Epilogue)— begins with the word “After” and contains the phrase “. . . on the morning of the twenty-fifth anniversary.” Each section is almost exactly the same length, and each
contains twelve chapters. This rigidly controlled form reflects, at the level of content, the novel's thematic preoccupations with inclusion and isolation, tradition and assimilation, control and chaos, and family and community.

Interestingly, neither Sidney, the eldest child (who has moved out and is now married), nor Phillip, the youngest child (who is still at school), has a voice of his own in the novel. Sidney is described, rhetorically, in terms of assimilation:

He was intelligent, industrious, clean-living, a credit to the Jewish community. If the Gentiles likewise respected him, it was because he was just as proud of the land of his birth as he was of his lineage. South Africa had given him a home, a livelihood, a fatherland. He had eaten of its salt, partaken of its hospitality. In return he had dedicated himself to its welfare, and it was a token of his gratitude that he had no objection to its assimilating him. (Segal 7)

Despite Sydney's status as the first-born son, his mother, Sophie, feels she cannot rely on him (or Phillip) but that she can on Laurie and Jessie. In "her mania for authority" and control, Sophie compartmentalizes her children, thereby exacerbating the conflicts each is shown to have with his/her parents (Segal 15). Nevertheless, her world and identity are inextricably bound up with her children and her role as their mother:

Besides being her flesh and blood, they were her heart, her soul, her conscience. Their prosperity was her prosperity, their joy her joy. So interwoven were their lives with her own that what they might refuse to share with her they must also fail to share among themselves. (Segal 6-7)

This interweaving of lives, however, is emotionally tyrannical, and reveals the emptiness at
the core of Sophie’s sharply circumscribed life and narrowly delineated domestic environment.

This overwhelming sense of confinement in the novel is related to the trope of marriage announced at the outset. The Levanthal’s wedding anniversary is unacknowledged by any family member. By the end of the Friday during which the novel unfolds, Sophie does remember: “Not only had there been no festivity of any kind, but no one had congratulated her on the twenty-fifth anniversary of her wedding day” (Segal 317). For Sophie, marriage has meant estrangement and atrophy:

Marriage not only forced her development to a standstill, it jerked her very nature out of alignment. She was not the woman she should have been.

Rather, she became the woman someone else wanted her to be. (Segal 26)

And as she has retreated from Max, and he from her, their home has become the focus of her maniacally meticulous attention, a home in which she is both prisoner and warden—by choice. The perimeter of the house itself encloses her sole domain; she does not venture outside, nor does she question the greatly diminished possibilities of her life. “[H]er life’s task” has been reduced to the “[s]acrificing [of] herself for her children” (Segal 35).

However, her persona as martyr is emotionally oppressive to them, and this results in various forms of estrangement.

Laurie, whose section is titled “The Son,” is apprenticed as a pharmacist to Andrew Macrae. He dislikes the job intensely and fantasizes about becoming a writer and penning an historical novel about South Africa. However, the family needs his income, so he is torn between personal fulfilment and obligation. He has impregnated his girlfriend, Poppy
Harris, and, in the course of the Friday, he gives her ergot, a drug meant to induce the abortion of their child. By rejecting his unborn child, Laurie self-aborts, symbolically erasing his life and transgressing the Jewish law which proscribes non-therapeutic abortion as murder.

Jesse, "The Daughter," also dislikes her present job as a secretary in a lawyer's office. She has been seeing Arthur Bretton, the non-Jewish son of one of the partners in the law firm, and, during her Friday, she realizes that the Jewish/Gentile breach between them cannot be bridged. Her decision to break with Arthur and affirm her Jewish identity is ironically undermined, however, by her unawareness of Yom Kippur's imminent arrival on the very day, that Sunday evening, on which she was planning to attend a concert. Her hairdresser reminds Jesse of the approaching Day of Atonement: "Here was one more proof, if proof were needed, of the gulf separating her from Arthur Bretton, separating the Levanthal family and all Jewry from the Gentile world" (Segal 307). However, Jesse's sense of separation between Jew and Gentile points to a similar split, within her own consciousness, between Jewish memory and Gentile assimilation. Her forgetting about Yom Kippur during the annual ten days of penitence which always separate it from Rosh Hashanah (New Year) symbolizes an amnesia of the very Jewish identity which, in letting Arthur go, she is trying to assert. It also points to the various points of division evident within the Levanthal family itself.

Max, "The Father," has, with his marriage to Sophie twenty-five years ago, abandoned the pursuit of material success and opened a decrepit bookstore, which he runs more like a hobby than as the source of his livelihood:
As money lost its appeal, so did success and power, both of which were easy of attainment in a land crying out to be milked. Instead of dabbling in the diamonds of Kimberley, in the gold of the Reef, as he had determined to do, he flung himself into the literary and the spiritual. While other men worshipped Mammon, he worshipped knowledge; while others prayed for riches, he prayed for wisdom. The history of his people lay before him in five thousand years of agony and glory, and he gathered it to his breast as once he had gathered the income from plots of land. (Segal 26)

The tensions between himself and his wife are exacerbated by “caste” differences. She is an English Jew from Whitechapel, London, whereas he is a “foreign” Jew; Sophie’s siblings “could not forgive their sister for having dragged their good English name in the Russian dust” (Segal 312-13). Sophie is a traditional Jewess; she lights the candles and recites the prayers which inaugurate and sanctify the Shabbat, and she never “forget[s] that she was a child of Israel, one of God’s chosen people” (Segal 71). Max is an Orthodox, practising Jew, whose Jewish identity is very strong. His Friday ends with his returning home for the traditional family dinner after attending the Shabbat evening services in the synagogue. However, despite his learning and his strong Jewish affiliation, he cannot stem the pressures on his children to assimilate their Jewishness to the culture in which they live:

To Mr. Leventhal it seemed that his son [Phillip], and a thousand more sons of the congregation, were prepared to grab the tenets of Judaism, throw them into the cauldron of blasphemy, stew them with insincerity, flavor them with hypocrisy, and poison them with deception. . . .
In every way, apparently, his children were betraying their trust. They were fast becoming aliens, agents of disloyalty. The roots from which they had sprung had not grown from the seed he had himself planted. Four branches had sprouted from the trunk, only to grow further and further apart. (Segal 221)

Though he exculpates himself from responsibility for the alienation of his children from their Jewish heritage, their estrangement is a reflection of that between their parents. Sophie in her home and Max in his bookstore signify the twin solitudes constituting their marriage. Parallel to those within the Freye family in Facing North, the unresolved intergenerational conflicts within the Leventhal family in Segal’s novel are similarly, though less spectacularly, self-destructive.

The categorization of characters in Johannesburg Friday by the rigidly defined roles they inhabit—Mother, Father, Son, Daughter—signifies exclusion within the inclusive category Family, a paradox which can be extrapolated to the position of Jews within the White minority of apartheid-divided South Africa. Thus, the construct Family (or “South Africa”) itself becomes a metaphor meant to contain and control the manifold paradoxes through which the society—both familial and national—is chaotically divided. As a metaphor for repression, Family limits freedom and curtails the boundaries of imaginative interpretation that would interrogate the very process of categorical thinking and its concomitant constructs of self-sustaining power. As Friday wanes, the Leventhal family ushers in Shabbat in the traditional manner. Shabbat Teshuvah, the shabbat which always precedes Yom Kippur, is customarily a time of introspection and repentance, a time to mend
broken relationships and to reconnect. As the Leventhal family members anticipate the Day of Atonement, however, there is little feeling that they are at one either with or between themselves.

Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer (1923- ), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, is one of the most prolific and internationally successful of all Jewish South African fiction writers. However, her work has very little Jewish content. In fact, commenting on several critics’ erroneous biographical declarations that Gordimer’s (fully Jewish) parentage is only part- or half-Jewish, Marcia Leveson suggests that “[i]t may be that Gordimer herself has colluded in these versions of her status, or rather her non-status as a Jew. It would seem that, like many other assimilated second and third generation Jews, she feels a sense of marginalisation, of being suspended between the Jewish community into which she was born, and the Gentile society with which she would seem to feel a greater kinship” (178). Although Leveson frames her comments within the grammar of conjecture—“[i]t may be,” “It would seem,” “she would seem”—Gordimer’s “Jewish” fiction certainly inscribes and foregrounds a recurring theme: Jewish estrangement and self-erasure.

Gordimer’s “A Watcher of the Dead” (hereafter “WD”), the first post-Shoah Jewish South African short story to thematize Jewish concerns, first appeared in Jewish Affairs in 1948 and was later republished in both the New Yorker (1951) and The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories (1952). The story, told retrospectively by an unnamed female
narrator, recalls the sudden death of her maternal grandmother in the tumultuous year 1939. The narrator’s father abandoned the family eight years previously, but his brother, the narrator’s Uncle Jules, abruptly and unexpectedly appears and makes arrangements for the funeral. Uncle Jules is described as being involved with “some sort of business (diamond buying? traveling in jewelry?)” (Gordimer, “WD” 56). The deliberate and stereotypical association of Uncle Jules with diamond buying (with its insinuation of IDB) suggests the illicit nature of his dealings in the business of both gems and death. For it is his knowledge and implementation of the Jewish rites and rituals of death and bereavement which alienate the narrator from both her dead grandmother and their estranged Jewish identities:

Although my grandmother was an old lady with the soft-pink color that comes from growing up in rainy England and the friendly, Cockney quickness of speech that comes from being a Londoner, and although she had friends on our street, in the unfashionable part of Johannesburg, who were Scotch and Afrikander and Italian, when she died, she was Jewish; all the other things were gone and she was only Jewish. Her race and the religion she had lightheartedly ignored claimed her for initiation at last, an initiation that we did not understand and that took her away from us as her death, by itself, had not yet done. (Gordimer, “WD” 56-57)

The narrator’s feeling of her grandmother’s being taken away from her through the enactment of Jewish religious practice reinforces the sense of rupture the narrator feels between herself and her putative Jewish identity:

I was a girl of sixteen and the eldest of the three children, but to me, as to my
brother William and my sister Helen, being Jewish had simply meant that we had a free half hour while the other children at our convent school went to catechism. If Mother had ever known any Jewish customs—and I doubt it—she had forgotten them long before we were born. (Gordimer, "WD" 57)

The certainty with which the narrator posits her mother’s supposed ignorance and/or amnesia of Jewish customs illustrates that the rupture between the narrator and her Jewish identity parallels that between her recollections and her reconstruction of them, between facts and their fictionalization, between her own adolescent experience of alienation and her retroactive adult introjection of that alienation into her mother’s pre-maternal consciousness. The paradox inherent in the narrator’s statement that she knows her mother has forgotten any Jewish knowledge (and identity) is heightened by the fact that the narrator did not exist at the time of her mother’s imagined forgetting. The maternal genealogy of the denial of Jewishness—from grandmother to mother to daughter—is analogous to the paternal legacy of the abandonment of family and responsibility.

The father’s absence from both the narrator’s life and the story precipitates a reversal of the traditional roles and responsibilities within the ruptured family:

My grandmother had lived with us and kept house for us ever since my father disappeared. Mother ran a little stationery shop and came home every night, like the man of the family, to hear from my grandmother what had happened during the day and to make the decisions and check the bills. It was just as it had been with my father. My grandmother did not like to have to make up her mind. She had never had to while my grandfather was alive; she had never
lived, as my mother had lived, with a man who abdicated all authority, a man
to lean on whom would have been to fall against empty air. . . . Mother
cherished her, in the true sense of the word, as a man cherishes a woman, a
woman a child, but also saw in her something that she herself did not have—
the easy tears, the gentle weakness, the submission to sex. (Gordimer, "WD"
60, 61)

As the narrator’s mother assumes the role of “husband” to her own mother, however, she
abdicates her position as mother to her own children. Their grandmother fulfills this role,
and, without any resolution of the implied intergenerational identity conflicts between
grandmother and daughter, history repeats itself through the next generation. Within the
“fatherless” family, however, the operation of maternal power remains unchanged.

Grandmother’s absence recalls and repeats the feeling of loss which accompanied the
father’s earlier desertion, thus conjoining the story’s thematically intertwined tropes of
abandonment and rupture—of both Jewishness and the (Jewish) family. The watcher
(watcher) of the deceased grandmother’s body observes Jewish custom, about which the
mother is ignorant. In addition, he enjoins the mother from touching her dead mother’s
body:

There was something of the air of a museum attendant about him; I felt that he
might say, “Now, is there anything in particular you would like to see? Any
information you wish?”

My mother went over to my dead grandmother and bent down and touched
her hair.
"Excuse me," said the old gentlemen. With a thrill of fear, I remembered the notices they put on exhibits: "Please do no touch!"

"What?" asked my mother.

"It is not allowed," the old gentleman said regretfully.

"I'm not doing anything," my mother said. "I've come to kiss my mother good night."

"It is not allowed—to touch the dead," said the watcher. . . .

He moved his hands with the apologetic, imploring denial of the small official. And, like all small officials, he clutched at the authority behind him. "It's against the Jewish religion," he said with a shrug and a smile of distress.

(Gordimer, "WD" 63-64)

The watcher thus symbolizes Jewish religious law and practice. And Jewishness is negatively marked as a fossilized, paternalistic, and bureaucratic instrument of denial, with the watcher as its ineffectual agent, artefact, and guardian. He falls asleep during the night, and, in the morning, her mother’s knowledge that he did shocks the narrator into starting to ask her mother a question she never does fully iterate. The mother was thus able to spend the night alone with her dead mother. The watcher’s failure to watch is a further recurrence of the topoi of abandonment and rupture. And in a story which focusses so emphatically on the imagery of observation and perception, and which is framed as an act of retrospection, this turn is especially ironic.

The narrative frame of the story distances the present telling from the recalled past. And it is significant that the year recalled is 1939, the year in which the Germans unleashed
World War II. However, the adult narrator who remembers and portrays herself as an adolescent girl displays no consciousness of the impending war and the attendant Shoah, which irrevocably ruptured Jewish life in Europe. The author specifies an historically resonant and provocative date. Yet on the major historical events of that year and their effects on Jews worldwide, both the narrator and the story are strangely silent, the subsequent conflagration erased from both memory and text.

A second retrospectively told tale in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories*, “The Defeated” (hereafter “TD”), concerns the adolescent relation between the unnamed, non-Jewish narrator and Miriam Saiyetovitz, the daughter of Jewish parents. Despite, or perhaps because of, her mother’s injunction that she stay away from the Concession stores in the small mining town in which the story is set, the narrator often visited them, marvelling in the thrill and implied danger of the illicit:

I would saunter along the shopwindows amongst them [African miners], and for me there was a quickening of glamour about the place: the air was thicker with their incense-like body smell, and the sudden rank shock of their stronger sweat, as a bare armpit lifted over my head. The clamor of their voices—always shouting, but so merry, so angry!—and the size of their laughter, and the open-mouthed startle with which they greeted every fresh sight: I felt vaguely the spell of the books I had read, returning; markets in Persia, bazaars in Cairo. . . . Nevertheless, I was careful not to let them brush too closely past me, lest some unnamable *something* crawl from their dusty blankets or torn cotton trousers onto my clean self, and I did not like the way they spat, with
that terrible gurgle in the throat, into the gutter, or, worse still, blew their noses loudly between finger and thumb, and flung the excrement horribly to the air.

(Gordimer, “TD” 195-96)

In her reconstruction of the remembered childhood experience of these encounters, the conspicuous and distastefully intimidating reality of the Black South African miners’ physical presence elides with the textually-imagined, Middle Eastern souk fantasies the child/narrator entertains. However, her exoticization of the South African Other contains a certain fascination, glamour, and attraction, which minimizes any threat.

In contrast, the Jewish Other, Miriam, whom the narrator observes at the Concession stores, is stigmatized: “When the child turned to look at me, I recognized her as one of the girls from ‘our school’; a girl from my class, as a matter of fact, called Miriam Saiyetovitz. Yes, that was her name: I remembered it because it was ugly—I was always sorry for girls with ugly names” (Gordimer, “TD” 197). This trope of ugliness finds its bestial correlative in the narrator’s description of Miriam’s defeated mother, Mrs. Saiyetovitz, the wife of a Concession store shopkeeper:

I saw that she was very ugly.

Ugly, with the blunt ugliness of a toad; the ugliness of seeming not entirely at home in any element—as if the earth were the wrong place, too heavy and magnetic for a creature already so blunt; and the water would be no better: too subtle and contour-swayed for a creature so graceless. And yet her ugliness was without repellence. When I grew older I often wondered why; she should have been repellent, one should have turned from her, but one did not. She
was only ugly. She had the short, stunted yet heavy bones of generations of oppression in the Ghettos of Europe; breasts, stomach, hips crowded sadly, no height, wide strong shoulders and a round back. Her head settled right down between her shoulders without even the grace of a neck, and her dun flat hair was cut at the level of her ears. Her features were not essentially Semitic; there was nothing so definite as that about her: she had no distinction whatever.

(Gordimer, “TD” 198)

Although the narrator tries to soften her harsh judgement of Mrs. Saiyetovitz by stating that her ugliness was non-repellent, it is the startling image of her portrayal as a toad which remains. As Marcia Leveson remarks about this story: “Jewish and animal ugliness are conflated in the image of the toad—the symbol of disgust identical to that found in the work of anti-Semitic colonial writers, which continued to be used as a mode of disparagement of Jews throughout the century” (179).

One of Miriam’s uncles owns the nearby Hotela la Bantu, a *kaffireater* whose “heavy, sickening, greasy carrion-breath that poured from [its] mouth,” whose “pulpy entrails hanging in dreadful enticement at the window,” and whose “blood-embroidered sawdust spilling out of the doorway” disgust and revulse the narrator (Gordimer, “TD” 196).

Miriam’s father, John Saiyetovitz—“his name wasn’t John at all, really—it was Yanka” (Gordimer, “TD” 201-02)—“lurk[s] within the depths of his store like a beast in its lair” and sells his merchandise to the African miners (Gordimer, “TD” 201). Although he is not dishonest in his business dealings with the Africans, Mr. Saiyetovitz, exerting his (presumed) financial power and White privilege, mistreats them in a far more subtle and, the
narrator implies, contemptible way:

Mr. Saiyetovitz treated the natives honestly, but with bad grace. He forced them to feel their ignorance, their inadequacy, and their submission to the white man’s world of money. He spiritually maltreated them, and bitterly drove his nail into the coffin of their confidence. (Gordimer, “TD” 203)

The African Other elicits narrative sympathy; the Jewish Other, antipathy.

As the two girls grow up and matriculate, the relation between the narrator and Miriam becomes more emotionally complex, tinged with the former’s jealous recognition of the latter’s difference:

She was a tall girl, now, with beautiful breasts, and a large, dark-featured face that had a certain capable elegance, although her father’s glum mouth was unmistakable and on her upper lip faint dark brown foreshadowed a heavy middle-age. Her parents were peasants; but she was the powerful young Jewess. Beside her, I felt pale in my Scotch gingery-fairness: lightly drawn upon the mind’s eye, whilst she was painted in oils. (Gordimer, “TD” 206-07)

The narrator’s muted condescension recurs towards the end of the story, when—after the two young women have graduated from university and become teachers, and after the narrator has served as a nurse in a field hospital in Italy during World War II (again, the Shoah is non-existent), and after Miriam has married a doctor, moved to Johannesburg, and had a son—the narrator visits the Saiyetovitzes at their store.

In a recent photograph of Miriam, the narrator observes: “One hand lay on the child’s shoulder, a smooth hand, wearing large, plain, expensive diamond rings. Her bosom was
proud and rounded now—a little too heavy, a little overripe in the climate of ease” (Gordimer, “TD” 211). The stereotypical markers of female Jewish difference—the large breasts and the diamond rings—signify the narrator’s alienation from her former friend. By the end of the story, it is clear that Miriam is similarly disconnected from her parents and the “ugliness” of Jewish identity they represent; she seldom visits, and her parents have seen their grandson a mere three times and their son-in-law not at all. The Saiyetovitzes are as defeated as the African miners who frequent their store: “Defeated, and without understanding in their defeat” (Gordimer, “TD” 212). However, in the hierarchical categories of Other the story constructs and construes, there is no equivalence in defeat between the Black African and the White Jew. At the story’s end, as Mr. Saiyetovitz addresses a Swazi customer, the narrator recollects and reimagines his voice as “striking like a snake at my faith: angry and browbeating, sullen and final, lashing weakness at the weak” (Gordimer, “TD” 212). In Gordimer’s fictional African garden, the Jew becomes the serpentine intruder and the Edenic native African his victim.

In 1953, the year following the publication of The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories, Gordimer published a novel, The Lying Days, which contains Jewish material not dissimilar to that found in “The Defeated.” However, it was to be thirty-four years until she again published a novel foregrounding Jewish content: A Sport of Nature, in 1987. Similarly, except for a very brief sketch titled “The Visit,” published in the Jewish Chronicle in 1966, Gordimer did not publish a Jewish short story until the 1991 publication of “My Father Leaves Home” (hereafter “MFLH”) in Jump and Other Stories. In this story, a contemporary hunting party—which includes the unnamed female narrator—has travelled
to the unspecified Eastern European country native to her Jewish father to shoot wild pheasants. She interweaves the present hunting trip with two juxtaposed and interrelated elements from the past: the imagined details of both her father’s departure from Europe and his early experiences in South Africa—of which she is ignorant; and the reconstructed recollections of growing up in a fractious, divided “Jewish” family—in which she was a participant.

As the adult narrator imagines her father’s leaving of his home and country at the age of thirteen and his arrival in South Africa, she envisages his topsy-turvy perspective of the country in which he is a stranger:

The moon on its back.

One of the first things he will have noticed when he arrived was that the moon in the Southern Hemisphere lies the wrong way round. The sun still rises in the east and sets in the west but the one other certainty to be counted on, that the same sky that covers the village covers the whole earth, is gone.

What greater confirmation of how far away; as you look up, on the first night.

(Gordimer, “MFLH” 61)

The subtle shift in the pronouns from “he” to “you” suggests a perspective sympathetically shared by both the narrator and her father. But this inference is dubious. For in this story, the retrospective perceptions of the narrator are as skewed as her father’s presumed perspective of the moon’s unfamiliar and unexpected orientation. However, the narrator’s point of view has been distorted not by a transhemispheric dislocation, but by an emotional disconnection within the family.
The word "Jew" and its derivatives do not appear in the story. On the other hand, many details and inferences make it clear that the narrator's father is a Jewish watchmaker from Eastern Europe (as was Gordimer's own father). And not far behind his portrait in the story looms the stereotype of the exploitative "Peruvian." At the mine works on the Reef, he services the watches the "black miners had proudly acquired . . . as the manacles of their new slavery: to shift work" (Gordimer, "MFLH" 61-62). Although the African mine workers are "migrants from their homes, like him," and although they have "only a few words of the language, like him," the narrator's father quickly masters the "terse jargon of English,"

[a] vocabulary of command. So straight away he knew that if he was poor and alien at least he was white, he spoke his broken phrases from the rank of the commanders to the commanded: the first indication of who he was, now.

(Gordimer, "MFLH" 62)

As he progresses from watchmaker to hawker of pocket watches to business man—"because of the blacks" (Gordimer, "MFLH" 62)—his Jewish identity wanes as his stereotypical role as an archetypal Jewish "Litvak" immigrant waxes.

He courts and marries "a young woman whose mother tongue was English" (Gordimer, "MFLH" 63). Although she is not specifically identified as Jewish, the textual inferences and autobiographical traces within the story suggest that she is, like Gordimer's own mother, an English Jewess assimilated to the non-Jewish culture. A particular species of domestic *apartheid* operates within the divided family as the narrator sides with her mother in the latter's contempt for her lower caste "Jewish" husband. The remnants of
Jewish practice and identity are hidden or erased within the family. And as the narrator’s father is stigmatized by his wife, he begins to be seen, and to perceive himself, as a “black” Jew:

If the phylacteries and skull-cap were kept somewhere the children never saw them. He went fasting to the synagogue on the Day of Atonement and each year, on the anniversaries of the deaths of the old people in that village whom the wife and children had never seen, went again to light a candle. Feeble flame: who were they? In the quarrels between husband and wife, she saw them as ignorant and dirty; she must have read something somewhere that served as a taunt: you slept like animals round a stove, stinking of garlic, you bathed once a week. The children knew how low it was to be unwashed. And whipped into anger, he knew the lowest category of all in her country, this country.

You speak to me as if I was a kaffir. (Gordimer, “MFLH” 64)

Although the narrator refers to herself twice in this passage in the third person (the “children”), her adult attitude towards her father is not distanced or neutral, having been shaped throughout her childhood by her mother’s contempt and revulsion (perhaps a displacement of her mother’s own self-loathing) at the Jewish Other she had married.

Like the beaters who scare the pheasants from their hiding places for the hunting party (related in the narrator’s imagination to the Cossacks’ ferreting out hidden Jews during pogroms), the narrator flushes from her hunted memories her empathy with the African miners, whom her father bullied and berated:
When I began to know him, in his shop, as someone distinct from a lap I sat on, he shouted at the black man on the other side of the counter who swept the floor and ran errands, and he threw the man's weekly pay grudgingly at him. I saw there was someone my father had made afraid of him. A child understands fear, and the hurt and hate it brings. (Gordimer, “MFLH” 66)

The perpetual present tense of the title's verb, "leaves," indicates that, for the narrator, the past childhood relation with her father remains unresolved in the present. As a crouching spectator to the hunt, she is struck on the shoulder by a shot bird and realizes that, under different circumstances, the Cossacks would have ridden her down. For her, the reality of her father's country becomes the hunt, and she imagines "the beaters advancing, advancing across the world" (Gordimer, “MFLH” 66). However, this sense of a tentative connection with her father is short-lived. She states that the six leaves she gathers are collected for their beauty and not for sentimental reasons. And the story closes with repudiation and denial, emphasized through the grammar of negation: "This village where we've rented the State hunting lodge is not my father's village. I don't know where, in this country, it was, only the name of the port at which he left it behind. I didn't ask him about his village. He never told me; or I didn't listen" (Gordimer, “MFLH” 66).

The narrator's shame at the stigma of her father's (and perhaps her own) Jewish Otherness stems from an ignorance which her parents' self-hatred has created. The mother's contempt for her "Peruvian" husband, combined with the father's doubt and self-effacement, contribute to an insoluble duality at the heart of their daughter's identity. The gravestones which the narrator observes in Eastern Europe are the only surviving record of the lives and
deaths of Jewish people there. But, "because the script that records their names is a language he forgot and his daughters never knew," she cannot identify herself with them, and their inscriptions remain unintelligible to her (Gordimer, "MFLH" 65). And the experiences of this narrator (and her counterpart in "A Watcher of the Dead") of a dysfunctional family and of estrangement from an innate Jewish identity may well represent those of Gordimer herself—a further example of Jewish South African writers whose unresolved issues of identity and self-identification are projected into their fiction.

Dan Jacobson

Dan Jacobson (1929- ) is the most significant Jewish South African author writing fiction with a Jewish ethos. Ironically, Jacobson, the other Jewish South African writer of Gordimer's generation who enjoys an international literary reputation has, since 1954, lived in England, where he teaches in the English Department of the University College, London. In fact, Jacobson does not identify himself as, essentially, either a Jewish writer or even a South African writer. Like many post-colonial writers who have moved from the literary margins of the Commonwealth to the central metropolis of English Literature, London, Jacobson has discovered that his voluntary exile from South Africa and acculturation to England has not ensured inclusion in its great literary tradition—a canon which he teaches. Like those works by Jewish Canadian writer Mordecai Richler (1931- ), who began his eighteen-year residence in London also in 1954, Jacobson's most interesting and engaging fiction is that which foregrounds Jewish experience in the writer's native land and milieu.
Furthermore, despite both his expatriation and the fact that not one of his novels or stories published after 1968 has been set in South Africa, this prolific author of both fiction and non-fiction figures prominently in the canon of South African English Literature, which was only in its embryonic stage when he emigrated.

Like Gordimer’s stories “A Watcher of the Dead” and “The Defeated” and those of Judah Waten in *Alien Son*, during the 1950s and 1960s Jacobson wrote several retrospectively told stories in which an adult Jewish narrator reconstructs experiences from the perspective of his childhood and adolescence in Lyndhurst, South Africa, a fictional Karoo town which resembles the Kimberley in which Jacobson grew up. These stories explore Jacobson’s recurrent central themes: alienation, in its personal, familial, social, cultural, racial, and political manifestations; and the relations and obligations both between and within the different social groupings in South Africa.

The two collections Jacobson published in the 1950s—*A Long Way from London* (in the U.K. in 1958), and *The Zulu and the Zeide* (in the U.S.A. in 1959)—overlap in content; except for the former book’s final story (which does not appear in the latter), the latter reproduces the content of the former and adds several extra stories. It is interesting to note the different emphases of the titles of the two publications. The U.K. title highlights the significance of colonial distance and dislocation from the central point of imperial reference, London, while erasing the South African genesis and perspective of the book. The U.S.A. title foregrounds the alliterative connection between Black, South African outsider and White, Eastern European, Yiddish-speaking Jewish stranger, emphasizing emotional and linguistic, rather than geographical, relations.
The final piece in *A Long Way from London*, “The Promised Land” (hereafter, “PL”), combines geographical and emotional foci in a triangular adolescent love story. The unnamed narrator’s passing of Leopold Brodsky in a Johannesburg street that afternoon stimulates the recall of events of a decade ago, a “year or two after the end of the Second World War” (Jacobson, “PL” 172). Both the narrator and Brodsky were Zionists, preparing in South Africa to live in what was then British Mandatory Palestine and was soon to be the state of Israel. However, based on their respective experiences, the ideological perspectives of the two young men differ considerably. The narrator has grown up with his childhood friend Ruth Stern in Lyndhurst. Brodsky, on the other hand, barely escaped Poland with his uncle in 1939 and, unable to secure entry permits to Palestine, went instead to South Africa. Brodsky’s self-appellation as a Zionist “‘extremist,’” who sympathizes with the Jewish underground military groups operating against the British occupiers of Palestine, differs markedly from the narrator’s observance of an idealistic and pacific Zionism (Jacobson, “PL” 174). However, Brodsky’s European experience has been circumscribed by something known, but unimaginable, to his Lyndhurst interlocutors—the Shoah:

[‘]For ten years in Europe—where I come from, I remind you—the Jews have been lined up against walls to be shot, have dug their own graves to be shot into them, have queued to go into gas-chambers. For ten, twelve, twenty years, people have been doing the most hideous and unspeakable things to Jews: they have been shot, whipped, gassed, driven, dogs have been set on them, lampshades have been made out of their skins and ornaments out of the gold in their teeth. And for all that time the Jews have done nothing in return. As for
the Jews who were lucky enough to be outside Europe, they have known only humiliation, impotence, rage and despair—as even you here, at your age, and in Lyndhurst, must well know.’ (Jacobson, “PL” 175)

And in the post-Shoah world, Brodsky rejects what he feels is the quintessential Diasporic Jewish condition—humiliation, impotence, rage and despair—and asserts Jewish strength through affiliation with, and habitation in, the emergent Jewish state.

For both the narrator and Ruth Stern, whom he secretly loves, Brodsky’s harrowing experiences of antisemitic persecution, flight from Europe, and immigration to South Africa seem compellingly authentic and vital in relation to their own:

I had never before met anyone of my generation who had suffered such direct loss in the Holocaust in Europe. Had Brodsky been older the effect of what he was saying might have been less; but as it was—conscious of the safety and dullness and triviality of my own childhood in the small South African town of Lyndhurst—in a curious and unadmitted way I was almost envious of the stranger, and of what had happened to him. It is hard for me to admit this even now, but that was how I felt; and I knew that Ruth was feeling something of the same emotion when she suddenly said to him, ‘You make me so ashamed of myself.’ (Jacobson, “PL” 177)

Within the developing, triangular power relations, the narrator withdraws, and Brodsky arrogates the narrator’s position with Ruth, becomes her lover, and then returns her to his acquiescent rival.

When the narrator and Ruth do get back together, they are sexually intimate for the
first time, "[y]et the initiative, the instruction, was Brodsky’s" (Jacobson, "PL" 182). However, Ruth does not love the narrator, though he loves her; just as Brodsky does not love Ruth, though she loves him. The experiences of love, although unreciprocated, and of sexual initiation are a revelation to the narrator:

We had never spoken of love before; and now that we did it was only for her to tell me in this way that she did not love me. Yet her words filled me with a wonder that I took home along the streets of the town, between pavements golden in the sun’s last light. I knew as I had not known before that there were powers and possibilities in the world; I knew that their light touched even here, touched even me. (Jacobson, “PL” 189)

In this moment of wonderful insight, Lyndhurst and Ruth become for the adolescent narrator geographical and emotional promised lands. He becomes a Zionist pioneer, exploring both symbolically and experientially the potential of his own human heart. In daring himself against Ruth, the narrator answers the rhetorical questions he had posed earlier in the story: “For which of us—Jewish or non-Jewish—did not have his own Palestine? Was there one who was not seeking for a commitment different to and larger than any he had known before? Was there one who was not trying in his own way, as I was, to guess, to gauge, to try out what might be possible for himself?” (Jacobson, “PL” 179-80). And as the narrator’s perspective on Palestine shifts from the geographic to the symbolic, the reality of the collective Jewish homeland is subsumed to the more compelling reality of individual human potential.

Returning from his retrospective reconstruction of a seminal event in his life to the
present of the story, the narrator recalls his emigration to Palestine and his return.

Ironically, it is Ruth who went to Palestine and has remained there—in Israel. The narrator does not know what Brodsky accomplished. The story ends with the narrator’s self-reflexive, epiphanic commentary on the enigmatic meaning of his recollections and the profound significance of their being manifested in written form:

> And it is only now, since I have written this, that I have come to realize that the recognition that Leopold Brodsky demanded from the world in such violence and despair was no more than the one Ruth gave me, when at her word I was able at last to see the land promised to us all. It is the land where all of us must try to live, for there is no other. (Jacobson, “PL” 190)

In the end, the promised land is an enigma—both a place and a trope—which each person must seek, understand, and interpret in his or her own way. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on an individually interpreted, but universal, humanism, this is still a story rooted to a particularly Jewish ethos, history, and iconography. It is also the first instance in post-World War II, Jewish South African fiction that the Shoah and the subsequent establishment of the state of Israel are depicted. And both are central events in this multivalent story of Jewish South African intragroup relations.

> “An Apprenticeship” (hereafter “AA”), collected in Beggar My Neighbour: Short Stories (1964), is another retrospectively framed story dealing with adolescent discovery, initiation, and identity. For three or four years of his boyhood, the narrator and David Palling were friends. Their relation is based on the narrator’s perception of the differences between both them and their families. The narrator is Jewish, and in his imagination he
categorizes the Pallings as the South African norm against which he measures himself and to which he aspires:

I had a fantasy about the members of the Palling family: I believed them to be 'typical'. I suppose the main reason why they appeared to me so typical was simply the fact that they were Gentiles and we were Jewish; it was from this difference that all other differences seemed to spring, more or less directly. (Jacobson, “AA” 76)

The sense he feels of being an inferior and an outsider is revealed in the subtle grammatical positioning of the noun “Gentile” in an (un)parallel relation with the adjective “Jewish.” And although the narrator’s “fantasy” is eventually revealed in the story to have been just that, his feelings of envy and shame were at the time very real and immediate:

... I deeply envied the Pallings for what I thought of as their typicality, their apparent resemblance to all the families in books, films, and newspaper advertisements. And I envied them because they seemed so much safer, so much more secure than ourselves. The Palling boys did not have to read in the newspapers about the massacre of their fellow-Jews in Europe; they did not have to protest against anti-Jewish remarks made by boorish schoolmasters or uglier things said in the playground by schoolboys; they did not have to bear the burden of guilt and sympathy towards the blacks which we bore as part of our Jewishness; they did not have to flinch inwardly when their parents mispronounced an English word. (Jacobson, “AA” 77)

For the narrator, to be Jewish is to be constantly threatened—by Nazi German genocide, and
international and local antisemitism—and constantly burdened—by South African racial
inequalities and the stigma of foreignness. Thus, Jewishness is a condition from which he
would rather be exempt. This categorization of the boundaries separating him from the non-
Jewish majority highlights the division between himself and his now erstwhile friend David.

However, this coming of age story is less about the relation between the narrator and
David Palling than it is about the former’s infatuation with David’s mother. The boys
discover in the Palling’s garage a box of torrid love letters that Mr. Palling had written
twenty years earlier to the woman who became Mrs. Palling. After reading a few of these
missives, the shocked and incredulous narrator begins to question his own perception of, and
craving for, the safe “typicality” the Pallings have represented for him:

... it seemed that if he could have written to her like that, then any emotion
was possible for anyone, anywhere. Was it typical to write to a woman of her
breasts and arms, of prostrating yourself beneath the soles of her feet; typical to
swear to her that if she did not yield you would leave her for others who
would; typical to speak of that night, her voice, our love, our single heart? And
was it typical, too, to conceal and contain these passions within an outward
show of respectability, of total conventionality? Then there was no one in the
world who was safe; then everyone lived amid his own dangers. (Jacobson,
“AA” 79)

The narrator’s revelation of the duplicity of human behaviour, of the division between bland
outward normalcy and raging inward passion, of the universal threat inherent in either the
suppression or expression of such feelings, culminates in the knowledge that he too is not
safe—from either the internal emotional and hormonal forces compelling him or the external forces classifying him as an alien Jew.

Although the journeyman narrator realizes that his feelings for Mrs. Palling were the product of the “dumb, hopeless lust of puberty and adolescence,” the narrated protagonist believes he has fallen in love with her (Jacobson, “AA” 79). The trope of apprenticeship reaches its culmination when, after Mr. Palling has left his wife for his Afrikaner mistress, the narrator confronts him, unexpectedly, at the door of the Palling household. To Mr. Palling’s quip “My wife’s admirer,” the narrator retorts, “You admired her too,” for which he reaps the blows of the infuriated husband (Jacobson, “AA” 84). At that moment, the apprentice’s transition from naivete to knowledge begins: “His violence and rage could only prove that what I had begun to learn from her was indeed worth knowing, was worth living a lifetime to know” (Jacobson, “AA” 84).

The themes of love and sexual consummation intertwine in the story “Sonia,” collected in Through the Wilderness and Other Stories (1968). Five teenaged male friends from Lyndhurst are vacationing near Cape Town, lodging in the boarding house of which the widowed Mrs. Ritstein is proprietor. Mrs. Ritstein’s youngest child, the bookish Sonia, whom the narrator and his four friends ignore, begins a literary courtship of the eldest of the five young men, Fatty Krawitz. Inspired by her reading of English Literature, she begins to leave hand-written quotations from Shakespeare’s sonnets where Fatty will find them. When he does respond to Sonia’s initial note, he discovers that she loves him and that she wants to give physical expression to her passion. The narrator cannot comprehend the dichotomy he perceives in Sonia, because it corresponds neither to anything he has ever
experienced nor to his categorical typology of both love and females:

For at the age of sixteen I had seen no one of the age of sixteen behave as she did. Her passion for Fatty was announced in poetry, and poetry accompanied it throughout; but this didn’t exclude a direct expression of a physical hunger or need that all of us, in spite of our brave talk together in our room and our much less brave fumblings under the piers of the promenade, found incredible, almost shocking. I think that had Sonia been simply “poetic” in her feelings about Fatty we might have known how to place her; had she been just physically forward with him we also would have had no difficulty in finding words to describe her. But that she should have been both at the same time—!

(Jacobson, “Sonia” 111)

Although at first very reluctant because of the moral and ethical issues involved, Fatty does eventually allow himself to be persuaded by the insistent Sonia, and they consummate their love together on the last day of the vacation. However, the impact of that summer’s experience falls most heavily onto the narrator. Having announced early in the story that Sonia died of a brain tumour a few months after the events retrospectively described, the adult narrator now contemplates the significance of her unstated challenge to his categorical judgements, assumptions, and beliefs and revises them in the light of his evolving understanding of both her empathy and her alienation:

Remembering Sonia’s passion for him [Fatty], I realize that my notion that she was already ill when they met was perhaps as much of a comfort-seeking delusion as his belief that she had had a supernatural “premonition.” The truth
may be that she was just a girl with an extraordinary gift for love: a gift which she had only that one chance, during our summer holiday in her mother's boardinghouse, to exercise. (Jacobson, "Sonia" 115)

Like most of Jacobson's short stories, "Sonia" ends on a poignant note of introspection and comprehension.

"The Boss" (hereafter "TB"), collected in The Zulu and the Zeide (1959), is a story of both initiation and Jewish intragroup relations. Mr. Kramer brings his eighteen-year-old son, Lionel, into his firm, a butter factory, to begin the process of apprenticeship. Although Mr. Kramer remarks to long-time secretarial employee Miss Lily Posen, "['"]New hands and a new young man make a new order"' (Jacobson, "TB" 233), and that "['"]Soon Mister Lionel will really be ordering me around,"' it is the father who has "the habit of power and responsibility" (Jacobson, "TB" 237). Most of the employees have known Lionel since he was a schoolboy, but, now that they recognize his new status and authority, they address him as Mister Lionel—all except Lily, who, after fifteen years of working for Mr. Kramer, now feels both jealous of, and threatened by, Lionel’s presence:

She presumed on the fact that she was the oldest employee, both in age and in years of service, and she called him Lionel. She presumed too—Lionel secretly was sure—on the fact that she was the only Jewish employee, and he hated the last presumption even more than he did the others, for it seemed to drag him down to a level where he was forever equal with her. (Jacobson, "TB" 237)

This last presumption, of course, is Lionel's, and it reveals that, to him, within this
triangular, intergenerational and intragroup power struggle, Jewish affiliation with Lily is
degrading and odious.

Although Lionel would prefer his father to make Lily acquiesce, Mr. Kramer refuses. Several attempts by Lionel to make Lily conform to his wishes fail, and, in his inadequacy, he begins to spy on her and to secretly search her purse. He documents several incidents of her petty pilfering and then, in his father’s absence, confronts Lily with his evidence. Upon Mr. Kramer’s return, Lionel explains:

“She’s got to go,” he shouted. “I’ve found her out and she’s got to go. I’ve shown who I am now!” The boy was pale, his hand was trembling, but his eyes were bright, and Mr. Kramer could see that he had tasted blood, that he was exulting in his own power. It could not be undone. (Jacobson, “TB” 243)

Mr. Kramer is appalled at his son’s actions and chastises him for both his methods and his lack of kindness. Nevertheless, he dismisses Lily, after finding her a comparable position at another firm. In addition, Mr. Kramer buys Lily an expensive gift and throws a small party in her honour on her last day of work at the firm. To Lionel’s bewilderment, she “describe[s] Mr. Kramer as the best man she had ever known” (Jacobson, “TB” 247). His father humbles Lionel by suggesting that “. . . [']perhaps a hard heart is a good thing to have in business nowadays, though I managed without one’” (Jacobson, “TB” 247). And, at the story’s end, the relation between father and son is revealed to also be one of power, and the real boss emerges:

[“]Oh,” Lionel said miserably, “I don’t know.”

“What don’t you know?”
It was hard for Lionel to make the admission. “Anything at all.”

And Mr. Kramer knew he had won his fight. “You’ll learn,” he said.

The tenderness in his voice made Lionel wonder, but to that too he submitted. (Jacobson, “TB” 247)

To the theme of adolescent initiation, “The Boss” adds that of the emotionally complex relation both between father and son and between Jews, intertwining issues of filial, social, and cultural empowerment, and of human dignity and shame, with those of Jewish communal solidarity and intragroup responsibility.

Intergenerational conflict within a dysfunctional Jewish family forms the thematic centre of “Only the Best” (hereafter, “OB”), a story of emotional, familial, and personal betrayal and alienation, collected in Beggar My Neighbour: Short Stories (1964). The unnamed narrator of this story attended university in Johannesburg just after World War II. His retrospectively narrated story concerns his peripheral involvement with the Johannesburg family of Louis and Ruth Alter, to the latter of whom he is distantly related. Louis Alter “had been a young, ambitious immigrant, speaking English with a strong accent and owning nothing more than a single furniture store in the slums of Vrededorp” (Jacobson, “OB” 100). In contrast to her immigrant husband, Ruth is the “daughter of an established professional man, a specialist physician, whose family had been in South Africa for generations” and thus represents the assimilated Jewish aristocracy (Jacobson, “OB” 100). Like the Freye family in Markowitz’s Facing North, now the Alters are very wealthy, and Louis is a business magnate:

He was very rich indeed; certainly the richest man my family could claim. His
companies owned furniture factories and a chain of shops which sold the
furniture his factories made; he owned blocks of flats, a citrus estate in the
Eastern Transvaal, and a road haulage firm which would transport anything
anywhere (as each truck proclaimed) from the Cape to Cairo. Everybody,
extexcept for his wife, treated him with an uncomfortable, unwilling respect; she
patronized him. (Jacobson, “OB” 99)

Jacobson purposely draws on the stereotypical characteristics of the affluent Jewish
Randlord who was once an immigrant “Peruvian” in his delineation of Louis Alter.

However, typically, he refers to such stereotypes in order to ironize them, thus
confronting his readers’ expectations and confounding their responses. For it is Ruth,
descended of South African Jewish gentry, and not her disparaged immigrant husband,
whom the narrator describes as having been

. . . positively ugly—a woman as large as her husband and almost as deep-
voiced, almost as square-shouldered. Her lips were full, her brow was
protuberant, her hair was piled on top of her head in a mass of greying,
sausage-like curls. There were diamonds on her fingers; there was gold in her
mouth. The condescension and complacency of her manner were undermined,
I would say, only by the odd air of vindication with which she looked at people
who came to pay their respects to her husband, or who congratulated her on her
clothes, her jewels, her house in Parktown, her lovely children. (Jacobson,
“OB” 100)

In this description, the stereotypical markers of illicitly attained Jewish affluence—
diamonds and gold—are ironically and satirically juxtaposed with a most unflattering portrayal of their owner as ugly. Whereas Gordimer, following the lead of antisemitic non-Jewish writers, uses the epithet “ugly” in “The Defeated” to indicate her unresolved and hostile ambivalence towards Jews and Judaism, Jacobson reappropriates the adjective here as a literal descriptor—negative, but dispossessed of its South African nuances of antisemitism. Ruth is no kugel; however, the materialism (and its concomitant power and control) which dominates her life and that of the Alter family ultimately leads to the estrangement of her daughter Marjorie.

Marjorie Alter graduates and attends the same Johannesburg university as the narrator. At some point during her first two years there, she meets Paul Gauss, a brilliant Jewish student, fluent in Zulu and Xhosa, who has returned to the university after two years of army service. From the narrator’s perspective, “[i]t seemed as though there was nothing he [Paul] could not do, or might not become, if only he would settle down, choose a career, and try to make a success of it. We admired him enormously because he refused to do any such thing” (Jacobson, “OB” 104-05). Despite his potential, however, Paul remains an angry and alienated Jew.

Ruth Alter interrogates the narrator about her daughter’s relation with Paul, whom she believes to be an opportunist. In turn, Paul disparages the Alter’s opulence and the way her parents have corrupted Marjorie. Marjorie, Paul believes, wants to turn him into “[‘]A Dudley! . . . Dudley was a Nice Jewish Boy” (Jacobson, “OB” 110). In order to combat the fear and despondency he sees as the state of the world, however, Paul has “ma[d]e uncertainty [his] value” (Jacobson, “OB” 112). When the inevitable confrontation between
Louis Alter and Paul erupts, Louis threatens to turn Marjorie out, and she chooses the security of home over uncertainty with Paul.

After their reconciliation, Paul asks Marjorie to marry him; they sleep together, and he leaves to study at the London School of Economics. Although Paul asks Marjorie to wait for him until he is able to fulfil Louis’s stipulation that he make something of himself, she decides after many months to defy her parents and sail to London. There she discovers Paul is living with a woman who eventually becomes Mrs. Gauss: “She was non-Jewish. She came, I was told, from a well-known academic family in Cambridge. I daresay that her connexions have been of help to Paul in his career—which, as everyone knows, has so far been a very successful one” (Jacobson, “OB” 122). Marjorie’s parents send her money, and she flies back from London after having been there for only three days.

Paul’s betrayal of Marjorie leaves her alienated and emotionally scarred. Unable to relate either to Paul’s crowd or to her former friends, she withdraws from both. Eventually, she breaks with her parents, rebelling against the privilege and wealth they represent, and adopts a bohemian lifestyle, albeit one financed by her father:

About six months after coming back from London she met—and married within days of meeting—an obscure, excitable, divorced, Afrikaans poet, many year older than herself, and went off with him to the Cape. She still lives there, without the poet; and presides over a kind of salon composed of a couple of painters and a man who makes copper jewellery, some actors from the local professional theatre, several people who were once but are no longer Communists, a Jungian, an Italian who runs a tourist agency and is her current
lover, various journalists of the more intellectual kind, an occasional visiting
celebrity, and all their assorted womenfolk. (Jacobson, "OB" 123)

However, the daughter she bore to the Afrikaans poet is not included in Marjorie’s surrogate
family; she lives with her grandparents in Johannesburg. Louis regularly sends money to his
daughter in Cape Town, but, poignantly, “[n]either he nor his wife ever visits her there”
(Jacobson, “OB” 124).

The story enacts several levels of betrayal and alienation: between members of the
Jewish family (both the one into which Marjorie was born and the one she creates), between
generations, between man and woman, between father and daughter, and between intellect
and emotion. Both Marjorie and Paul remain estranged from one another, from their Jewish
identities, and from themselves. Paul’s Oxford professorship is not an uncertain value;
however, to gain this academic status, his intellectual prowess has overwhelmed and
betrayed his heart, leaving him estranged from his innate Jewish identity, assimilated, and in
a state of exile. Marjorie recreates her dysfunctional family, abandons her daughter and
responsibility for her, and assimilates her Jewish identity to a version of self-imposed
assimilation and exile not dissimilar to Paul’s. Each, perhaps wanting only the best,
ultimately settles for very much less.

The themes inherent in “Only the Best” are enacted at the level of the larger Jewish
community in “The Example of Lipi Lippmann” (hereafter “ELL”), collected in *Beggar My
Neighbour: Short Stories* (1964). Lipi Lippmann is a poor, elderly, immigrant peddler of
produce, a peripheral member of the marginalized Jewish community of Lyndhurst. Unlike
the city’s other Jews, Lipi is not upwardly-mobile, middle-class, or comfortable. He is not
"a licensed wholesaler or a licensed hotel-keeper, a licensed dentist or a licensed
doctor"—rather, "nothing but a licensed hawker" (Jacobson, "ELL" 62). Although, as
"nothing but," he is disdained by the Jewish community, to that community Lipi symbolizes
the anti-stereotypical Jew and, in that role, he is thus a convenient exemplum with which to
counteract Gentile jealousy and hostility:

In Lyndhurst, if a Gentile spoke enviously to a Jew about how rich the Jews of
Lyndhurst were, how clever they were, how well they did in business, the reply
was often made—‘Well, it’s not really true about all the Jews. Just look at Lipi
Lippmann!’ No one, not even the biggest anti-Semite in the world, could say
that Lipi Lippmann was rich or clever or did well in business.

Lipi Lippmann once said that the Jews of Lyndhurst should pay him to
remain poor, his poverty was so useful in arguments. But the joke was
received in silence; it was felt to be in bad taste. The Jews of Lyndhurst were
ready to use Lipi Lippmann’s poverty to propitiate an envious Gentile, but they
were ashamed of him nevertheless. . . . (Jacobson, “ELL” 62)

However, the Jewish community’s defensive use of Lipi as a counter-example to antisemitic
constructions of Jewish stereotypes serves only to entrench and “validate” the Gentile
(mis)perception of the Jew (both in general and in Lyndhurst) and to sustain the entire
relation between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities at the level of stereotype and
prejudice. In addition, Jacobson makes here an ironic gesture towards the sub-textual
Talmudic injunction that all Israel (i.e., every Jew) is responsible the one for the other.
Ashamed of Lipi, the Jewish community ignores responsibility for him. And in his poor
suburban Lyndhurst neighbourhood, the Afrikaner children insult him as "'Koelie-Jood,'" an epithet which conflates White Jew and Coloured Indian, both threatening Lipi with racial recolouration and denigrating his trade (Jacobson, “ELL” 63).

After discovering his home robbed of its meagre contents—"someone must have had the fantasy that Lipi was a miser, and had been hoarding money and valuables over the years"—Lipi is distraught and, in his despair, reports to the policeman who interviews him at the scene that his stolen money-box contained the money he had been collecting for a lifetime in order to visit Israel before he died (Jacobson, “ELL” 65). Overnight, Lipi’s status is elevated. The Jewish community members are shamed into action. And when the money is not recovered, they establish a fund in his name “to make good Mr Lippmann’s loss, and thus enable him to fulfil his lifelong ambition of visiting the Holy Land” (Jacobson, “ELL” 68). However Lipi’s rehabilitated reputation is motivated and sustained by the Jewish community’s communal guilt:

For Lipi had become a hero, even something of a martyr in Lyndhurst, and especially so to the members of the Lyndhurst Jewish community. If they felt any embarrassment or shame in connection with him now, it was only because they had been ashamed of him and embarrassed by him in the past. His poverty now appeared to them noble; his ambition to visit Israel exemplary; his attempts to realize that ambition inspiring; his disappointment pitiable. There was none among the well-to-do Jews of Lyndhurst who did not feel himself humbled by Lipi’s humility, shamed by his selfsacrifice [sic]. (Jacobson, “ELL” 68)
Within three months of the theft, the luminaries of the Jewish community, including an ex-Mayor of Lyndhurst, the local rabbi, and the chairman of the Zionist society, present Lipi with a return plane ticket to Israel and a cheque to cover his expenses.

However, the entire turn of Lipi’s fortune is based on a lie told “in a frenzy of rage and self-hatred” (Jacobson, “ELL” 69). In his dreams of Israel, he never reaches its peopled houses. And as the day of his departure for Israel approaches, his anxiety and guilt overwhelm him. He feels himself to be a fraudulent Jew and imagines that, in the imagery of the Old Testament Hebrew Prophets, the land of Israel itself will vomit him out:

> It was another fear that possessed him now, and it was as formless, impenetrable and insistent as the darkness around him. He could not believe that the landscape of his dreams would accept him, if came to it as a liar and a fraud. It would reject him—he did not know how—it would thrust him from itself, it would disgorge him as unclean, a tainted thing. (Jacobson, “ELL” 71)

Lipi’s conscience prevails, and he confesses to the Jewish ex-Mayor of Lyndhurst:

> However, the ex-Mayor was a man of decision; and he said nothing to Lipi of his rage at the deception Lipi had practised upon the people of Lyndhurst, or of his own personal indignation at having been shown up as a sentimental fool, or even of his anxieties about the possible effects of Lipi’s confession on ‘inter-faith relations’ in Lyndhurst. (Jacobson, “ELL” 71)

Concerned more with his own position than that of Lipi, the ex-Mayor orders Lipi to take the train to Johannesburg immediately and wait there for his flight; he tells Lipi that their conversation “never took place” and adds, “with sudden ferocity, ‘And I wish you’d never
come back!" (Jacobson, “ELL” 72).

Covering his ears in order to prevent his hearing the internal “voice that shrieked that everyone, everything is the world was tainted; that he had nothing to fear,” Lipi falls in front of a moving train in the shunting yards and is killed (Jacobson, “ELL” 72). After a coroner’s inquest, the official version of Lipi’s demise is accidental death. However, there is another, perhaps more truthful, version—an unofficial, unstated, though not unfelt, one: suicide. At Lipi’s enormous funeral, “it was noticed that the ex-Mayor of the town was among those who seemed most affected by grief at the graveside” (Jacobson, “ELL” 73). His abrogation of generosity, compassion, sympathy, and mercy—the very heart of Jewish identity, practice, religion, history, and consciousness; his protection of his social position; and his betrayal of trust are all factors contributory to Lipi’s desperate alienation and the self-loathing, self-destructive state of mind which precipitated Lipi’s death. However, the omniscient narrative voice does not indict the ex-Mayor; the ingenuousness of his guilt and remorse is confirmed by his grief. In a tale about Jewish communal and personal responsibility and the demands of conscience, the ex-Mayor’s epiphanic (re)turning to the voice of his Jewish soul is both poignant and moving.

South African intergroup relations between Jews, Afrikaners, and Black Africans are paradigmatically portrayed in “A Day in the Country” (hereafter “DC”), collected in both A Long Way from London (1958) and The Zulu and the Zeide (1959) and originally published in 1953 in Commentary under the title “Dutchman, Jew, Piccanin: A Story.” The original title underlined the stereotypical perspectives, categorical thinking, and social positioning—Jews between Afrikaners and Africans—which exacerbate the triangular tensions inherent in
the story’s allegorical presentation of South African society. The sanitized “A Day in the Country” is a subtly ironic retitling—and, perhaps, Anglicizing—of the title, inviting pastoral expectations of an idyllic interlude on the veld, which are left unfulfilled.

Another of Jacobson’s stories of adolescent memories, “A Day in the Country,” is a retrospectively framed reconstruction of events which occurred on a cold April Sunday during an unnamed Jewish family’s return journey to their home in Lyndhurst from their country farm. As the narrator’s older brother drives through Rietpan and continues on the road to Dors River, an apparent accident in the middle of the road necessitates his slowing down and stopping the family car. However, it is not an accident. A group of laughing Afrikaner men and women are “playing” with a terrified and screaming Black African child, whom one of the men, one with a “broad gray-shirted chest,” carries under his arm and eventually puts in the bonnet of their car (Jacobson, “DC” 17).

From the relative and insular safety of the car, the narrator and his family recognize the significance of this confrontation:

But we knew now. It wasn’t an accident, it was a game. I don’t know whether we felt more relief or disgust. One of the grinning men saw us watching them, and still with his grin, he waved to us that we could go on. They didn’t need our help; it wasn’t an accident. None of us grinned back at him. I think he saw that we weren’t amused at his game, for he looked away. (Jacobson, “DC” 18)

As they drive off without intervening, the young narrator says from his back seat vantage point beside his younger sister, “‘What dirty swine’” (Jacobson, “DC” 18). As they watch
the "game" break up, the narrator expresses the communal hope that their interference was responsible for its ending:

We hoped that it was our condemnation that had broken it up. Yet there was the taste of guilt in each of our mouths that we had just looked our condemnation and not said anything to them, not made a protest in the name of humanity. But we were used to that sort of scene and that sort of guilt.

Together they almost make up a way of life. (Jacobson, "DC" 18)

To the self-reproach of their silence and guilt is added the self-reproach of their acquiescence to a society riven by racial divisions and confrontations, a society in which Jews, despite their condemnation of the social and racial construction of the South African "way of life," are privileged as White by Blacks and penalized as Jew by Whites.

As the Afrikaners’ black Dodge overtakes the Jewish family’s car, something inaudible is shouted which Michael, the narrator’s father, takes as an antisemitic slur: “All we saw was a white shirt and a white face and a pair of bright red lips opening and closing grotesquely" (Jacobson, "DC" 18). Michael forces his older son to stop the car and to let him pursue the Afrikaners when the latter refuses to chase them. Although the family protests that he did not hear or know what was shouted, Michael, expecting antisemitic insults, responds repeatedly, “No one shouts at me like that” (Jacobson, "DC" 19). And at Dors River, he catches and confronts the Afrikaners in front of their home.

However, the threatened violence of this encounter is never given physical expression. Instead, it becomes a verbal standoff—conducted in English, the Jewish family’s language. Michael addresses the huge, dirty man in the gray shirt (symbolically
associated with the South African Nazis, the Greyshirts) who was carrying the Black child:

My father suddenly blazed out at him. “What sort of a person are you? First you torture a child that’s done nothing to you, and then you scream at someone you’re passing on the road. Well, let me tell you that I’m not a little Kaffir piccanin. You can’t do what you like with me. I’ll teach you manners before I’m finished with you.” (Jacobson, “DC” 21)

Despite his denial, the father’s words reveal his fear that, as a Jew, he is a sort of second-class White “Kaffir piccanin” and may be treated as such by other Whites. In addition, his statement that the Afrikaners cannot do what they like with him includes the corollary implication that they can do whatever they like with the powerless and suppressed Black Africans. Further, his use of derogatory terms for the Black African child—for whom he chose not to intercede earlier on the road—implicates him in the conjoined ideologies of political and linguistic apartheid.

The Afrikaners’ father intercedes, and his words reveal to the narrator the crux of the dispute between them—mutual fear:

We stared at him. He said again, “You’ve got no right to talk like that about my people”—and then I realized that our fear—the fear that we would be called “Bloody Jews,” the fear which perhaps had kept our mouths closed when we had seen the piccanin being tortured—was his fear too. He, the Afrikaner who spoke English to us, felt that my father was sitting in his car and despising him for the race he belonged to, and judging him and his race by what we had seen on the road; and I realized, how happily, that the father did
not want to be judged by that act, and did not want his son to fight us, for even if we should fight and his son should beat us, our original damning judgment would remain, would even be confirmed. He didn’t want to beat us, he wanted us to think well of his race. . . . (Jacobson, “DC” 22)

The Afrikaners heard the narrator call them “‘dirty swine’” (Jacobson, “DC” 18), and they claim to have shouted at the family “[‘]to mind your own business’” (Jacobson, “DC” 23). Michael denies having sworn at them, and the narrator remains silent. The unspoken subtext of inter-White racial tension, however, is not broached: “Our fear was theirs: it was almost as though we co-operated with one another to keep the significance of the argument hidden, yet never for a moment forgot it. . . . But we were all prevented from fighting, and prevented from peace” (Jacobson, “DC” 23). And as long as that fragile stasis is balanced on the fulcrum of the fear of censure, nothing is resolved, and no categorical attitudes are interrogated or jettisoned. On the contrary, that very stasis maintains and nurtures hatred; as the narrator states, rather disingenuously, “We despised that family; it is not our fault they misinterpreted it. And they should have known that we were as frightened of them as they were of us” (Jacobson, “DC” 25). Likewise, neither should the reader misinterpret Jacobson’s agenda: “He skilfully and subtly exploits the discourse of prejudice, while creating a text which seeks to subvert the concept of prejudice itself” (Leveson 134).

In the end, the significance of the confrontation does make an impact. The narrator’s family “wins” the confrontation; however, it is, morally, a Pyrrhic victory: “It was a quiet journey home. Everyone was feeling depressed and beaten, though, as I have explained, the victory was ours. But we had all lost, so much, somewhere, farther back along that dusty
road” (Jacobson, “DC” 25). And the road thus taken, it is implied, does not lead to a higher state of spiritual consciousness. Fear, and its attendant inaction, have their own psychological and moral consequences. The narrator now understands the significance of the precarious and uncertain position of his family, the “Jews,” both in South Africa and, by implication, in the world. The text intimates that to know, however, is not enough. For the Jews’ silent rejection of the moral imperative to assist the helpless child being forcibly deposited in the black Dodge’s bonnet—interred in a symbolic tomb—operates metaphorically as a disavowal of responsibility for the life of the precious Child within one and all. Knowing the truth, and yet, through fear or ignorance or self-interest or apathy, choosing not to uphold it, is, ultimately, self-divisive. To consciously abandon the Child/Self is to despise one’s identity and to suppress and ignore the inner voice of compassion and conscience. Especially for the Jews in this story, such turmoil is self-alienating and unbalancing. And, as Jacobson subtly suggests, the vertigo induced by this existential stasis nurtures guilt, which is, in turn, enmeshed with its twin progeny: self-doubt and self-hatred. The position of the authentic Jew in apartheid South Africa would thus appear to be, at best, compromised and ambivalent and, at worst, untenable.

The themes of intergenerational and intergroup alienation are reprised in the most anthologized of Jacobson’s short stories, “The Zulu and the Zeide” (hereafter “ZZ”), collected in both A Long Way from London (1958) and the eponymously titled The Zulu and the Zeide (1959). At the heart of this story is the strained affiliation between Old Man Grossman (the Zeide [“grandfather,” in Yiddish]) and his son, Harry. The primary connection in the story, however, is the compassionate relation which develops between the
Zeide and his alliterative companion Paulus, the young Zulu Harry hires as his aged father's caregiver.

Zeide is an old man, and, in his degenerative senility, directs “all his physical activity . . . to only one purpose: to running away”:

Old man Grossman was worse than a nuisance. He was a source of constant anxiety and irritation; he was a menace to himself and to the passing motorists into whose path he would step, to the children in the streets whose games he would break up, sending them flying, to the householders who at night would approach him with clubs in their hands, fearing him a burglar; he was a butt and a jest to the African servants, who would tease him on street corners. . . . It was a passion for freedom that the old man might have been said to have, could anyone have seen what joy there could have been for him in wandering aimlessly about the streets. . . . (Jacobson, “ZZ” 103)

Harry, for one, does not perceive his father’s joy in wandering. For the son, the father’s running away is symbolic of the elder Grossman’s lifelong abrogation of responsibility and duty for his family, burdens Harry had to assume at a young age. Harry’s mother saved the money required to send her husband from Lithuania to South Africa, where her brother had already established himself. There, her husband would earn the money needed to bring her and their two sons out from Europe. However, on the boat from Bremen to London, other Jews persuaded him to go instead to South America. After a silence of six months, he had someone write to his wife, and she had to borrow the money from her brother in South Africa to bring her destitute husband home from the Argentine. Eventually, with money
borrowed from their South African relative, the family immigrated to South Africa, and it was the teenaged Harry who eventually paid the money back for the passages of all his family members.

In South Africa, the father continued to run away from his responsibilities. He developed severe myopia, and then continually lost or broke the glasses Harry had to provide for him, "until it had been made clear to him that he was no longer expected to do any work" (Jacobson, "ZZ" 106). Harry becomes the family's sole support, and by so doing he reverses roles with his father. But the child's being father to the man (his own father) alienates and angers Harry, who carries into his adulthood the emotional scars of his being abandoned, betrayed, and burdened by his negligent father. Nevertheless, his overdeveloped and overwhelming sense of filial obligation and duty prevents Harry from placing his father, from whom he is completely estranged, in the Jewish old-age home.

Harry's problematic paternal relationship is echoed in the other family members' relation to their father-in-law and Zeide:

But she [Harry's wife] put up with the old man; she did not talk to him. The grandchildren had nothing to do with their grandfather—they were busy at school, playing rugby and cricket, they could hardly speak Yiddish, and they were embarrassed by him in front of their friends; and when the grandfather did take any notice of them it was only to call them Boers and goyim and shkotzim in sudden quavering rages which did not disturb them at all. (Jacobson, "ZZ" 107)

Ironically, their Zeide, emblematic of Yiddishkeit (Jewishness), contributes to the growing
estrangement of his two grandsons from theirs through his clumsy, angry tirades, and thus helps to weaken the chain of Jewish tradition, which has survived for over five millennia only by its being passed down from one generation to the next. Ignored by his closest family members, ridiculed by the African servants, the elder Grossman becomes an anomaly in South African terms: an ineffectual and powerless White man.

Johannes, one of Harry’s Zulu servants, suggests that his “‘brother’” Paulus be hired to look after Harry’s father (Jacobson, “ZZ” 108). Paulus is a young, strong, dignified warrior from a Zululand kraal, who knows no English and whom the omniscient third-person narrator describes, derogatively, as a “‘raw boy’” (Jacobson, “ZZ” 108). Harry hires Paulus, and, in his houseboy’s uniform, “into which he fitted, with his beard and his physique, like a king in exile in some pantomime,” he begins, tentatively, to look after the childlike Old Man (Jacobson, “ZZ” 110).

Connected initially through the trope of exile—the one from his Zulu “kingdom”; the other from his native land, his family and his faculties; and both from socio-political power—Paulus and the Grossman patriarch represent the marginalized African and Jew in South African’s hierarchical social stratum. As Paulus acclimatizes to his new situation in a strange house in a strange city in a strange language amongst strangers—an immigrant in his own land, ironically emulating the Jewish experience of immigration to South Africa—he must also learn how to deal with his charge’s fear of him:

Paulus had been given no instructions, he had merely been told to see that the old man did not get himself into trouble, and after a few days of bewilderment Paulus found his way. He simply went along with the old man. (Jacobson,
And through Paulus’s great patience and compassion, Zeide’s attitude evolves from fear, hostility, and distance to trust, equality, and warmth:

The young bearded Zulu and the old bearded Jew from Lithuania walked together in the streets of the town that was strange to them both. . . . And neither Paulus nor old man Grossman was aware that when they crossed a street hand-in-hand, as they sometimes did when the traffic was particularly heavy, there were white men who averted their eyes from the sight of this degradation, which could come upon a white man when he was old and senile and dependent. (Jacobson, “ZZ” 111, 112).

This physical connection, perceived by other White South Africans as the epitome of degradation and humiliation, is reiterated in Paulus’s dressing, bathing, barbering, and even carrying of Zeide. Paulus’s support (emotional and physical), care, and protection become indispensable to every aspect of the senior Grossman’s life. And although neither can speak the other’s language, they communicate in a shared language of feeling. Paulus’s calling his charge “‘Baas Zeide’” reinforces the emotional and filial bond which has grown between them (Jacobson, “ZZ” 113). However, from Harry’s perspective, the whole arrangement began, and persists, as a joke, one he delights in telling everyone:

For Harry persisted in regarding the arrangement as a kind of joke, and the more the arrangement succeeded the more determinedly did he try to spread the joke, so that it should be a joke not only against his father but a joke against Paulus too. It had been a joke that his father should be looked after by a raw
Zulu; it was going to be a joke that the Zulu was successful at it. . . . [“]Do you think,” Harry would say, and this too would insistently be part of the joke, “if I had nothing else to do with my time I wouldn’t be able to make the old man happy?” (Jacobson, “ZZ” 113, 114)

Harry’s insistence on the arrangement’s being a joke is a defense mechanism through which he rationalizes his guilt, anger, and unresolved emotional issues with his father. As his ridicule turns to jealous hostility towards his father and Paulus and their relationship, Harry exerts the prerogative of his white power and, in his lust to humiliate him, berates the Zulu contemptuously in English, a language Paulus does not understand. Similarly, he teases his father about his “‘black friend,’” and even “jokingly threaten[s] to send the Zulu away” (Jacobson, “ZZ” 114). But Harry’s need for paternal recognition persists.

On one of Paulus’s days off, Zeide calls continuously for “der schwarzer [Black man],” and Harry, angrily (and unsuccessfully) offering to do whatever his father wants, cannot pacify him (Jacobson, “ZZ” 117). Refusing to tell his son what he wants, and unable to summon Paulus, in his frustration, Zeide breaks down in tears. Later, escaping unnoticed from his son’s big house, the Old Man is hit by a bicyclist and dies days later in the hospital. The quarrel which precipitates the accident which kills his father becomes “something that Harry was to keep secret for the rest of his life” (Jacobson, “ZZ” 117).

Although everyone else weeps at Zeide’s death, Harry cannot express his feelings of grief. Instead, in a suppressed and guilty rage, he dismisses Paulus and then asks Johannes sarcastically: “[‘]What’s he going to do with the fortune he’s made?’” (Jacobson, “ZZ” 121). The translated reply—that he is saving to bring his wife and children to Johannesburg
from Zululand—overwhelms Harry, as he recognizes that Paulus’s goal is identical to that which his father failed to effect for the Grossman family. He also recognizes that, in contrast to Paulus’s dignified example of familial love and responsibility in the face of racial hatred and disempowerment, he, the empowered and privileged White man, has failed in his obligations—both to himself and to his father. In the epiphanic closing sentence of this powerful story, Harry begins to feel:

The two Zulus were bewildered to know why it should have been at that moment that Harry Grossman’s clenched, fistlike features should suddenly seem to have fallen from one another, nor why he should have stared with such guilt and despair at Paulus, while he cried, “What else could I have done? I did my best,” before the first tears came. (Jacobson, “ZZ” 121)

The cathartic release of Harry’s tears is an act of *teshuvah* (repentance), a turning of his heart, and a returning to the centre of his emotions.

Like the palms and oak trees which “grow indiscriminately among each other” in Grossman’s South African garden, the relation between Paulus and Zeide operates metaphorically as a paradigm for an idealized interracial co-operation between White and Black, a relation built on human commonality and not racial categorization (Jacobson, “ZZ” 112). And, the story suggests, it is the moral responsibility of the Jew (Zeide), in his childlike way, to recognize the Zulu (Paulus) as his oppressed *doppelgänger* and to pioneer a new language of mutually sustaining compassion and trust free from the taint of racial or religious hatred. Zulu and Zeide are mutually alienated, equally in a state of spiritual exile. Only by recognizing and accepting this mutuality can the Jew—so inculpated in the material
prosperity, privilege, and power *apartheid* bestows on him—extricate himself and, thereby, assist his Black double to do the same. In the absence of such active recognition, the Jew remains separated from both Self and Other, morally and spiritually cut off by a self-inflicted and internalized *apartheid* of self-hatred.  

The conjoining of Zulu and Jew is even more explicitly thematized in “Through the Wilderness” (hereafter “TW”), collected in *Through the Wilderness and Other Stories* (1968). Another of Jacobson’s retrospectively told Lyndhurst stories, “Through the Wilderness,” as its title suggests, is a tale of spiritual wandering and the struggle for identity. The unnamed narrator recalls himself at the age of twenty, when he had completed his third year examinations at the university in Johannesburg and was preparing to shortly leave his home in Lyndhurst for Israel. His father’s sudden hospitalization and subsequent emergency medical operations delay the narrator’s departure indefinitely. During the months he remains stuck in Lyndhurst, the narrator visits his father in the hospital daily, takes Hebrew lessons thrice weekly, delivers rations once weekly to the Afrikaner and Black African employees at his father’s farm on the veld sixteen miles from town, and counts the sheep there.

The Jewish narrator’s boyhood connection to his heritage and identity, imaged in his unsuccessful attempts to learn the Hebrew language, was negatively coloured by feelings of estrangement and difference:

All the attempts that had been made in my childhood to teach me Hebrew had ended in failure. I had been determined that they should. For obvious reasons. I had associated the Hebrew language with being alien, set apart,
exposed; implicated in what I was convinced at an early age was a continuing, unendurable history of suffering and impotence; involved with a religion in whose rituals I could find no grace, no power, no meaning, and that had no connection I could discern with the dusty, modern mining town in South Africa in which I was growing up. I can still remember how intensely I hated the very pictures in the books from which we had been taught Hebrew. They were old books, who know how old, and the pictures in them were ugly, small, cramped, full of thick black lines. The boys who appeared in the pictures were physically puny, dressed in skullcaps, long jackets and grotesque knickerbockers; they had earlocks hanging from their temples; they were imprisoned in rooms that looked both overfurnished and poverty-stricken; they sat in devout, learning postures, receiving instruction from bearded rabbis or winding their phylacteries around their arms. I cannot describe the claustrophobia, the anguish of embarrassment and distaste, they roused in me. Was I learning Hebrew to become like one of those boys? Was that the prize? I would sooner have died. (Jacobson, “TW” 8-9)

In his determined rejection of what he perceives as the odious prison of Judaism, however, the narrator has abandoned some crucial facet of his Jewish identity, something his secular Zionism cannot replace. Now studying Hebrew again with Mr. Saltzmann, his boyhood teacher, the narrator reads in Hebrew from the Torah the story of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac by Abraham.

The significance of the allusion to Abraham is manifold, for his story is the
prototypical Ur-text. In answer to the call of the Almighty, he exiles himself from his native city and settles in Canaan, the land (of Israel) promised to him and his descendants in perpetuity. Abraham is the first historical personage in the world to acknowledge the one, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent deity and is thus the founder of monotheism. In answering the divine call of faith, he becomes the first “Jew,” the Patriarch from whom the narrator and all Jews are descended in an unbroken spiritual genealogy. His willingness to bind and sacrifice his only son Isaac, whom he loved, is the supreme test of Abraham’s faith; however, this sacrifice is stayed through divine intervention and a ram slaughtered in the place of Isaac. Symbolically, by not killing his son, Abraham forswears the practice of child sacrifice to Moloch and other deities popular at that ancient historical time. The ancient becomes coterminous with the present as the narrator realizes that in Beersheba, destination of Abraham and Isaac after their encounter with the divine on Mt. Moriah, once again dwell Hebrew-speaking Jews: “How long, and in how many places, everything had been going on: fathers, sons, death, sheep, thornbushes, the lot” (Jacobson, “TW” 12).

In Jacobson’s story, the skeptical narrator has no faith in the deity worshipped by his reputed forefather Abraham. While at the farm one day, however, he encounters Boaz, “the Israelite,” and their interaction informs his spiritual search (Jacobson, “TW” 1). Boaz wants to live in a vacant hut on the farm. He explains to the narrator that he is an Israelite, a survivor of the Bulhoek massacre during Passover fifty years earlier: “About half a century before, under the leadership of a certain Enoch Mgijima, one of the separatist African religious sects had rejected the New Testament as a white man’s fiction and ‘returned’ to the worship of the one God of Israel” (Jacobson, “TW” 19). In a dream, the Almighty addresses
Boaz “as if he were Joshua. . . . He woke, and knew that he had been chosen. He was a chosen man among the chosen people” (Jacobson, “TW” 20). Boaz “blind[s the narrator] with his blind eye” (Jacobson, “TW” 21).

Having appropriated Jewish religious customs, beliefs, and sacred texts, Boaz not improbably appears to the narrator to be a Black “Jew,” his African doppelgänger:

... I had felt a bond with him in his absurd, wild claim that he, too, was some kind of Jew. Why shouldn’t he be? What sort of Jew was I? Wasn’t it possible that he knew more about the spirit and fervor of the Israelites than I ever would? That I might learn from him something that no one else could ever teach me? Yes, just because he was a poor, black, skeleton-thin zealot who had been “sent” to live in a tumble-down hut on a farm that was nowhere. Just because he was a nut, a religious loony, a dreamer, a hearer of voices, a man you could do nothing with. (Jacobson, “TW” 22)

During the narrator’s successive visits to the farm, Boaz questions him about Jews, Judaism, and himself. And the differences between them are reduced to a single point of crucial divergence:

He was utterly humorless, and utterly direct. He made less of the difference in color between us—and the difference it meant in status, legal rights, opportunities, wealth, education—than any other African I had ever met. That he believed in an omnipresent God and I did not was the only difference between us that mattered at all in his eyes. Or eye, rather. (Jacobson, “TW” 23)
In time, Boaz comes to the ironic conclusion that he has been sent to this farm in order to convert the Jewish narrator to a belief in the Jewish deity. And the narrator both hopes and fears that “he might succeed” (Jacobson, “TW” 24). Boaz takes seriously the injunction that all Israel is responsible the one for the other and genuinely prays for the narrator’s soul: “We have been chosen to choose each other. We belong to the people of Israel” (Jacobson, “TW” 26).

The narrator travels for instruction between Boaz and Mr. Saltzmann. And after four months, the narrator’s father has sufficiently recovered to tell his son to send Boaz from the farm. He believes Boaz is responsible for his illness, that he is an angel of death, and that he will finish off his son after killing him. The narrator realizes that Boaz has failed in his self-appointed task. However, when he arrives at the farm to tell Boaz this, the narrator finds the old man ill and dying. In a re-enactment of the Akedah, the people ministering to Boaz choose the narrator to sacrifice a sheep in order to save the failing man’s life. And when he unwillingly cuts the sheep’s throat, the narrator feels not grace but anger and disappointment:

> It was followed, too, by a sudden seizure of rage within me that made me lash out with the blade again, even though it could do no more than it had already done. I wanted to punish the sheep for dying under my hand; I wanted to revenge myself against Boaz and my father for what I felt they had taken from me. (Jacobson, “TW” 37)

Boaz dies in the Lyndhurst hospital, and a few weeks later the narrator does leave for Israel, “carrying with [him] Mr. Saltzmann’s parting gift of a siddur [prayer book], containing the
daily prayers of the Hebrew liturgy” (Jacobson, “TW” 38).

Just exactly what the narrator feels his father and Boaz have taken from him remains unspecified and thus open to interpretation. In a story about the perceived absence of faith, the narrator’s enigmatic words suggest that this is the theft he decries. Though craving certainties, boundaries, and categories of belief, the narrator is left to wander through his own spiritual wilderness—perhaps even to enter the promised land of Israel—wrestling with ambiguity and his inchoate identity.

Throughout Dan Jacobson’s South African short stories and novels—*The Price of Diamonds* (1957) and *The Beginners* (1966)—there is a focus on Jewish concerns, issues, relations, and characters unprecedented in post-World War II South African fiction. He is the first Jewish South African writer to address in fiction both the Shoah and the significance for Diaspora Jewry of the founding of the state of Israel. Further, he “is in the vanguard of the literature of political awareness” in South Africa (Leveson 148). In addition, his emotive power, innovative imagination, and literary sensitivity ensure the placing of his work in the vanguard of Post-Colonial fictive creation.

**Froma Sand**

Froma Sand’s *My Son Africa* (1965; hereafter *MSA*) is a rather clumsy schematization of the South African intergroup relations about which Dan Jacobson writes so much more subtly, elegantly, and insightfully. Ora Stern and Haya, her mother, are Jewish Lithuanian survivors of the Shoah who arrived in Cape Town as refugees after the war. Joseph Stern
had left his pregnant wife in Kovno to emigrate to South Africa. Three years later, his wife and infant daughter were about to join him; however, the outbreak of World War II prevented their embarkation. Upon their arrival in South Africa, the Sterns discover that Joseph is living in Bloemfontein with his mistress, Clara Marcus, the wife of his business partner, Samuel Marcus. Joseph Stern has become an important man and a strong Zionist within the community. However, Ora's relation to him is negatively coloured by her feelings of paternal abandonment and betrayal: “My father clothed us, housed us, fed us: but he lived a separate life, he came and went as a stranger in the house” (Sand, MSA 20). In reaction, Ora vows at the age of thirteen to cleave to her humiliated mother, to care for her forever, and never to marry or bear children.

At the age of nineteen, Ora moves to Johannesburg where she finds work as a journalist. Her editor, Paul Arkin, is also a Jewish survivor; his father died in the death camps of Europe, and his mother, Anna, clings to him as Haya does to Ora. Both Ora and Paul are committed to their mothers, and each has vowed not to marry as long as her or his respective mother is alive. The role reversal each of them experiences is explained by Paul: “[‘]The shock of things—all the losses—somehow turned her into a child and me into a father’” (Sand, MSA 39). Similarly, Ora has an overly responsible role in Haya’s life as both “mother” and “husband.” When she eventually brings her mother to live with her in Johannesburg, Ora promises, “[‘]I will make a new life for her over here—for both of us’” (Sand, MSA 39). Her personal agenda, however, is “[n]ever to become involved with anyone, never to marry, never to be trapped by promises. To have lovers, and remain free’” (Sand, MSA 41-42).
The story begins with Ora lying naked on the bed of her lover, Jim. They argue about Jim’s wanting a commitment from Ora, and her words signal that she is constructed as a stereotype—the liberal, Jewish kafferboetie:

“What the hell do you want of me, Jim? You knew when we met that I was Ora Stern, the wild Jewish girl from Bloemfontein who writes about native shows and players. You’re a decent young Englishman, you have a fine decent family, you can meet fine decent virgins in your own community. You can marry and raise children, and go to church, and speak of God—and stand by while our bastard government treats the Africans like human garbage. Well, I don’t like churches and temples, and I don’t talk about your kind of God, Jew or Christian. I love Africa, I love the Africans with whom I work. They are exciting and original.” (Sand, MSA 11)

Because of her experience during the Shoah, Ora identifies with the plight of the persecuted Africans, who suffer terribly under apartheid. She tells Jim:

[“]Men in your circle don’t go around with Jewish girls, not even nice Jewish girls. And I’m not a ‘nice’ Jewish girl. I’m a girl who has seen every lousy thing there is to see in a cruel and crazy world. I don’t want to be nice, and careful, my darling. I want to do something useful and good, and change what I can. You forget, Jim—your lover is a one-time refugee. I can’t forget. I never will.” (Sand, MSA 13)

Ora’s chance to make her protest against a political ideology characterized in the novel as analogous to German Naziism arrives, literally, on the doorstep of her apartment.
building in the form of a young Black African boy standing and waiting in the rain. His name is Africa Lithebe, nicknamed “Cheeky,” and he wants Ora to write about him (Sand, MSA 34). After arranging for Africa to stay overnight with the houseboy, Reuben, in his room in the basement of her apartment block, Ora becomes smitten with the boy and later decides to apply to the authorities to adopt him as her son, Africa.

Haya diagnoses her daughter’s condition as “cholera of the brain”: “[‘]What is the sickness? She is the Messiah for the shwartze, for the black ones. All alone she is going to fix things up in Africa[‘)” (Sand, MSA 66). Although he is not a religious Jew, Paul Arkin tells Ora he is going to put on his tallit (prayer shawl) and pray that she is refused permission to adopt the boy. Jim proposes marriage to Ora (via the telephone), but, inevitably, her decision to adopt Africa estranges Jim, and he eventually sails for fine, decent England.

Nevertheless, Ora remains determined to adopt Africa, her cause. She tells a sales representative at the store where she is buying clothes for Africa: “‘As for being afraid, I have had good training in standing up to hostility. I’m Jewish, I spent my childhood under Hitler. You fight for what believe, you die for it sometimes, or you sell out to the fear[‘)” (Sand, MSA 92). She perseveres: “Your heart beats fast with hope and anxiety. Oh Africa, small trembling son, dark seedling of my deepest heart! I could not bear to lose you now . . .” (Sand, MSA 94). And, finally, she gets from Inspector Michael De Villiers the permit to adopt that she requires.

Dismissed from her job and harassed for her political stand in adopting Africa, Ora begins to move in liberal circles, both Black and White, even attending a Liberal Party
meeting where she meets Alan Paton. She is joined in her struggle by Dr. Hendrik Van der Merwe, an Afrikaner gynecologist whom she consulted earlier in the novel and who prescribed orgasms from a “real man” for her malaise (Sand, MSA 48). His views combine the utopic and the apocalyptic:

"I had a sense of the black mother holding a key to the future—as though Africa will again somehow become the cradle of the race of men—a new cradle with a new race of men—as you are a new kind of mother with a new kind of son.” (Sand, MSA 159)

Ora’s new kind of motherhood, however, recreates for her son a simulacrum of her own fatherless family. Africa, on the other hand, identifies himself with Sammy Davis, Jr., and wants to emigrate with Ora to Hollywood or Las Vegas (Sand, MSA 143).

Ora falls in love with Hendrik, her “[‘]rare eventual,[‘]” and Haya contacts Joseph Stern to come and speak to his daughter (Sand, MSA 174). Other characters begin to perceive Ora as symbolic: for Paul Arkin, she is the mother of the African cause; for Jim, she is the perpetual refugee; for her father, she is “[‘]a reflection of the new concept of Judaism, not the archaic one,’” the prototype of the new Jew, who, having risen above the constant threat of extermination, will stand up to atomic annihilation and teach others a new way (Sand, MSA 186). Ora’s meeting with her despised father begins a process of reconciliation of which the physical manifestation is her overcoming of writer’s block.

Jim, the decent Englishman, has abandoned South Africa for the England he represents. Hendrik, the Afrikaner, falls in love with Ora, the Jewess, and she accepts his proposal of marriage, thus assimilating her Jewish identity with his Afrikaner one. Hendrik
thus becomes father to the Black child, Africa, who, having abandoned his dysfunctional biological family, will now be nurtured and supported through the union of his adoptive White parents and their liberal love:

“We shall share strength, we shall stand hand in hand against the bitterness of our country’s night of pain. Hendrik, dear Hendrik, the blood of rabbis shall mingle with the blood of voortrekkers, our children shall be pioneers of love, they shall embrace their tall brother Africa Lithebe. Oh Cheeky, son of brightness and piercing voice and smile learning to trust, how I long for the moment of imparting this to you. Hendrik is an Afrikaner, begotten of the men of hatred, but he will grant you all the fullness of a father to a son. He is strong and brave, small Cheeky, his covered wagon is compassion, his seed shall sow a breed of love . . . oh Hendrik, dearest, cleave unto me with your maleness, we shall merge as one, beloved.” (Sand, MSA 199).

Haya views the union of her daughter and Hendrik and their parenting of Africa in both cultural and gastronomic terms:

. . . [“I am glad, I am glad you get married. Hendrik is a fine man. Would be nice, of course, if he is the son of a rabbi not the son of a nationalist Afrikaner—but perhaps is good like this. The world comes together. I am born in Lithuania. I come from a nice Jewish family. So who could tell one day I am in Africa, I have a black grand-child—a shwartzer ainickel?—who tells me I get a Dutch son-in-law? So it is. Hendrik will teach you to eat Afrikaner food, how you call that, baboetie? You teach him to eat knaidlach, matzo balls. And
that chochem Cheeky, ... he will teach us all to eat fried locust.” (Sand, MSA 212)

Hendrik purchases a house in Johannesburg built by Hans and Lisa Philipstein, European refugees from Hitler, which includes, as a symbol of their decency, a separate cottage—“[‘]the most beautiful servants’ quarters in South Africa’” (Sand, MSA 196). Reuben, the houseboy, is invited to become the caretaker of the new family home. However, Africa has disappeared.

Eventually, Reuben brings back the unrepentant Africa, who, jealous of Hendrik, had rejoined his old criminal gang. Africa is deposited with Ora’s African friends, Jacob and Gertrude Masoleng, at Friendly Glade, the Masoleng’s location/township. An ensuing race riot there leaves Jacob and Africa badly beaten and Gertrude dead. And the novel ends with Ora’s incantation: “Oh Africa, small Cheeky, son . . . dark seedling of my deepest heart . . . I love, I love, I love” (Sand, MSA 255).

*My Son Africa* is constructed as a novel of political protest. However, in its paradigmatic portrayal of South African intergroup relations, it is the paradigm which dominates both the story and the characters. For the dramatis personae are relegated to the position of caricature. And, in that capacity, they stand as somewhat humanized examples of various dominant categories within the social and cultural strata of South Africa. So the fact of Ora’s Jewish identity and experience in the *Shoah* does not confer character or meaning in this novel; it is (co)incidental. Her meaning inheres only in her symbolization as a type, an oppressed and persecuted person, and her relation to the other symbolically marked characters she encounters. Ultimately, the characters cannot sustain the symbolic
weight with which Sand has burdened them. The often sentimental, clichéd, overblown, and overwrought prose weakens the impact and import of what is being conveyed. And, although the novel is so very earnest, its high seriousness and frantic intensity become, inadvertently, self-parodic.

Jillian Becker

Although Jillian Becker (1932-) is perhaps better known as an authority and author on international terrorism, she has also published several works of fiction. Her first novel, *The Keep* (1967; hereafter *TK*), tells the rather morbid story of the Leytons, a dysfunctional, wealthy Jewish family living in an upper-class Johannesburg suburb. The novel’s thematic and symbolic preoccupation with death—in its various manifestations—is announced by the Joycean title of the first of the novel’s four chapters: “The Dead.” On the third Wednesday of each month—the “day of Odin,” the supreme god and creator, the god of both victory and death in Scandinavian mythology (*OED*)—Josephine Leyton, “a dark unchildlike child, too solemn, too clear and correct in her speech, so that adults felt criticised and attacked her cheeks in self-defence,” takes tea at the “[¬]Dead House[¬]” of her Great-Aunt Jenny and Great-Uncle Frederick Kronowsky (Becker, *TK*, 1). Josephine’s older brother, Simon Leyton, has stopped accompanying his sister on these ritual monthly visits. She characterizes her Great-Uncle’s residence as the Dead House because of its mounted trophy heads of wild African animals and the albums of photographs of now dead relatives she peruses there; yet she is unable to convey to Simon “... how she felt deadness in her
Uncle’s house as unmistakably as she felt safety in their own” (Becker, *TK* 4). However, the safety Josephine feels in the home of her parents, Rayfel and Freda Leyton, proves in the end to be just as deadly.

Hoping to view photographs of actual corpses at the Dead House, Simon eventually does attend with Josephine. However, the albums contain merely pictures of relatives now deceased: “And everyone who was old now had been a child in Russia. Once upon a time, in a land far away” (Becker, *TK* 8). For the Leyton children, the family’s Jewish heritage, imaged through the estranging language of fairy tale, is geographically, temporally, and emotionally remote. As unrelated to them, indeed, as is Great-Uncle Frederick’s immigration, a stereotypical and by now familiar South African *topos* here elevated to the status of mythology:

Uncle Fred’s African studies had begun when he’d ‘smoused’ through the Free State and the Transvaal with the customary donkey-cart (that *motif* of the pioneering days so common that along the frieze of the century it fits between the oxwagons as a Greek triglyph between the metopes). They had continued when he had turned prospector, exercising his hopes with a sluicepan[.] And they were given their widest scope when, after making his fortune in partnership with the owner of a mining store who’d had a side-interest in brandy and a side-door which the mine boys preferred to the other, he had gone with a party of intrepid men into the bushveld and shot his subjects dead. More recently they had been pursued chiefly through books, museums and camera lenses. But throughout, their chief purpose had been to assist Fred
Kronowsky in fixing his claim to be a True Man of Africa. (Becker, TK 15)

What Great-Uncle Fred teaches his niece Freda Leyton—whom he and Great-Aunt Jenny raise after her parents die in the influenza epidemic while on their way to visit Palestine after World War I—and then her children, Simon and Josephine, his grand-nephew and grand-niece, is that the category “Jew” is infinitely mutable, thus rendering Jewish identity equally unstable:

‘Jews,’ he instructed the children, ‘have always had to be adaptable. You can’t say a Jew’s like this or a Jew’s like that. The most typical example, of any nation, on this earth, that you may care to name, is its Jew. The most Russian Russian. The most German German. And so on. Maybe not the Esquimaux. All right, about Esquimaux I’m not arguing. But Indiannnns, Chineeeees, I’m telling you. And in the Middle East, like it or not, there are Jews as black as kaffirs. Blacker, if you’ll excuse me. I’m telling you if we had to live among leopards, we’d come out in spots. All you’ve got to do, you’ve got to put a Jew in a New Country, and you’ve got a New Man.’

(Becker, TK 15)

Great-Uncle Fred’s “New Man,” however, is one in whom Jewish identity has been erased. His prescription for the new Jew is total assimilation, a recipe which his niece, Freda Leyton, implements in the lives of both herself and her children. The Dead House thus becomes, symbolically, “a museum,” an edifice memorializing the fossilization of Jewish memory and identity (Becker, TK 25).

Rayfel Leyton marries the reluctant Freda, the daughter of Saul Levin—“... who’d
been in gold and died of the Spanish ‘flu, practically a millionaire . . .” (Becker, TK 21)—
for love: “‘Why I—I married you for love. And I *loved* you for your money’” (Becker, TK 57).
Rayfel is a vain lawyer with an egotistic ambition to become a member of parliament.
Freda has artistic and intellectual pretensions which jibe with her privileged life of leisure
and lassitude. As she waits for her putative passion to express itself in something
significant, however, she abandons all responsibilities and indulges in fantasies. Within
their castle, Rayfel and Freda keep apart, both physically and emotionally.

Simon and Josephine are the progeny of their parents’ loveless and lifeless marriage.
Through a combination of personal disengagement and maternal inertia, Freda turns over
their upbringing to Nanny Binny, an English Christian spinster whose favourite is Simon.
The appropriately named Alan Jesus, the dog, completes this assimilated family.

After hearing Simon singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” at the Leyton’s regular
Saturday afternoon tea, Great-Aunt Lydia voices the concern that the children are being
denied their religion, heritage, and identity:

‘But tell me, vere is he learning to shing sux shongs?’ . . .

‘You sink you can do mitout religion? The kinderlach don’t know nutting
about their own religion or their own pipple. You don’t shend Simy to
shool—’ . . .

‘I must stand by and votts my own nephew and niece bringing up to be
heathens?’ (Becker, TK 40)

However, Freda has nothing to offer her children and nothing to substitute for Nanny
Binny’s Christian input:
. . . two things prevented her from replacing whatever image of Heaven and Jesus the children might have with a radical blank. First, the policy she had established from the beginning of non-interference with Nanny’s governorship. And secondly, if only her aunts were thin ladies with white hands who smelt of lavender and wore pearls! When she had been a boarder at St. Catherine’s School how she had wished on visiting days that her mother (bringing boxes of teiglach) would not talk so loudly, or that, if she must, she would sound like Josephine Mill’s mother, whose dentures had so aristocratically clicked on the last syllable of her daughter’s name. (Becker, TK 41)

Freda’s acute and embarrassed recognition of her mother’s, her aunts’, and her own Jewish difference is suppressed and counterpointed to an imaginative reconstruction of her family as the English Christian South Africans with whom she identifies and to whom she is becoming socialized and assimilated.

Estranged from her Jewishness, Freda’s identity becomes a void. Her self-hatred finds its external target in her Aunt Lydia, whose Yiddish-accented voice the third-person omniscient narrator (reflecting Freda’s viewpoint) characterizes as sounding “like a cheese-grater,” she having “come to the country too late to get a wieldy grip on English” (Becker, TK 33). In resonance with her mother, Josephine Leyton echoes the former’s “distaste” for Aunt Lydia, for Jewishness, although she admits this “was unfair since a relation was not something to eat” (Becker, TK 34). Simon’s antipathy to his Jewish Great-Aunt Lydia, on the other hand, is much more physical and ominous: “Simon, however, had shouted out in the bathroom that if he’d been a Cossack he would have socked her too. Which Nanny had
seemed not to hear” (Becker, *TK* 34). This legacy of intergenerational and familial Jewish self-loathing has disastrous repercussions later in the novel.

The emotional and spiritual violence within the Leyton family has its physical expression in the character and actions of Simon. From the time of his birth, when Freda had “substitute[d] Nanny Binny for the undeliverable embrace,” Simon is viewed and described as pathologically, perhaps even genetically, different (Becker, *TK* 129). Great-Uncle Fred comments that Simon is “‘[a] real Aryan type’” (Becker, *TK* 40). His emotionally and physically absent father, Rayfel, surmises that “perhaps some foremother took a Cossack for a lover, willingly or unwillingly, and thus a Nemisite gene was set on the road, the long, long road to the green pastures. Was the time now come for the iniquities to be visited?” (Becker, *TK* 149). Simon, destined by his mother to be the fulfilment of her empty life, rapidly disappoints her:

Then not only had Simon failed to turn out the perceptive, articulate creature through whom all his mother’s gifts would come to full flowering, not only was he not her masterpiece, but so alien, so, as the years went by, increasingly alien, that had he not been born in this very house she might have fancied some terrible mistake had been made. . . .

[H]er own view [was] that Simon was not just naughty, but actually, somehow actually, fundamentally bad, though God knew it was a terrible truth for a mother to have to face. (Becker, *TK* 130, 131)

She tells Rayfel that she sometimes thinks “‘[’]that your son is little more than a complete idiot[’]” (Becker, *TK* 132). In this way, Simon’s parents disown him and disavow their
responsibility for his aberrant and abhorrent behaviour.

As a youngster, Simon cuts up his mother’s fox fur with Nanny Binny’s scissors. With the same instrument, he later cuts up the exhumed crippled cat—which he had earlier beheaded with a spade—in order to see its insides (Becker, TK 43). In both instances, Nanny Binny stays silent, protecting the child she favours. When Willy, the native African gardener, apparently murders the black washerwoman and an unidentified male friend in the servant’s squalid quarters, Simon, aided by Josephine, slips into the building through a window (stepping on the dead man in the process) and steals the murder weapon, a knife. Afterwards, Josephine collects her older brother’s dirty, tattered, blood-stained clothing and hides it. Both this knife and Simon’s hidden clothing play significant parts in the evolving story.

Later, during a vacation by the seaside, Simon jumps into the heavy surf to rescue a boy (also named Simon) from drowning, gouging himself on the rocks and immediately becoming both hero and leader of the other boys vacationing there. When Freda reneges on a promise to take her son surfing at Muizenberg, an angry Simon, urged on by the other boys, pushes the stolen knife “with slow, controlled strength” between the eyes of a seal stranded in a pond left by the receding tide and places the corpse in his mother’s hotel bed (Becker, TK 114). Simon’s gratuitously violent act, once again covered up by Nanny Binny, elicits both awe and revulsion from his audience: “Benny, the barmitzvah boy, stood stiff and quiet, his mouth stretched, his eyes half closed, looking at what the goy had done. Only a goy could have done that” (Becker, TK 115). However, Simon is not a “goy”; that he is perceived as one as a result of his cruel and amoral violence is significant, because he
represents the external articulation of both his Jewish parents’ internalized self-loathing and his family’s dysfunction. Thus, within the vacuum of the loveless Leyton family, the Jewish son becomes a “goy,” his innate identity erased and his personality warped by parental self-doubt and indifference.

Interestingly, this slaying of the seal occurs as a result of Simon’s anger over his mother’s breaking her promise to take him surfing at Muizenberg. For Freda, this popular seaside town represents the epitome of the Jewish affiliation she loathes in herself:

She went to Muizenberg only for the surfing. It was a horrible place, crowded with vulgar, loud, ugly people whose grammar was worse than her Aunt Lydia’s. They came down every year from their tasteless houses in Johannesburg, fat women with red lips, moustaches and diamonds, and fat men with wet lips and flashy cars who stood about in indecent bathing-trunks talking at the tops of their voices about money and business. They had spoilt whiny children. They spread their gorged flesh everywhere over the beach which they had ruined with a hideous pavilion and concrete promenades.

Gross, gregarious, philistine Jews! (Becker, TK 104)

Here, Becker’s satire is punctuated with stereotypical markers of antisemitic South African fictive discourse—physical ugliness, money and business, diamonds, accented English, loudness, vulgarity, ostentation—revealing a personal antipathy embedded within the narrative voice. In this way, Muizenberg functions symbolically as the locus of Freda’s rejection of Jewish identity and, from her perspective, its grotesque expression. In her violent renunciation of all Jews—of herself—she, like her son, effectively and paradoxically
transforms herself into a non-Jew, a “goy.”

Simon is sent to Dr. Emma Weiss, a German psychotherapist, for treatment. However, despite her success with boys—through a combination of sexual abuse, humiliation, degradation, and torture—it is Simon who conquers her, both sexually and emotionally. As Dr. Weiss becomes fixated on Simon and his sexual attentions, she reports to Freda that he is “[‘]abnormally normal[’]” (Becker, TK 147). And when he tires of her and abandons her, she suffers a nervous breakdown.

When Josephine retrieves Simon’s hidden clothing and burns it in the wood-burning kitchen stove, an earth tremor causes her to lose her balance and fall into the flames. She is horribly burned and disfigured. Freda, however, spends very little time with her convalescing daughter, preferring instead to attend to the construction of a conservatory, in which, when completed, she grows tulips and other Northern European flora. Simon, having been expelled from his local school and sent away to boarding school, returns home from his classmate Benny’s farm, where he has been spending his vacation. While attending to her tulips, Freda is bitten by a black snake, and Simon answers her cries for assistance. However, when he reaches his mother, he, indifferently and apparently without conscience, watches her die:

He stopped trying to break the resisting wood. He just stood and looked. This would be the first time he’d ever watched a person dying. . . .

Simon waited until there was nothing more to watch. . . .

No one looked out of the windows of neighbouring houses to discover what the screaming had been about. Perhaps no scream could penetrate the walls of
such houses, built as they were to withstand assaults, even by time, hail, pests, 
earth-tremors or the black menace. (Becker, *TK* 245, 246)

The keep, last refuge in the Leyton castle, proves unsafe.

Josephine Leyton's personal holocaust is analogous to the *Shoah* which occurs during 
the period of time framed by the novel. While Freda rests in her seaside hotel, the "*dies 
irae*" engulfs European Jewry (Becker, *TK* 111). However, she remains untouched by 
events in Europe as she perversely indulges her feelings “about the race to which she 
unwillingly belonged, in the light of these developments” (Becker, *TK* 190). On the other 
hand, Great-Uncle Fred is devastated. In trying to be the New Man, the most South African 
South African, he discovers that, in the face of Nazi German persecution of Europe’s Jews, 
he has not been a pioneer, but merely a survivor. He retires to his house, seldom emerging:

> He was, he discovered, still a European: he had, after all, been landed on an 
> alien shore, far from home, and now home itself was being scuttled and he 
> could never return, and yet the better part of himself was there, the infant Fred 
> was sinking with it, and the old Fred, this remnant, had never been quite a 
> pioneer, never much more than a survivor. (Becker, *TK* 190)

Great-Uncle Fred’s recognition of his Jewish condition of alienation, exile, loss, and 
survival is palpable. However, this condition has always already been present in the novel 
within the extended Jewish family itself.

Within the Edenic garden of White privilege and power lives the black snake. In the 
context of *apartheid* South Africa, the ideological subtext is clear. However, there is 
another, equally compelling political subtext—the antipathy Becker constructs in her
characters in relation to their Jewishness. The Keep may be read at one level as a novel viciously satiric of Freda and Rayfel Leyton as representatives of White South Africa. But the satire alone accounts for neither this powerfully written novel’s very disturbing content, nor the apparent lack of authorial empathy for Jews. In her portrayal of self-hatred, Becker, like Gordimer, may be projecting unresolved issues of Jewish identity and self-identification into her fiction. This possibility notwithstanding, however, the author portrays Jews in a most unmediatedly pernicious way, often invoking—without comment, criticism, or consideration—the most antisemitic stereotypes present in South African historical discourse and fiction, and thus demonstrates the kind of Jewish estrangement foregrounded in the novel.10

Antony Sher

Antony Sher (1949- ) is another expatriate South African Jew, one perhaps better known as a brilliant actor, director, and artist than as a writer. In 1968, he emigrated to London, England, to study at the Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. Since then he has become an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company and has been acclaimed as one of the finest actors of his generation. In 1984, his remarkable performance as Shakespeare’s Richard III won Sher the Drama magazine’s Best Actor Award (1984), the City Limits’ Best Stage Actor (1985), the London Standard’s Best Actor Award (1985), and the Laurence Olivier Best Actor Award. His first publication, Year of the King: An Actor’s Diary and Sketchbook (1985), is a non-fictional account of his preparation for, and
execution of, his role in *Richard III*. In 1988, he turned his hand to fiction, publishing *Middlepost* (hereafter *Mp*), the first of the pair of novels he has written to date.

*Middlepost* is constructed as a South African picaresque quest novel, whose unlikely *picaro*, Zeev Zali (né Immerman, registered as Zali to avoid conscription into the Czar’s Imperial Army for twenty-five years, but called Smous throughout the book), is an observant Jew from Plungyan (the Yiddish name for the Lithuanian shtetl of Plunge) who (in the third decade of his life) is sent to the Cape Colony of Southern Africa just after the Anglo-Boer War “so he could establish a foothold for the rest of the family” (Sher, *Mp* 27). He seems a most implausible candidate for such a responsibility, however. In Plungyan, at the age of thirteen, unsure of what direction he should choose for his life, Smous “perches on the milking-stool in the kitchen” and sits in the doorway until “the act of pondering becomes in itself his routine” (Sher, *Mp* 98). As an adolescent, Smous is dismissed by his uncle, Dr. Lazar Immerman, as “a half-wit” (Sher, *Mp* 93), by the shtetl children as “a runtish boy with a beard, like a midget, or some freak you might see in the travelling gypsy sideshow” (Sher, *Mp* 100), and by his mother as “[‘]the family fool[‘]” (Sher, *Mp* 114):

> They had always feared he would become the town idiot (to many he already was, sitting in his doorway) and now he grew even odder, more remote, muttering to himself and constantly flicking his head. (Sher, *Mp* 104)

Nevertheless, at about the age of thirty-five (his birth date being uncertain), and in response to a letter of invitation from the Immerman relatives now in Southern Africa, Smous begins a journey to join his uncle, Lazar, and cousin, Issy, in the hamlet of Calvinia, Cape Colony.

Part One of the novel begins with Smous’s arrival at Cape Town on a sunny Sunday
in 1902. Because he has overslept (due to the consumption of too much celebratory ale the night before), Smous awakens to find himself the last passenger on board the ship which has transported him to Southern Africa from Southampton. Inauspiciously, a seagull twice defecates on him, and he inadvertently urinates on himself while desperately fumbling to relieve himself over the ship’s side. Having missed the debarkation of his co-religionists, and exuding “a putrid odour” (Sher, Mp 21), Smous finds himself alone with the single remaining immigration officer, Mr. Theed, to whom he appears “[h]irsute, runtish, tiny hands and feet, buttocks flattened by a lifetime of idleness” (Sher, Mp 21). Joined by another immigration officer, Mr. Polchard, Smous, who knows no English, is processed and given by officialdom yet another invented identity—Maurice Josif Brodnick, a fourteen-year-old from Poland (Sher, Mp 35).

Smous emerges from the buildings at the docks into a strange and insane new country. Through a series of misadventures with an assortment of odd characters in Cape Town—including Koos Visser, a legless Afrikaner Anglo-Boer War veteran; Pa Gommie, a half-caste whom Miller and van Riebeeck, the English owner and horse of the carriage in which Smous finds a ride, run over in the street; the Mommie, Pa Gommie’s hapless wife, and proprietress of a seaside sugarhouse (whorehouse); and Naoksa, a San woman whom Visser has kidnapped up north in Bushmanland and whom Miller rapes—Smous manages to lose his steamer trunk, his jacket, his money, and most of his possessions before he has spent barely a day in his adopted land.

In the company of Naoksa, who speaks only Xhosa and who seeks his help to find her way home to her husband, Kgototxe, and son, Bo, Smous, who speaks only Yiddish, begins
his great trek north through the Karoo. In Part Two of the novel, Smous and Naoksa have reached Ceres, where he finds work with a Jewish German wholesaler, Kottler. Unable to pronounce the name Immerman, the Boers to whom he peddles his wares call him, simply, Meneer Smous:

Smous liked it. You only had to say it with a ‘sch’ and it sounded Yiddish—*schmous*. He would coin a new Yiddish word, he decided. Here at last was a part of the job which appealed to those distant dreams of glory: I am not just a smous, he thought, I am *the* smous. Future generations of smouses will have to look back to me, the great-grandfather smous . . . There will be a statue of me in Ceres, bestriding a rocky terrain, one hand holding my hat against the glare of the sun, the other outstretched, holding a fist full of buttons and threads, the forefinger pointing into the uncharted wilderness where no smous had yet gone smousing—*Smous, the smous* . . . (Sher, *Mp* 144).

Smous’s translingual musings and pathetically grandiose dreams of a rather bathetic heroism as the patriarchal, archetypal, quintessential *smous*, however, do not translate into success or progress towards his goal.

Preceding Part One of the novel is a short prefatory paragraph titled “Smous,” in which Sher emphasizes the many names of his reluctant *picaro*, defines the Afrikaans word *smous*, and gives both its unique context and proper pronunciation. By creating Smous, Sher may be understood to be parodying this ubiquitous South African stereotype of the Wandering Jew, to be ironizing a well-known image in order to undermine its antisemitic animus, to rename and reconstruct it as a positive Jewish persona, and to recontextualize it.
within South African historical and literary discourse. However, Smous is a dismal failure as a *smous*. He is unable to barter or make a profit. Instead, falling deeper into Kottler’s debt, he becomes a virtual slave. Thus, Sher’s satire does not retrieve and rehabilitate a stereotype, but, rather, by attaching his own ironic nuances, he reinforces its negativity and demonstrates his antipathy towards the Jewish character he has created. The humour of this farcical situation (and others in which Smous finds himself in the novel) does not originate in the author’s sympathy towards his protagonist, then, but in his ridicule.

There is abundant evidence pointing towards Sher’s antipathy towards the Jewish characters in his novel, all of whom are satirized in ways the non-Jewish characters are not. And, although all of the novel’s characters are in differing ways eccentric, alienated, and marginalized, Sher reserves his most scathing judgement and derision for the Immermans. Smous’s father, Her Immerman (*sic*), “resembled a simpleton at the best of times, dumpy and short, his mouth fixed in a desperate grin” (Sher, *Mp* 25). His brother, (Onkel) Lazar, excels academically, and, after attending the Yiddish University of Vilna, he “return[s] eventually with diplomas of distinction and an imposing top hat which he always wore, indoors and out, day and night. Lodged between his two flapping ears, it gave his head the appearance of a tall ship sailing around on the undulating silver curls of his beard” (Sher, *Mp* 56). Lazar Immerman’s disparaging, Dumbo-like delineation—simultaneously bestial and cartoonish, demeaning and laughable—is echoed in the depiction of Smous’s maternal grandmother, the “Old Girl,” as both witch-like and rodential:

She lived in a small dark room half way down the passage and only appeared at meal times. Her mouth was so sucked in it looked as though she carried a
small lump under her nose, not unlike a dwarf’s fist, which punched back and forwards as she chewed her food. . . .

He [Smous] passed his grandmother’s room and heard the familiar scratching, rustling noises within, like a large rodent in its nest. . . . (Sher, *Mp* 66, 97)

Smous himself is characterized in similarly negative ways.

Elie Immerman, Smous’s elder brother, displays the most cynicism towards things Jewish and is the most cynically portrayed of the family members:

Elie, his brother, possessed everything Smous coveted: three year’s seniority, the family name, huge front teeth (Smous’s were minute) and a truly inventive mind. Recently, for example, Elie had started to wear a smudge of coal dust on the end of his nose to shorten its hooked shape and so de-Jew himself. While it wasn’t entirely successful—in fact, it just attracted attention and made Elie look like a Jew with a dirty nose—Smous found the idea astonishing. Elie devised the coal blob because he had started studying at count Dolrogusky’s Musical Academy, and, of all his brother’s achievements, Smous most envied his access to the Russians and their summer palace. (Sher, *Mp* 57)

From the Dolrogusky servants, Elie learns how to mimic Jewish behaviour, appearance, gestures, and inflections, and how to perform ““Jewish copulation[’]” (Sher, *Mp* 60). Elie enumerates for his brother an exhaustive list of antisemitic stereotypes:

‘This is what we look like to them,” he said, burying his head in his shoulders, gesticulating wildly with his arms, then rubbing his hands together in greed.

““Oi-yoi-yoi, business schmusiness, what a to-do, such a carry on, do me a
They also say that we torture our animals in the most unspeakable way when we slaughter them, that we then smear their fat on our hair and on our bodies to keep warm, which is why we look so slimy, that we drink human blood, and that, all in all, our hygiene stinks.

‘And does it?’ asked a breathless Smous.

‘Probably. But worst of all is how we breed.’

‘Breed?’ Smous gulped. ‘What? How?’

‘Prepare yourself,’ warned Elie. ‘The man puts his fruit in the woman’s mouth and then after a while she swallows it, and then a year later she vomits out more Jewish babies.’ (Sher, Mp 59)

Though Elie is merely repeating what he has heard and seen, it soon becomes apparent that he has internalized these negative attributes.

His music career ends when Froi Immerman, his mother, seeing the disturbing changes in Elie, observing his “mimic[ing] the family strangely, rubbing his hands greedily and pulling at his nose,” refuses to accept the Dolrogusky’s offer to sponsor him at a larger music school in St. Petersburg (Sher, Mp 60). Instead, he begins to travel with his father, who is an itinerant trader, and to drink, in time becoming a “drunken clown” (Sher, Mp 93).

Elie’s urge to “de-Jew” himself expresses itself in a corrosive self-hatred:

[‘]Dear oh dear, oi veh! You think maybe assimilation is the answer? Hmm, maybe. I tried it actually, years ago, with a blob of coal dust . . . here—’ he touched the tip of his nose, ‘shortens the nose. Used to wear it to the music academy. People said it looked silly, but what do they know? . . . Yes, maybe
you’re right. Our women should start putting their hair into wreaths, we should start putting coal dust on our noses, grow back our foreskins, and we’ll be laughing.’ (Sher, Mp 96)

Finally, Her Immerman tells Elie angrily, “’You’re laughing at yourself.’ . . . ’I’m ready to burst with all your shit!’” (Sher, Mp 107). Elie eventually withdraws from identifying with his Jewish family and disappears from the novel.

Sher’s animosity towards his Jewish characters, Smous’s “cringing, apologetic people,” also colours his portrayal of Judaism (Sher, Mp 101). Smous’s Hebrew teacher at the cheder (Jewish school) he attends in Plungyan is a grotesque sadist:

There was only one Bible, around which the boys crowded, and some, so the joke went, learned how to read Hebrew not only from right to left but upside down as well. Their teacher was a pink frog of a man, Pinchvinch, so named because of his favourite method of punishment. One clammy hand was probed into the clothing of the guilty party to search out their most sensitive spot—nipple, underarm, or the soft skin between inner thighs and privates—where the nails of his forefinger and thumb would lodge; the victim would then remain impaled in front of the class while the lesson continued.

Even more terrifying was the synagogue. (Sher, Mp 54-55)

Later, in Middlepost, after having eaten non-kosher meat for the first time in his life, Smous relates to April, a Thembu tribesman who understands no Yiddish and who is now the servant of Meneer Breedt, the details of his terrible barmitzvah, ending with the admission, “’I have already failed as a Jew in so many ways.’ He paused, then said, ‘I’m a joke’”
In time, Smous abandons the cart, merchandise, and dying donkey he had rented from Kottler and resumes his quest, heading again towards Calvinia with Naoksa. However, he is still unable to communicate:

Smous had made no effort to learn the languages of the land. He told himself this was because he was far from certain he'd be staying. He knew two place names: Ceres and Kulvidya, five words in English—Howareyou, Gooood, Yes, No, and Bye-bye, and only one in Afrikaans, Smous—his trade and new name.

(Sher, Mp 143)

When, in Part Three, they reach Middlepost, Smous is confronted with another community of grotesque and eccentric characters. Meneer Stoffel and Mevrou Hannie Breedt have returned to their home, Middelpos, after being interned in English concentration camps after the Anglo-Boer War. All Breedt’s livestock have been killed by the English, and he has been reduced from a farmer to the proprietor of a store and inn. His wife, Middlepost’s teacher, has suffered damage to her digestive system while interned and now is unable to control her devastating flatulence. Major Giles Septimus Kavanagh Quinn, the homosexual English soldier who defeated Breedt at the battle of Middlepost, has remained, as has his batman, Private Billy Garbett, to prospect for gold in the veld. April, once Quinn’s servant, has received an English education from his former master, and been given to Breedt, along with a grandfather clock, as a peace offering. April’s only surviving family member from the war is his son, Caius Martius, nicknamed Klippie. Another Bushman, the ancient Bok, is “Quinn’s gold-diviner” and the clandestine brewer of Bokswater, the rot-gut to which
Quinn is addicted and upon which Smous develops a serious dependence (Sher, *Mp* 245).

As in much Jewish South African fiction, a quadrangular relation between four symbolic groups emerges: Breedt represents the Boer fanatic; April, the abused Black African, deafened in one ear and blinded in both eyes by Breedt’s brutal beatings; Quinn, the quintessential Englishman, erudite but deviant; and Smous, the Jew, who, unable to speak, comprehend, or act, merely observes the often violent interactions between the other three while protecting his privileged position. To all the others, Smous remains a cipher, onto whom each projects his own unresolved conflicts. For Breedt, Smous is an Old Testament Prophet (not unlike Jonah, a recurrent trope in the novel) come to direct him to the right course of holy action. To April, Smous is a “[‘]mooncalf,[’]” a fellow wanderer and sufferer (Sher, *Mp* 169). And for Quinn, Smous is a potential sexual partner.

When, in Part Four, Smous finally fulfils his quest and re-encounters Lazar and Issy in Calvinia in October 1904, he discovers that Lazar is planning another transhemispheric move, this time to the United States of America: “They might be on the other side of the world, but nothing had changed” (Sher, *Mp* 414). To the compendium of antisemitic stereotypes in the novel, Lazar adds the final entry, that of congenital Jewish mental deficiency. In the “[‘]madhouse[’]” (Sher, *Mp* 413) of Southern Africa, the Jews, with their “diseased brains,” can survive (Sher, *Mp* 414). Lazar hopes to find the cure for sick, Jewish brains in America (Sher, *Mp* 419). Smous flees Calvinia and his relations to return to Middlepost at the end of the novel.

Smous is neither an idiot nor a fool (wise or otherwise), but, for no discernible reason, he acts like one throughout the novel, separated from himself and others through silence and
self-loathing. However, there appears to be a larger and stranger obsession being acted out in the novel. Marcia Leveson suggests that the book “demands to be read as a case study, as a fantastical enactment of psychological trauma. It was only in 1990 that Sher publicly admitted that his sense of the stigma of being South African had been reinforced by having to face up to two other areas of stigma—being Jewish and being gay” (196). During one of their Bokswater-shrouded evenings, Quinn accosts Smous as “you great walking piece of circumcised sausage” (Sher, *Mp* 290); of course, Smous cannot understand him, although he has by now added “Bokswater” to his meagre vocabulary:

[’]God, it would be rapturous to reach across now and rummage in your wild Ukrainian lap, don’t you think?’ Quinn was careful to keep all trace of lust from his voice and eyes, retaining an expression of detached, erudite pleasure, hands gesturing now and then with classical grace. ‘It is heavenly, you know,’ he informed Smous, ‘to be able to sit here and say these things to your face. That hairy face with its glorious organ of flesh sticking out, catching the light just so, its sheen neither slack nor rigid, a face altogether so reminiscent of the lower visage, the lap visage, the loin visage, with its own little terrier’s crop and oh such expressive featurettes . . . yes, fearfully thrilling to be able to say these things while you presume our theme to be literature or the climate.’

(Sher, *Mp* 291)

The conflation of the Jewish organs of smell and (male) procreation, combined with the fellatory imagery of so-called “Jewish copulation,” the preoccupation with male circumcision (the inscription of the covenant of Jewish identity into the flesh), the use and
magnification of anti-Jewish stereotypes, the “runtish” stature of the protagonist, and the overall strangeness in the novel, all suggest that the book is an “autopathography” of self-hatred, an exhibition by Sher of his conflicted identity and his unresolved (perhaps unresolvable) obsessions with being very short, South African, gay, and Jewish. Attempting to address and resist apartheid, Sher instead invokes and perpetuates the very divisions his novel may have been trying to exorcise.11

Rose Zwi

Born in Mexico in 1928, Rose Zwi immigrated with her family to South Africa, where she grew up and was educated. In the 1980s, she published a trilogy of novels which portray the genealogical saga of several generations of a Jewish South African family.12 Her first novel, Another Year in Africa (1980; hereafter AYA), won the Olive Schreiner Prize for Prose in 1982, the same year she received the Mofolo-Plomer Prize for an unpublished novel, titled The Umbrella Tree, which was subsequently published in 1990.

The title Another Year in Africa is the English translation of a recurrent Yiddish phrase in the text and expresses both the resignation of the Jewish immigrants to a bitter (and supposedly temporary) exile in South Africa and their nostalgic yearning for “der heim” (“the home,” in Yiddish) in Lithuania (Zwi, AYA 34). The novel focusses on the extended family of Berka Feldman, who fled Ragaza, Lithuania, after a pogrom, emigrated to South Africa in 1892, and worked for his rich Uncle. Uncle Feldman put Berka to work in his Concession Store and attached kaffireater; however, Berka breaks irrevocably and
irreconcilably with Uncle Feldman by buying the tools of the cobbler’s trade he learned in Lithuania, resigning as his relative’s kaffireatnik, and beginning his solitary, wandering life on the veld as an itinerant tradesman. Now, in 1937, Berka lives in Mayfontein with his wife Yenta, daughter Raizel, and son Joel, and plies his trade from a shop instead of from an ox wagon.

Mayfontein, a poor mining suburb of Johannesburg and home to a large community of Jewish Lithuanian immigrants, is recontextualized in the novel as a transplanted shtetl. Within this circumscribed community, the neighbours and landsleit of Berka Feldman, the cobbler, are identified by their occupations: Hershl Singer the Zionist baker, Leib Schwartzman the blacksmith, Mr. Nathan the draper, Mr. Steinberg the butcher (“who gave short weight” [Zwi, AYA 16]), Mr. Pinn the miser (owner of a second-hand store), Mrs. Pinn the gossip, Dovid Erlich the tailor, and Shmuel the plumber. The ties of Jewishness, proximity, poverty, and “der heim” both unite and divide them. In addition, there are the strong but ambivalent family bonds. The unresolved conflict between Berka and his Uncle is mirrored in the relations between various other family members. Gittel Levitan, widowed sister of Yenta Feldman (Berka’s wife), lives with her daughter Sheinka, son-in-law Dovid Erlich (the tailor), and granddaughter Ruth. Berka and Yenta are thus uncle and aunt to Dovid and Sheinka, great-uncle and great-aunt to Ruth, their grandniece. The Feldman’s children—Raizel and Joel—are Sheinka Erlich’s cousins.

When thirty-one-year-old Dovid Erlich betrays his wife (pregnant with their unborn son, Phillip) and daughter by falling in love and having an adulterous affair with Raizel Feldman (ten years his junior), Berka breaks with him also. Berka has cut himself off from
a very painful past, from Judaism, and from God. In so doing, however, he has erased the past and its traditions for his children. Raizel fills that emotional void with Dovid, whose Yiddish songs, poems, and stories from Ragaza move her deeply. Her betrayal of her cousin, Sheinka, and her family is just the beginning. She later falls in love with Jan Burger, the son of the Afrikaner family living next to the Feldmans. Like Sonia in Victor Barwin’s “A Convent Jewess,” Raizel denies her Jewish identity by converting to Christianity. She tells Berka, her father: “'To you it doesn’t matter to what God the superstitious pray. And I’ve got to have a God. You killed the Jewish one for me’” (Zwi, AYA 139). She marries Jan in a church and moves with him to farm in Rhodesia.

Berka is the sole Feldman to survive the pogrom in Lithuania in which his entire family was murdered. In his despair, he has denied God and Judaism. He admits to Raizel, “[’]I didn’t teach you to be a Jew[’]” (Zwi, AYA 138). Neither has he taught his son, Joel. Joel’s self-rejection is not as dramatic as that of his sister. However, his betrayal of Berka is more devastating. Like Laurie Levanthal in Johannesburg Friday, Joel is frustrated and unfulfilled in his studies to become a pharmacist. Mere months before the completion of his training, his Uncle Benjamin (Yenta and Gittel’s brother) summons Joel to meet Berka’s dying Uncle Feldman. Joel complies, rejecting his father’s poverty, failure, and socialist, anti-Capitalist attachment to the dignity of labour. The son’s estrangement from his father is enmeshed with his estrangement from Jewish identity; he is ashamed of both:

On the Mayfontein tram, however, he sat in a sweat of embarrassment as the immigrants talked loudly to one another in Yiddish, above the clatter of the iron wheels. He would watch in acute discomfort as an Englishman lowered
his newspaper and smirked at the foreign sounds emitted by Joel’s co-religionists, as unselfconsciously as though they were still in their shtetl. It was even worse when they trotted out their ridiculous version of English. Afrikaans simply jarred on his ears. Yiddish, particularly when spoken in public, made him ashamed of being a Jew. (Zwi, AYA 101)

To atone for his treatment of Berka, and as an attempt to make peace with him before he dies, Uncle Feldman offers Joel a job and the possibility of a partnership in the future. When Joel tells his father that he has accepted the proffered position, that he will quit his pharmacy program, and that he will start the new job immediately, Berka banishes his son:

Hershl stopped in his tracks as a painful groan tore itself from deep within Berka. He tried to speak but could not. In a paroxysm of rage and despair he ripped his shirt apart with his work-worn hands.

‘Eili, Eili,’ he cried. ‘Lama azavtani! [sic]’ (Zwi, AYA 109)

As Berka later explains to Raizel, his question—My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?—uttered in Hebrew and echoing the same words Jesus is reported to have said during his crucifixion, reflects the loss of the trust he had placed in men after having lost his trust in God when the Cossacks murdered his family: “[‘]I was reproaching the God I didn’t believe in for forsaking me. How can one live without faith in God, without faith in men? I am utterly alone, utterly alone’” (Zwi, AYA 138). Unfortunately, Berka’s sense of tormented aloneness and self-estrangement is the legacy he bequeaths to both the second and the third generations—to his children and to his grandniece, Ruth, who loves him unconditionally.

In 1937, the present of the novel, Ruth Erlich is six years old and displays a talent for
drawing. Though born in South Africa, she dreams of Cossacks and pogroms in Ragaza and, upon waking, flees in terror to the nearby mine dumps to hide. All of the memories and experiences of her great-uncle Berka, whom she addresses as Zeide, her "['']honorary grandfather,['']" have been imprinted onto her consciousness, and she is unable to discern if they are dreams or reality (Zwi, AYA 10). Berka guiltily consoles her after she has again run to the mine dumps and been beaten for it by her mother, Sheinka:

‘Shah, shah. It did happen, my poor child, but not to you. To someone else and a very long time ago. It is all over now and it will never happen again, so you mustn’t worry. It will never happen again.’ (Zwi, AYA 29)

However, Ruth’s childlike sense of terror, threat, and alienation never ends.

The hypochondria and the physical and emotional abuse Ruth’s mother directs at her daughter (including having her beloved dog, Zutzke, removed), combined with Ruth’s knowledge of, even complicity in, her father’s affair with Raizel Feldman, creates an intolerable situation. Ruth erects a glass wall between herself and others. And as the details of the Shoah reach Mayfontein, Dovid Erlich’s guilt at what he characterizes as his abandonment of his family in Lithuania becomes unbearably acute, impacting further on Ruth and the other members of his loveless, dysfunctional family. As she grows into adolescence, Ruth continues to have nightmares and feels she is totally alone, abandoned even by God:

An empty sky. God was not there for her any more. When she was small she had prayed to him through the gap in the curtains: Please stop my parents from fighting; let my mother love me; send away Phillip forever; let me find Zutzke.
But the sky was as empty as Zeide Berchik’s veld. (Zwi, *AYA* 160).

Believing she is mad, consumed with self-hatred, Ruth wishes for self-negation. Teased by her schoolmates for an instance of sleepwalking, and treated like an idiot by the adults, Ruth and her family move from Mayfontein. Dovid Erlich becomes more distraught about his family’s fate in Ragaza. And the novel ends with the death of Yaakov Koren, who, after he learns that the wife and children he left behind in Grodno and then divorced to marry the Widow Kagan in South Africa have been murdered by the Nazi Germans, becomes overwhelmed with guilt and kills himself.

*The Inverted Pyramid* (1981), the second book in the trilogy, follows Ruth Erlich through school, through affairs with Paul Stern, whom she met on her first day of elementary school in the first novel, and Daniel Singer, youngest son of Hershl (the baker) and Faigel Singer, through the Zionist Youth Movement, and through hachsharah, the international Zionist farm training program preparatory for immigration to Israel. At the end of the novel, she breaks with Paul.

In *Exiles* (1984), the final novel in the trilogy, Ruth follows Daniel Singer to Israel in the early 1950s. There, she improves her skills as an artist, and participates in the growth of the fledgling state. One of the central characters in this novel, Gil, Daniel’s cousin, is a guilt-tormented survivor of the Nazi German death camps, one of the very few Shoah survivors to be depicted in South African Jewish fiction since Leopold Brodsky in Dan Jacobson’s “The Promised Land.” After Daniel returns to South Africa to see his dying father, Hershl, and then stays there, Ruth follows him home. However, her return to South Africa (and the unresolved emotional entanglements she left behind) is an ambivalent one.
She hopes to return to Safad (in the Galilee) to paint. Home is not a place Ruth can easily locate or define for herself anymore. The trilogy ends where it began in the first novel—exile and estrangement:

Nothing is forever, Gil had said. Except exile? Her parents when they came to Africa, had also said, another year in Africa, another year in exile. They sighed but remained on. Home. Der heim. Was she going to it, coming from it? Would she always be a sojourner, an exile? (Zwi, *Exiles* 181)


In 1988, Rose Zwi emigrated to Australia and settled in Sydney. There, in 1990, she published *The Umbrella Tree*, a novel about resistance to *apartheid* in the aftermath of the June 16, 1976, Soweto Uprising. With the publication of her fifth novel, *Safe Houses* (1993; hereafter *SH*), Zwi produced a sequel to *Exiles* and thus turned her genealogical saga into a tetralogy.

*Safe Houses* encompasses the years 1979 to 1986 and continues the story of Ruth Erlich and Daniel Singer after their return from Israel in the 1950s and their subsequent marriage. They have two children: Avi, an epidemiologist who has left the country; and Sara, who begins medical school and qualifies as a doctor during the time frame of the novel. The family of Paul Stern, Ruth’s former lover, forms a counterpoint to the Singer family. Paul is now married to Lola and they have three children: Michael, who is studying Industrial Sociology at university and who becomes involved with the nascent Black trade union movement; Jeanne, who is a dancer in Manchester, England; and Chantal, who, with
her husband Erwin, now lives in Paddington, Australia. Lola’s unmarried Uncle Zalman Shenker, an immigrant tailor from Lithuania, lives in the Aged Home and serves as a character who is temperamentally, generationally, and functionally very similar to Berka Feldman in *Another Year in Africa*.

The novel is constructed contrapuntally, interweaving Zalman’s first-person journal entries, Lola’s first-person letters to her daughter Jeanne in Australia, and a third-person omniscient narration which counterpoints both the life of Lola Stern to that of Ruth Singer and the relation of each mother to her respective child still living in Johannesburg—Michael Stern and Sara Singer. Thematically, the novel counterpoints South African literary politics and the racist ideology of *apartheid* to the familial politics of memory and betrayal.

Zalman’s journal entry for 16 June 1979 opens the novel and foregrounds the ambiguity—and thus uncertainty—of memory:

As I said, I was born three days before Pesach, on the night Janka Shtaba’s barn burned down. That’s how dates were calculated in our shtetl; in relation to the holy days and to memorable events. It mattered little what date the clerk scribbled down on the birth or death certificates: we remembered our way.

*(Zwi, SH 3)*

In context, the meaning of this final sentence depends on the verb’s being understood grammatically as intransitive, thus rendering the word “way” the object of the omitted preposition “in” in an implied prepositional phrase which functions adverbially (adverb of manner) and modifies the verb “remembered”: we remembered *in* our way. However, Zalman’s sentence is ambiguous. If the verb is understood as transitive, then the word
“way” becomes the direct object of the verb, and the meaning of the sentence changes dramatically: we remembered our way—i.e., our destiny, our heritage, our tradition. Ironically, the Stern and Singer parents have forgotten their way and are now living lives made ambiguous by their public privilege within an apartheid society and by their private memories of emotional betrayal within their marriages. Within the dichotomy ambiguity enacts, the society, the family, and the individual are all divided. The safe houses—whether symbolic of the social, national, familial, or personal—once divided, can no longer offer safety, only uncertainty. In the black-covered notebook where he writes his Yiddish journal, Zalman differentiates a “house,” which is fit for human habitation, from a “Home,” which, as an institution of refuge (like the Aged Home), is unfit for human habitation (Zwi, SH 2). And as the story unfolds, the various houses in the novel devolve into inhospitable Homes.

The house of Stern and the house of Singer are divided, both within and between themselves. Lola Stern, the only child of a rich property developer father and a charity worker mother (Baila, also known as Belle), is a liberal, assimilated Jew. She works for the Advice Office in a building which once belonged to the Automobile Association and now houses various groups opposed to apartheid and committed to “. . . the Cause, known these days as the Struggle” (Zwi, SH 7). However, she does not have the “political faith” of her fellow white volunteers; she “is not a believer, religious or political,” and thus suffers from a “lack of commitment” (Zwi, SH 10). Acutely aware of the ironies inherent in her working for the Advice Office, Lola asks, “How does one face the victims of one’s privileged life? . . . when so little can be done for them?” (Zwi, SH 8).

Lola’s lack of commitment now permeates her marriage. She met her future husband,
Paul Stern, an anthropology tutor, while attending university. However, Paul’s only and true love has been, and continues to be, Ruth Singer. The Stern’s marriage is now a mutually loveless bitterness. Paul’s thoughts about Lola reveal the division between them:

Peaceful now, like the grave: she intuits the dry socket where my heart should be; and I the worm that eats into hers. Stuck together with the glue of inertia, habit. No point in parting now. Then, perhaps. Me and Ruth, she and Daniel; we’d have deserved one another. All that thunder and lightning, grief and betrayal. Remember the pain but not the love any more. (Zwi, SH 55-56)

As Lola writes to her daughter Jeanne, “Ruth Singer is my bête noire . . . and there is nothing I can do about it” (Zwi, SH 105).

Having returned from Israel in the early 1950s “forlorn and disillusioned,” Ruth Singer, a liberal, assimilated Jew, now writes and is part of a non-racial writers’ group (Zwi, SH 35). She still carries the spark of her Zionist idealism, but she directs it towards a new cause by proofreading the journal Skelm, which has become the vehicle for the publication of the Black writing emerging from the townships in the aftermath of the 1976 Rebellion:

“And the rousing Cossack rhythms and Slavic melodies have been replaced by African drums. But the underlying assumption remains: it is possible and necessary to change the world” (Zwi, SH 31). However, Ruth’s own writing has dried up, as a result, Sara tells her, of her being “[‘]brainwashed by that group into thinking that whites can’t write about blacks or that they shouldn’t, even if they could’” (Zwi, SH 24). Ruth is chastised by one of the members of the group, Jenny, for writing “irrelevant’ fiction, none of which has ever been banned, about a privileged section of the community” (Zwi, SH 37). Ironically, when Sara
Singer secretly submits her mother’s manuscript of a novel about the 1976 Uprising and the false liberalism of the whites to the Skelm office under the signature of an unknown Black writer, Nocha Nakasa, it is hailed by the writers’ group as brilliant and its putative author becomes a literary sensation. When Ruth discovers the prank, she tells Nicholas, the editor of Skelm, and the manuscript is quietly withdrawn.

The Singers’ marriage is as empty as the Sterns’ and Ruth’s parents’ (Dovid and Sheinka Erlich). Like her Great-Uncle/Zeide Berka, Ruth can live without God, but cannot “live without faith in love, in people, in justice”; however, her lifelong quest has only taken her down “paths that [have] led to disillusion” (Zwi, SH 112). Her marriage to Daniel Singer, her childhood friend, is no exception: “She had always wanted to live passionately, fully open to experience. Instead she had been sucked into a domestic trap, finding release only through her writing” (Zwi, SH 114). The literary politics which beset the non-racial writers’ group, however, lead to its betrayal by the Black members. The group votes to disband itself, and the very next day an exclusive Black writers’ group is established.

When Sara leaves the Singer family home to live in Crown Mines, an older, poorer, mixed suburb of Johannesburg, and to attend university as a pre-medical student, she finds herself the neighbour of Michael Stern. Both Sara and Michael are acutely aware of their respective parents’ hypocrisies. During an earlier conversation, Sara tells her mother:

“Contradictions. There we were, living in this beautiful low-slung house of rock, wood, glass and thatch, unobtrusive on the koppie, in very good taste, so comfortable, so safe, with you and dad agonising about poverty, injustice, discrimination. And right in your backyard was the third world in the shape of
two small rooms in one of which Selina and little Luke lived, and in the other Phineas and his wife, sharing a small bathroom and toilet. We went to the best schools, and their children went to mission schools out in the gramadoelas where they lived in unbelievable squalor. Dormitories smelling of stale urine, mealie meal served out of tin baths...” (Zwi, SH 22)

Similarly, Michael has earlier confided to his trusted Great-Uncle Zalman that “I’ll never be like my father.” ... ‘The big Zionist-Marxist who never made it to the kibbutz, the great anthropologist who is creating a tame work force for the gold mines’” (Zwi, SH 51). As they become more involved with each other, Michael informs Sara that his father, Paul, has always been in love with her mother, Ruth. He adds that, later, his mother, Lola, fell in love and had an affair with her father, Daniel:

[“]I may be telling this in a light-hearted manner, but believe me, it’s a saga of love, disloyalty, betrayal, regret, the lot. We’ve got to do better. We’ll make up for it, heal their wounds, bring together the Montagues and Capulets, stop the bloodletting. Did you really not know?” (Zwi, SH 82-83)

Despite their parents’ chiastic infidelity and mutual self-betrayal, Michael and Sara’s Shakespearian relationship flourishes. Nevertheless, they do not succeed in bringing the houses of Singer and Stern together. Although Ruth reluctantly meets Michael (introducing herself as Ruth Erlich), Lola refuses to have anything to do with Sara—“[‘]At last he [Paul Stern] and his son [Michael] have something in common: the Singer women’” (Zwi, SH 105).

By the end of the novel, there are no safe houses. In 1983, Michael, after having been
incarcerated for fifty-eight days in solitary confinement, interrogated regularly, and released without being charged with anything, escapes from the country and is now studying in London, England. After Michael’s detainment and exile, Lola’s involvement in the anti-conscription movement and her vocal support for civil disobedience and pacifism increase.

By 1985, she has separated from Paul, and, when her house is petrol bombed, she moves into a more secure flat. In 1986, the building in which Lola works is blown up. Despite her experiences, Lola writes to Jeanne, “But I shall never leave this country; I love it and its people. This is where I belong” (Zwi, SH 140).

By 1985, Sara has completed her medical training and is interning at the Alexandra Health Clinic in Alexandra Township. She has been living with Michael, with whom she is in love. She is interrogated by the secret police when Michael is suspected of being back in South Africa. In 1986, Sara visits Great-Uncle Zalman and confides that her long-distance relationship with Michael is strained and they are not getting along with each other. Ruth has always yearned to return to Safad, Israel, to resume her painting. By 1985, she and Daniel have separated, and she liquidates the contents of the family house in preparation for leaving South Africa for Israel as she had done forty years previously. The narrative voice intones: “She has learned nothing from experience” (Zwi, SH 119).

In six years, Zalman has filled four notebooks with his Yiddish writings. He intends to have them and his photographs burned; however, he dies while dreaming his recurring dream of his dead brother, Leibala. Even Zalman’s friend, Ezekial Mzwakhe Sibiya (called John), a thirty-year employee at the Aged Home, is not safe in his Alexandra Township house. His children, Mandla and Lindiwe, fled after the 1976 Soweto Uprising and are in
hiding. Masilo, the eldest son, has also fled, but he returns in 1985 to warn his family about his sister Agnes’s being a police spy. Agnes and her policeman boyfriend are "necklaced." The Johannesburg radio transmitter mast is blown up in an act of political sabotage in 1986, symbolizing the bleak prospects for communication, reconciliation, or co-operation while the apparatus of apartheid still operates.

Each of the central characters in the final novel of Zwi’s tetralogy has somehow lost his or her way—emotionally, artistically, and/or spiritually. The tropes of exile, estrangement, and alienation predominate, familial dysfunction mirroring the social, cultural, and national dysfunction of a country in upheaval. Once again the paradoxical position of the Jew within the ruling White minority of a country defined by racial categorization is represented, psychologically, as an unresolved identity conflict internalized as self-rejection. Zwi’s representation of the house called South Africa and its future is overwhelmingly pessimistic. The future for South Africa’s Jews would appear to be even more hopeless. Like many South African writers before her, Zwi has chosen voluntary exile. And those who, like some of her Jewish characters, choose to stay behind remain divided, in a house and state of exile.

**Concluding Remarks**

Although the Jewish community has been an integral part of South Africa since its colonial days and has maintained a strong communal presence, the demographic studies reveal convincingly that it is in a rapid decline and will likely lose its critical mass. From
the outset, Jewish South African identity has shown itself to be deeply conflicted. On the one hand, South African Jews have benefitted from a political ideology which privileged and enriched them as Whites; on the other hand, their status was maintained at the cost of supporting a racist system (both pre-\textit{apartheid} and during its post-1948 implementation) anathema to any Jew sensitive to the millennia of Jewish enslavement, persecution, and genocide. The sense of having to live with irreconcilable moral and emotional ambiguities and uncertainties, combined with the internalization by Jews of both indigenous and European antisemitic stereotypes of themselves, has culminated in a Diaspora Jewish history and predicament unique in both the Commonwealth and the world. And this particular history, differing substantially from that of either Australia or Canada, has resulted in a body of post-\textit{Shoah} Jewish fiction which enacts its own literary \textit{apartheid}—through the erasure of Jewish identity and memory, through the blatant silence of the \textit{Shoah}, through the exile of many Jewish writers, through the self-hatred of a conflicted identity.

Within South Africa’s “mandatory pluralism” of \textit{apartheid}, ended by the democratic elections of 1994, the term “multiculturalism” (much defined and debated in Australia and Canada) was alien, meaningless, not a concept available to a society so rigidly dominated by racial classification and categorical thinking (Shimoni 5). Indeed, there has never been an “unhyphenated South Africanism” (Shimoni 6). The canon of South African literature (in English) has not differentiated the variety of experience within White writing and within Black writing. Such nuances simply did not exist. Therefore, the category “Jewish South African” literature, as a term denoting difference, is an alien concept. There are no courses on this subject in the universities; there are no critical works on this subject within the
academy. That is not to suggest that Jewish fiction writers such as Nadine Gordimer, Dan Jacobson, or Jillian Becker (despite the expatriation of the latter two) are excluded from the South African canon; they are not. However, they are recognized as White, liberal writers and not as specifically Jewish writers.

Many of the works examined in this chapter are antithetical to Jewish identity and religious practice. Ironically, by introjecting their own self-hatred—whether consciously or otherwise—into their fictional portrayals of Jews, post-Shoah Jewish South African fiction writers underscore the sense of marginalization and alienation which characterizes the consciousness of the world post-World War II. Jews are not the only people to suffer from self-hate. The sense of psychological exile one feels when separated from oneself through self-rejection is not unique. It may not be natural (innate), but it appears to be a normal (conditioned), individual, human challenge. In this way, the fiction surveyed in this chapter contributes to "Jewish Literature," and its particular preoccupations intersect with both Jewish Australian and Jewish Canadian fiction.

In the aftermath of 1994, South Africa is undergoing a massive upheaval as it begins the healing process of constructing a new, inclusive national identity. The enormity of this social and political undertaking necessarily dwarfs the fictive expression of ethnic (as opposed to racial) difference, a concept as yet undeveloped in the literary consciousness of the country. With time, and as the literature encompasses new ideas, new freedoms, and new voices, perhaps the categorical attitudes which have helped to conflict the psyche of the country will lose their rigidity, their sting, and, ultimately, their divisive power.
CHAPTER 4

Scrolls and Scrapbooks:

Jewish Canadian Fiction and the Mosaic of Re-Readings

Although not literally imprisoned in penal colonies (as were the progenitors of Australian Jewry) nor figuratively incarcerated by racist ideology (as were the forebears of South African Jewry and their progeny), the precursors of Canadian Jewry were nonetheless socially, politically, and religiously immured within a dichotomous French/English-Catholic/Protestant culture to which they were peripheral. Over the course of time, and having been elevated to the status of a foundational national mythology in the 1960s, this dichotomy became entrenched. The myth of Canada’s twin parentage—two equal founding cultures and languages, French and English—is a fiction which effectively effaces the indigenous First Nation populations long resident in North America, disregards the French colonists’ intention to establish in North America not a new country but a new France, and ignores salient historical and political facts concerning the cessation of hostilities between France and England at the end of the Seven Years’ War. Although English Brigadier-General James Wolfe defeated French General Louis Joseph, Marquis de Montcalm, during their military encounter on the Plains of Abraham, Quebec, in 1759, and although the English captured Montreal in 1760, it was France who chose, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, to relinquish to England all of New France (except, strangely, for the two
tiny Gulf of St. Lawrence islands, St. Pierre and Miquelon).

With the cessation of military hostilities, however, there still remained problems of social and political adaptation and accommodation, problems which persist into the 1990s. The Quebec Act, proclaimed by the British Parliament in 1774, ensured French language rights, Roman Catholic religious freedom, and French civil law in Lower Canada, thus conceptualizing the twentieth-century notions of bilingualism and biculturalism which, beginning in the 1960s, became enshrined in legislation. Upper Canada and Lower Canada were connected through the Constitutional Act of 1791 and renamed Canada West and Canada East by the Union Act of 1840. The Confederation of July 1, 1867, which united Canada West (Ontario), Canada East (Quebec), Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into the independent entity named the Dominion of Canada, was proclaimed through the British North America Act by the British Parliament. In 1870, Rupert’s Land, having been purchased from the Hudson’s Bay Company, was transformed into the Northwest Territories and became part of the Dominion. In the same year, Manitoba became a province, followed by British Columbia in 1871, Prince Edward Island 1873, Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, and Newfoundland (the tenth province) in 1949. However, the official recognition of the English/French Canadian bifurcation did not occur until 1969 when—acting on the recommendations published in Book I of the Final Commission Report (1967) of the 1963-established Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism—the Liberal government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau passed the Official Languages Act and appointed a Commissioner of Official Languages, thus making Canada legally a bilingual country.

Books IV, V, and VI, the last sections of the Bi-Bi Commission’s report, were
published in 1970. Acknowledging the reality of the country’s diverse social composition, the Postscript to Book VI refers to another paradigm: the “cultural mosaic.” Within two years, this paradigm of cultural multiplicity replaced—both in law and in practice—the original concept of biculturalism. In 1972, Trudeau appointed a Minister of State responsible for the newly created official policy of “multiculturalism.” The B.N.A. Act remained in effect until Trudeau (re-elected as Prime Minister in 1980 after the short-lived Conservative minority government under Joe Clark was defeated) “repatriated” the Canadian constitution in 1982, replacing the existing statute with a “made-in-Canada” Constitutional Act. This Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms reiterated in the section titled “Official Languages of Canada” that both English and French were the official languages of the country. A federal government Department of Multiculturalism was established in 1987. And on July 12, 1988, the House of Commons passed Bill C-93, “An Act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada,” the “Canadian Multiculturalism Act.” The passing of this Act represented the legal and formal recognition—for the first time in Canadian history—of the existence of people who culturally, socially, linguistically, and/or ethnically belonged to neither one of the formerly officially acknowledged duet of constituent cultures and populations of Canada: the English and the French.

Two different, but ultimately intertwined, tropes characterizing the cultural duality (and, subsequently, multiplicity) of Canada’s social matrix—“solitudes” and “mosaic”—have become embedded in the Canadian consciousness. The first of these is derived from Two Solitudes (1945), a novel by Hugh MacLennan (1907-1990), which is a fictional
representation of the “Laurentian thesis” Canadian historian Donald Creighton (1902-1979) proposed in his *Dominion of the North* (1944). Creighton’s theory of metropolis and hinterland is a study of the shift of economic control in Canadian society from the once dominant Montreal to the emergent usurper, Toronto. In his novel, MacLennan reconstructs Creighton’s model of the power relations between English and French as the titular two solitudes. MacLennan borrowed this powerful metaphor—utilizing it to represent the bicultural interactions between the novel’s French and English families and characters—from a letter by German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). In both the letter and the novel (the lines from the letter which introduce the metaphor form the book’s epigraph), love unites the two solitudes. As reconstructed by the media and popular culture in the 1960s, however, the “two solitudes” became emblematic of an unbridgeable separation and mutual alienation between English- and French-Canadians.

The trope of the twin solitudes has become part of the lexicon of Canadian cultural and historical discourse. However, those Canadians who by birth, culture, religion, or ethnicity did and do not fit into either the English or French solitude were and are marginalized by this constractive duality. As if in response, Jewish Canadian poet David Tarnow expanded the twinned concept by titling his 1968 volume of poetry *A Collection of Solitudes*. In a further qualification of the trope, Irving Layton (1912- ), a popular Jewish Canadian poet and iconoclast, wrote in the Foreword to his *The Collected Poems* (1971) of the French, English, and Jewish neighbourhoods in the Montreal of his childhood as constituting “Three solitudes” (Foreword 144). The genealogy of this new concept of three solitudes has since been elaborated by Jewish Canadian commentators to delineate the sense

Subsequently, the trope underwent a further refinement when Linda Hutcheon (1947-) and Marion Richmond titled the anthology they co-edited Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions (1990). The original concept has thus undergone a transformation from a trope of bicultural duality to one of ethnic multiplicity.

The second, and even more popularly disseminated metaphor descriptive of the Canadian cultural ethos—the “mosaic”—was an extant trope used by John Porter (1921-1979) in his sociological study, The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada (1965). Porter contrasts the Canadian “mosaic” with the American “melting pot” as contrapuntal concepts of social integration. However, his understanding of the hierarchies of power, ethnicity, and culture inherent within Canadian society is indicated by the vertical spatial orientation of the mosaic. It is not improbable that the commissioners of the Bi-Bi Report were acknowledging Porter when they used the phrase “cultural mosaic” in the Postscript to their Book VI in 1970.

The combined tropes of the two (or manifold) solitudes and the mosaic have become inextricable from the concept/metaphor of multiculturalism. Thus the contemporary Canadian ethos—whether viewed from a sociological, historical, cultural, or literary perspective—may be characterized as a multicultural mosaic of multiple solitudes.
However, mosaic itself is a self-contradictory metaphor. While functioning as a trope of inclusive plurality, a mosaic simultaneously depicts through each of its constituent fragments an exclusive singularity. The overall pattern of perceived wholeness proves illusory, cleaved by the mosaic’s individual, bordered segments. Although the mosaic may invite readings and interpretations which suggest uniformity, consensus, and stasis, its tessellated nature produces an ongoing kinesis of recontextualization, re-reading, and reinterpretation. Within this metaphoric frame of reference, Jewish Canadian fiction—a marginal solitude of remnants, commentaries, scrolls, scrapbooks, journals, fragments, rags, and fugitive pieces neither English nor French—resists through both its content and literary forms an exclusive monolithic construction of the canon of Canadian Literature, insists instead on reinterpretation, and thus persists in the creation of a literary mosaic of re-readings.

Origin, History, and Demography of the Jewish Community

The Mosaic presence in what was to become the Dominion of Canada began very inauspiciously in New France on September 15, 1738. On that day, young Jacques La Farge, a recent arrival from France aboard the schooner St. Michel, “was summoned to appear before government officials [the Marine Commissioner] in Quebec” (Abella, Coat 1). Under questioning, it was soon discovered that La Farge was really Esther Brandeau, a nineteen-year-old Jewess:

Her story was intriguing. Born in Bayonne, France, the daughter of Jewish
refugees from the Portuguese Inquisition, Brandeau was shipwrecked at the age of fifteen while on her way to visit relatives in Holland. Following her rescue she decided not to return home but to see as much of the world as she could.

Using the name Pierre Mausiette, she disguised herself as a boy and signed on as a ship’s cook in Bordeaux. Apparently the kitchen was not for her and over the next four years she worked as a tailor, a baker, a messenger-boy in a convent and as footman to a military officer. Her quest for adventure still not sated, she changed her name to Jacques La Farge and set out aboard the St. Michel. (Abella, Coat 1-2)

By the express order of Cardinal Richelieu, who founded the Company of New France in 1627, Jews were not allowed to settle in the colony of New France from the very beginning of French settlement in the early 1600s until Wolfe’s victory at Quebec in 1759. A comparable Jewish restriction pertained to the Cape Colony of Southern Africa under the Dutch East India Company (1652-1795), which allowed only those Europeans who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church to settle in the Cape. Similarly, the Company of New France allowed only French Roman Catholics to settle in the first colony in what later became Canada. This restriction applied not only to Jews, but also to Huguenots, dissenters, and all foreigners. Thus, having been misread as male and French Catholic, Esther Brandeau, now re-read as female and Jewish, could not remain in New France unless she converted to Roman Catholicism. This she refused to do. In 1739, on the orders of King Louis XVI, she was deported to France.²

Although there may well have been Marranos living in New France—Spanish and
Portuguese Jews who had been forced under the threat of death by the Inquisition to convert to Roman Catholicism, but who secretly practised Judaism while outwardly pretending to be Christians—the only Jews who could legally settle in the colony were those who had converted to Christianity. The British colonies in the New World, however, imposed no such restrictions on Jewish settlement. Prior to the American Revolution, Jewish congregations

\[\ldots\] were formed in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Newport, Charleston, and Savannah. To these centres of colonial commerce, Jews came from various countries. The original settlers were mostly Sephardim, whose ancestors originated in Spain and Portugal. Expelled from those countries in 1492 and 1497, they moved to The Netherlands, a more tolerant region, and later to England, where in 1655 they were admitted by the Protector, Oliver Cromwell. (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 9)

German Jews, the Ashkenazim, followed their Sephardi co-religionists to the New World, so that by the middle of the eighteenth century they constituted about half of the total Jewish population of British America. By the 1780s, there were approximately three thousand Jews living in the United States of America out of a population of more than three million (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 10).

In British North America, on the other hand, a “Jewish trader from Rotterdam, Joseph de la Penha, was driven onto the coast of Labrador by a sudden North Atlantic storm” in the 1670s (Abella, Coat 6). He claimed the land for William III of Orange, King of both England and Holland, who granted all of Labrador to de la Penha and his descendants in
perpetuity on November 1, 1697 (Godfrey 40). However, de la Penha appears not to have attempted the establishment of a Jewish colony there.

The first Jewish immigrants to actually settle in what was then British North America, and later Canada, arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1749. By 1752, the Jewish community numbered approximately thirty, most of whom were Anglo-German Jews who had emigrated from the Thirteen Colonies: “The most prominent of these were Israel Abrahams, Isaac Levy, Nathan Nathans and the four Hart brothers, Abraham, Isaac, Naphtali and Samuel” (Abella, Coat 7). However, this fledgling community did not thrive, and most of its members disappeared through conversion, out-marriage, or repatriation to a British America now in the midst of the American Revolution.

With the capture of Quebec in 1759 and Montreal in 1760, Jewish suppliers and sutlers both accompanied and followed the British forces into their newly acquired colony. Montreal became the hub of both the fur and the provisioning trades, and Jews were active in all aspects of the flourishing commercial and trading opportunities there. On December 30, 1768, fifteen Montreal Jews formed Shearith Israel (“The Remnant of Israel,” named after Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York City, itself styled after the venerable Spanish and Portuguese Jews’ Congregation, Bevis Marks, in London), the first congregation in British North America. Although thirteen of the fifteen founding members of Shearith Israel—

Chapman Abraham, the brothers Gersh[on], Simon and Isaac Levy, Benjamin Lyons, the cousins Ezekiel and Levy Solomons, David Lazarus [sic]⁴, the brothers John and David Salisbury Franks, the brothers Samuel and Isaac

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Judah, and Andrew Hays—were Ashkenazim, they identified themselves as Sephardim, not just because of the implicit cachet but because the Sephardic order of prayer was an integral part of the American Jewish culture they shared before moving to Quebec. Even though the handful of Sephardim in the congregation in 1768 had largely disappeared within a decade, the congregation retained that identity. Its members took its name from that of New York City’s major synagogue and, though oriented to London for religious personnel and guidance, the Montreal congregation continued its strong connection to the Jewish communities in New York and Philadelphia.

(Tulchinsky, Taking Root 10)

Because there were scarcely more than twelve Jewish families living in Montreal at the time, there were neither resources nor need for a permanent building. Thus the congregation met in the house of a member until a proper synagogue was subscribed to and begun in 1777 on a plot of land on St. James Street belonging to the estate of the late Lazarus David. By 1778, the synagogue was completed, a Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll) had been purchased from the Spanish and Portuguese Jews’ Congregation, Bevis Marks, in London (which actually provided three—two as gifts), and a spiritual leader had been hired, Jacob Raphael Cohen of London, who acted as to the congregation’s first Shoichet (Ritual Slaughterer), Hazan (Cantor), Teacher, and Reader.

Although the nucleus of Jewish settlement and commercial activity was centred in Montreal, many Jewish families settled and established businesses in rural areas, the most successful and important of these being the family of Aaron Philip Hart (1724-1800) of
Trois-Rivières. Of German parentage, Hart was probably born in London, whence he made his way to the New World after 1740. As a sutler to the British forces under Generals Haldimand and Amherst, Hart left New York and accompanied the army on its northward march to Montreal in 1759. After the surrender of Montreal to the British in 1760, Hart remained in the new colony and settled in Trois-Rivières, a French town situated midway between Montreal and Quebec City at the confluence of the St. Maurice and St. Lawrence Rivers, where he provisioned the forces stationed there and established various business interests:

Hart ventured into the fur trade in 1763 and shortly thereafter, often in conjunction with his brother Moses of Montreal, into many real estate transactions, including his acquisition of the fief of Bruyères and the seigneuries of Sainte-Marguerite and Bécancour, as well as the marquisate of Le Sable and numerous plots of land in and around Trois-Rivières. . . .

Hart also operated a store in Trois-Rivières, where he conducted a diverse wholesale and retail business, and he extended commercial and real estate loans throughout a wide area around the town. (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 13)

Hart was appointed postmaster of Trois-Rivières in August 1763, thus becoming “probably the first Jewish office holder in the new British colony of Quebec”; his appointment “was the most senior given to any Jew in England or any of its colonies to that date” (Godfrey 98). He also acted as “the paymaster for British troops [stationed] in the area. In effect, Hart was a conglomerate with business interests in a variety of areas: real estate, fur, liquor, foodstuffs and lumber” (Abella, Coat 15).
Aaron Hart is traditionally recorded as the first Jewish settler in Canada. Despite this inaccuracy, he was certainly the most important, influential, and successful Jew to settle in British North America during this period. In addition, unlike the vast majority of Jewish settlers at that time, the Harts (for the most part) remained Jewish. Aaron Hart was a strictly Orthodox Jew who practised his religion and was determined not to marry out of his faith. To that end, he returned to England 1768 to wed a Jewish bride, his cousin Dorothea Judah, with whom he returned to Trois-Rivières. Their eight surviving children—Moses, Ezekiel, Benjamin, Alexander, Catherine, Charlotte, Elizabeth, and Sarah—all received a traditional Jewish upbringing, the four sons even being sent to New York and Philadelphia for their religious education. Hart built his own synagogue and Jewish cemetery in Trois-Rivières and neither joined nor contributed to the Shearith Israel Synagogue in Montreal. His family was joined by Uriah and Samuel Judah, two of Dorothea’s brothers, who settled in the town, as well as by the children of Naphtali Joseph, Hart’s brother-in-law.

In spite of Aaron Hart’s hope that his self-sufficient little community would continue and thrive in Trois-Rivières, except for Moses and a few of his sisters the Hart progeny eventually moved elsewhere after their father’s death in 1800. Alexander Hart, the youngest surviving brother, moved to Montreal and established the family’s business interests there. Moses Hart remained in Trois-Rivières, founding both a transportation company, the St. Lawrence River steamboat business, and a bank, the Hart’s Bank (1835)—which issued its own banknotes. Ezekiel Hart “became the first—and only—Jew elected to the legislative assembly of either Upper or Lower Canada” in 1807 and again in 1808 (Abella, Coat 19). However, on both occasions, for a variety of reasons both political and antisemitic, he was
prevented—as a Jew—from taking his rightful seat and was expelled from the House of Assembly in 1808 and again in 1809. And it would not be until June 5, 1832, when an act passed by the legislature on March 31, 1831, received royal assent, that British subjects of the Jewish religion were granted the full rights and privileges enjoyed by every other (Christian) British subject resident in British North America.\(^5\) Benjamin Hart fought in the War of 1812 (as did his brother Ezekiel), settled in Montreal, and was appointed Justice of the Peace on April 13, 1837, just weeks before the Rebellion of 1837 broke out in Lower Canada (Godfrey 204). Aaron Hart and his family became wealthy and famous, and “[f]or most of the past two centuries [his] descendants . . . have taken their place in the forefront of the Jewish community” (Abella, *Coat* 14).

Jewish settlement in Upper Canada was much sparser than that in Lower Canada during the post-1760 period. Moses David (1767-1814), the third son of Lazarus and Phoebe (née Samuel) David of Montreal, was born in the Old Province of Quebec, one of the first native-born Jewish children. His father “died before he was ten and his mother when he was still in his teens” (Godfrey 165). In 1790, he migrated to the largely unexplored Upper Canadian frontier around Fort Michilimackinac and Detroit to trade with the Indians. He joined Sir John Johnson’s militia in Detroit, fought with the forces which stopped General Anthony Wayne at Fort Miami near Detroit in 1793, and, after the British ceded Detroit to the Americans, moved across the river and settled in Sandwich, Upper Canada (now Windsor, Ontario) in 1794, where he established himself as a merchant, built one of the first residences, and served as a volunteer militiaman under the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, in 1796 (Godfrey 165). However, despite
his loyal militia service to Britain, Moses David had his application for a land grant in Sandwich rejected on the grounds that Jews could not hold land in Upper Canada (Abella, Coat 23). After six years of frequent and fruitless petitioning of the Executive Council, Moses David finally in 1803 received his land grant “and was permitted to become a permanent settler” (Abella, Coat 24). Moses David, a practising Jew throughout his life, was the sole Jewish resident in Sandwich. After having lived for more than eighteen years on the Upper Canadian frontier, in 1811 he married Charlotte Hart, the daughter of Aaron and Dorothea Hart of Trois-Rivières, and brought her to his home. They had only one child, Moses Eleazar David (born March 10, 1813), before Moses David died in September 1814. He was buried in a corner of his property, and, soon after, his widow and son moved to Montreal.

Although Jewish settlement in Upper Canada was not widespread prior to the 1830s, much Jewish commercial activity occurred there. A consortium of five Jewish sutlers who had formerly dominated the Indian trade in New York before 1760 from their base in Albany moved their trading sphere into the former French holdings around the Great Lakes and established Montreal as the hub of the fur trade. The men who established this consortium—Ezekiel Solomons, Gershon Levy, Chapman Abraham, Levy Solomons, and Benjamin Lyon[s]—operated under the name Gershon Levy & Company and were dominant players in the fur trade from 1761 to 1763. Levy Solomons and Chapman Abraham made Forts Niagara and Detroit their respective bases; Ezekiel Solomons and Gershon Levy based themselves at Fort Michilimackinac; and Benjamin Lyon[s] worked from Montreal and Albany. However, their fortunes changed disastrously when, in 1763, led by the Ottawa
Chief, Pontiac, Indians loyal to the French rebelled against the newly arrived British. From May 9, 1763, Chief Pontiac besieged Fort Detroit and killed over a dozen “English” caught outside the stockade. Chapman Abraham, travelling up the Detroit River with a load of goods, was captured by the Indians and his goods were seized. A week later, at almost the same spot, Levy Solomons experienced a similar fate. On June 2, 1763, the Chippewa Chief, Madjeckewiss, and his men tricked the British forces and attacked Fort Michilimackinac, killing over half of the garrison of thirty-five. Ezekiel Solomons, “arguably the first English-speaking person who reached the Upper Great Lakes after the British conquest of New France,” was present at the fort, where he operated a trading house, and was captured (Godfrey 83). Gershon Levy, unaware of the uprising, the capture of the fort, or his partner’s incarceration, arrived soon after and was also taken prisoner, his goods confiscated. Miraculously, all four of the captured consortium partners escaped with their lives—Abraham Chapman, being thought insane by the Indians, was released and literally walked away from his own auto-da-fé; however, they lost approximately £18,000 worth of unrecoverable goods, thus effectively ending their business venture (Godfrey 87, 90).

Jews who converted to Christianity and/or married out of their faith doubtless settled in Upper Canada prior to 1832, assimilated, and disappeared as Jews. Likewise, of those who chose to remain Jews—the traders, suppliers, and entrepreneurs who travelled and peddled throughout the province—some did settle in “Sandwich [Windsor, Ontario], York [Toronto, Ontario], Kingston, Uxbridge and in the Niagara-Hamilton area”: “There even appears to have been a village aptly named Jewsburg, founded by German Jew Samuel Liebshitz, a miller who had settled in the area around today’s Preston [Ontario]” (Abella,
Coat 24). In 1832, Arthur Wellington Hart, son of Benjamin Hart and grandson of Aaron Hart, moved to Toronto (formerly, York) to explore business opportunities on behalf of his Montreal-based family; however, he left in 1833. By 1834, the city which was to become home to the most populous Jewish community in Canada had a population of nine thousand, of which but a solitary Jew could be identified.

In 1838, Judah George Joseph, an observant English Jew who had emigrated to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1820, moved himself and his family to Toronto, after having first lived in Hamilton, Upper Canada (Ontario). He established a jewelry and optical business on King Street East and is documented as Toronto’s “first . . . permanent Jewish resident” (Abella, Coat 44). The Hebrew Congregation of Toronto was formed in 1849, “in order to purchase land for a cemetery in the eastern outskirts” (Abella, Coat 46). However, the first congregation organized for the purpose of establishing a synagogue, the Toronto Hebrew Congregation, was not founded until June 1856. Known to its congregants at the time as the Sons of Israel Synagogue, the Toronto Hebrew Congregation later became Holy Blossom, the name it retains into the 1990s. Through the efforts of Lewis Samuel, an observant English Jew who had lived in both upper New York State and Montreal before moving to Canada West (formerly Upper Canada), Toronto’s first synagogue was built on Richmond Street East. The four-hundred-seat sanctuary was officially dedicated on January 20, 1876, and the consecration sermon was delivered by Reverend Professor Abraham de Sola (1825-1882), who, since January 1847, had been the spiritual leader of Montreal’s Portuguese Jewish Congregation (a revivified, incorporated, and renamed Congregation Shearith Israel). At that time, the Toronto Hebrew Congregation had a membership of 250. By the time of
Confederation in 1867, Canada West (soon to be the Province of Ontario) had Jewish populations in Lancaster, Cornwall, Hamilton, London, Windsor, Belleville, and numerous other smaller towns.

In the Maritime province of Nova Scotia, the Jewish community which had been established in 1752 in Halifax had disappeared, and it was not until 1867, after having been moribund for well over a century, that a new Jewish community was slowly reconstituted there. By 1891, eighteen Jews lived in the city; in 1901, there were 102. The Baron de Hirsch Benevolent Society was founded in 1891, and a synagogue on Starr Street was constructed in 1895 (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 86). In New Brunswick, Solomon Hart and his brother-in-law, Nathan Green, established the foundation of a Jewish community by moving with their families to Saint John from the United States in 1858 and 1862 respectively. Hart was a tobacco merchant, and Green a cigar-maker, “the sole agent in Canada for the American Tobacco Company” (Abella, Coat 50). The Dominion Census of 1871 recorded forty-eight Jews living in Atlantic Canada, nearly all of them resident in Saint John, then the third-largest city in Canada (after Montreal and Toronto). The Harts and Greens were joined by Abraham and Israel Isaacs in 1878. And in 1896, the thirty-family community formed a congregation, Ahavath Achim (“Brotherly Love”), “to conduct services and employ a rabbi” (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 85). There were no Jews living in Prince Edward Island (formerly Saint John’s Island) in the nineteenth century. Similarly, there was no official Jewish settlement in the British Colony of Newfoundland (which, in 1949, became Canada’s tenth province and the last of the four Canadian Atlantic provinces) until the 1890s. However, “Solomon Solomons,” Newfoundland’s first postmaster,
appointed in 1805, may have been a Jew" (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 85). In addition, “[t]here is also much evidence that in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century Jews were heavily involved in the cod fisheries, and in the seal fur and coastal trading industries. A Mr. Levi, for example, was the premier seal trader in the 1830s in Carbonear” (Abella, Coat 51).

Beginning in 1858, on the Pacific frontier of British North America, a significant Jewish community was established in Victoria (formerly the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fort Victoria, a small trading post), a dusty town located at the southern tip of Vancouver Island, after the discovery of gold on the Fraser and Thompson Rivers in the new mainland colony of British Columbia the previous year. The gold rush brought tens of thousands of fortune-seekers to the tiny settlement, which served as the entrepôt for the mainland, and, by mid-1859, Victoria had become a booming city. Simultaneously, the traditional Pacific industries—the fur trade and fishing—were also expanding rapidly through private enterprise: “The Hudson’s Bay Company’s legal monopoly of the West Coast fur trade had just come to an end, and about three dozen ‘Indian traders’ obtained trade licences in Victoria to take advantage of the new opportunity. According to recent research, roughly two-thirds of them were Jewish” (Godfrey 221).

When the S.S. Pacific docked in Victoria on July 17, 1858, it had transported about fifty Jews from San Francisco, including Frank Sylvester, the first recorded Jewish arrivant in the town. He was soon followed by other Jewish entrepreneurs from San Francisco, including the five Oppenheimer brothers—Meyer, Godfrey, Isaac, Charles, and David; the Franklin brothers—Selim and Lumley; and the Sutro brothers—Adolph, Gustav, and Emil.
When the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) were approaching in September 1858, there were enough Jews resident in Victoria that religious services were arranged and held in a private house on Johnson Street. A general meeting of the Jewish community was convened on May 22, 1859, for the purpose of proposing and implementing a plan to acquire a plot of land suitable for a cemetery. In the afternoon of February 5, 1860, after the inaugural meeting of the members of the newly formed First Victoria Hebrew Benevolent Society at the Royal Hotel on Wharf Street that morning, a cemetery was consecrated on Cedar Hill Road. A formal Congregation, the Emanu-El ("God Is with Us") of Victoria, Vancouver Island, was officially established on August 31, 1862, and one of its first actions was to purchase a piece of land on Blanshard Street suitable for the building of a synagogue. Money was donated from both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, and, amid much ceremony and fanfare, the cornerstone of the new synagogue was laid on June 2, 1863. The synagogue, Congregation Emanu-El, was completed in September 1863, a mere five years after the first Jewish settlers had arrived in Victoria.

Most of the founders of the Jewish community in Victoria were middle-class, Anglo- or Anglo-German Jews who had emigrated to Vancouver Island via San Francisco in the 1850s and 1860s. And many achieved great financial and political success. For example, Selim Franklin (1814-1883), born in Liverpool, England, had arrived in San Francisco in 1849 at the beginning of the California gold rush. Arriving in Victoria in 1858 to take advantage of the British Columbia gold rush, he and his older brother, Lumley (whom he had brought up from San Francisco), established Franklin and Company, auctioneers, at the foot of Yates Street. As the only British-born auctioneer in the two colonies, he had been
appointed by Governor Douglas in 1859 as the first government auctioneer in British Columbia and Vancouver Island. “He was regarded, with some deference, as ‘silver tongued Franklin’” (Godfrey 220). In 1860, Selim Franklin was elected to the House of Assembly of Vancouver Island after winning the second of the two Victoria Town seats, narrowly defeating Amor De Cosmos, the flamboyant editor and publisher of the *British Colonist* newspaper, by fifteen votes. However, like Ezekiel Hart (elected to the legislative assembly of Lower Canada in 1807 and 1808, but disqualified because he was a Jew), Franklin was also denied his seat. While being sworn in on March 1, 1860, he omitted the words “‘and I make this declaration upon the true faith of a Christian’” and, when challenged, he resolutely refused to utter them (Godfrey 222). Because of legislative precedents enacted in Britain and in force in the British colony of Vancouver Island (see endnote 4), Selim Franklin was permitted to take his seat on March 12, 1860, thus becoming only the second Jew in British North America to hold such a political office.⁹ Defeated in the election of July 1863, but returned to the legislature in a by-election in early 1864, Franklin eventually resigned from the Assembly in 1866—in protest against the union between the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia (the mainland)—and returned to San Francisco (Godfrey 347).

In the year that his brother left Victoria, Lumley Franklin (c. 1812-1873) was elected as the fledgling city’s second mayor, the first Jew to be elected mayor of a major city in British North America. Both he and Henry Nathan—an English Jew who had arrived in Victoria in 1862, had become a successful merchant, and had been elected as member from Victoria to the last British Columbia colonial legislature in November 1870—were
advocates for British Columbia's membership in Confederation. After B.C. became the sixth province of the Dominion of Canada in 1871, Henry Nathan, having been acclaimed as one of the first two of Victoria’s Members of Parliament, became the first Jew to sit in the Canadian House of Commons. As a Liberal, under the Prime Ministership of Sir John A. Macdonald (Canada’s first Prime Minister), Nathan actively promoted a transcontinental railway—“indeed he was a director of what was to become the Canadian Pacific Railway Company” (Abella, Coat 71). Ironically, Nathan’s success in bringing the railway to British Columbia accelerated the post-gold rush decline of Victoria and, consequently, its Jewish community.

Despite the new synagogue and a solid communal infrastructure, Victoria’s Jewish community grew very slowly:

By 1860 Victoria had the second largest Jewish population of any town or city in British North America. The core Jewish population, made up of at least 50 or 60 families with a membership of about 200 (most of whom had arrived by way of San Francisco), formed at least 10 per cent of Victoria’s non-Asian/non-native population of 1,500. (Godfrey 220)

There were 242 Jews in Victoria by 1863 (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 87). However, the abrupt end of the gold rush and the choice of Vancouver as the western mainland terminus and headquarters of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway dealt Victoria a dual economic blow so severe that it never recovered. Both people and capital migrated across the Strait of Georgia to Vancouver.

From a tiny settlement named Granville, located on Burrard Inlet and numbering fifty
residents in 1870, arose the City of Vancouver, which, when incorporated in 1886, had approximately one thousand residents. A year later, that number had tripled. Among those leaving Victoria were the Oppenheimer brothers. After emigrating to the United States from Bavaria in 1848, they had settled in the 1850s in San Francisco, from whence they had moved to Victoria. Charles founded “a trading firm in Victoria and at Point Roberts on the mainland” (Abella, Coat 60). Other branches were established at Yale, Fort Hope, Lytton, and, after the second B.C. gold rush began in the Cariboo region in 1862, at Barkerville. David Oppenheimer had been buying prime real estate around Granville beginning in 1878 and began operating a wholesale grocery business in 1887. Perhaps more than any other entrepreneur at the time, David Oppenheimer recognized the embryonic Vancouver’s economic potential and promoted the fledgling city:

More than any other family, the Oppenheimers were responsible for Vancouver’s early growth. They owned huge tracts of land in the city, established a steamship line, developed the city’s first streetcar line and organized the city’s other major landowners to give part of their property to the CPR to ensure that the railway would choose Vancouver as its Pacific terminal. Indeed the Oppenheimers themselves gave up a third of their land holdings in the city, so that the CPR would locate in Vancouver.

Two of the brothers, David and Isaac, were members of Vancouver’s city council, and in 1888 David was elected mayor, serving for four years. He built the bridges that united the city, laid sidewalks, developed the town’s water supply, organized its transit system, founded the YMCA and astutely procured
the land for Vancouver's downtown treasure, Stanley Park. No wonder he was called the "Father of Vancouver." (Abella, Coat 72)

Vancouver's Jewish community was large enough to have purchased land for a cemetery by 1887; however, the Jewish population of the city grew very slowly during the 1880s. A tiny Reform congregation under the leadership of Solomon Philo, who had abandoned Victoria, started in 1884. As destitute Eastern European Jews arrived from Russia and Poland and settled in Vancouver's Downtown East Side neighbourhood of Strathcona, a traditional Ashkenazi Orthodox presence grew. When Zebulon Franks, son of the High Rabbi in a town near Odessa, arrived in 1887, he became a hardware merchant and held religious services in his small rented home on Water Street until 1894. In 1907, he became president of B'nei Yehudah ("Sons of Judah"), the first Orthodox congregation in Vancouver. The first synagogue in the city was constructed in 1911-1912 at Heatley and East Pender Streets and was, in 1917, incorporated and renamed Schara Tzedeck ("Gates of Righteousness"). In this way, two distinct Jewish communities evolved on the Pacific margin of Canada:

Despite their small numbers, the Jews on the Pacific coast in the latter years of the nineteenth century contributed as much to the development of their region as did the founding fathers of Canadian Jewry to central Canada a hundred years before. (Abella, Coat 73)

In the 1860s, the total Jewish population in the Dominion of Canada numbered approximately 1,100, about 500 of whom lived in Montreal. A second congregation—comprising English, German, and Polish Jews—had broken away from the Congregation of
Portuguese Jews of Montreal (formerly, Shearith Israel) in 1846, the year of the latter’s incorporation. The splinter congregation eventually built its own “Ashkenazi” synagogue, Shaar Hashomayim Congregation (“Gate of Heaven”), which was dedicated in July 1859. The decennial Dominion Census of 1881 recorded 2,443 people of the Jewish faith in Canada, representing .06% of the total Canadian population. In 1881, there were perhaps five synagogues in the entire country—the Sephardi and Ashkenazi synagogues in Montreal, Toronto Hebrew Congregation (Holy Blossom), Anshe Sholom (“People of Peace”) of Hamilton (Ontario), and Congregation Emanu-El of Victoria (British Columbia). However, events in Eastern Europe during the infamous year of 1881 had a profound effect on the Jews living there, prompting their mass emigration to other continents throughout the world.

Following the Russian partitions of Poland from 1772 to 1795, the Jews of Eastern Europe had been confined to the Russian-created and Russian-controlled Pale of Settlement—an area consisting of twenty-five western provinces extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea—which assumed its final shape in 1812. The passing of the first of a long series of statutes in 1804 limited every aspect of Jews’ increasingly restricted and marginal lives in the Pale. In 1871, Russia’s first modern pogrom, instigated mainly by Greek merchants, was unleashed against the Jews in Odessa (Johnson 364). However, when Czar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, the pogrom became an instrument of government policy:

The major pogroms which began on 29 April 1881 were incited, condoned or organized by the Minister of the Interior, Ignatiev, an enthusiastic Slavophile. They spread over one hundred centres, lasted nearly a year, and in some cases involved huge mobs. Not only the government but the police and innumerable
ethnic groups were involved. The far left joined in. The revolutionary
Narodnaya Volya party incited the Ukrainians to kill the Jews in August 1881
under the slogan: ‘Rise against the Tsar of the pans [nobles] and the zhids
[Jews].’ Great liberal writers like Turgenev and Tolstoi remained silent. The
pogroms were followed by a mass of anti-Semitic legislation, known as the
May Laws. Indeed, the pogroms were used to justify the legislation. . . . Of
course the government inspired and permitted the mob action in the first place,
and the whole aim of the regime was to bolster its crumbling popularity by
attacking an easy target. The Nazis were to use exactly the same technique of
violence-led legislation. (Johnson 364-65)

The approximately two hundred pogroms of 1881-1882 alone “left 100,000 Jews homeless”
(Vigod 5). The years 1881 to 1911 witnessed an increasing number of antisemitic decrees
and actions. The May Laws were enacted in 1882; the Pale of Settlement was reduced in
size and Jews were barred from the professions in 1886-1889; over 10,000 Jews were
expelled from Moscow in 1891; massive expulsions of Jews from non-Pale areas followed
from 1893 to 1895; a spirits monopoly, economically catastrophic for the now-excluded
Jews, was introduced in 1894-1896; and, starting in 1903, a new series of murderous
pogroms began (Johnson 365). In the wake of the failed revolution of 1905, and Russia’s
disastrous loss of the Russo-Japanese War the same year, pogroms erupted in Vilna,
Kishinev (fifty Jews murdered and five hundred wounded), Odessa (four hundred Jews
murdered over a four-day rampage), and in Bialystok in 1906. Between 1908 and 1911,
there were more indiscriminate mass expulsions of Jews.
At some point during the 1890s, the Czar’s secret police, the Okhrana, forged a document which alleged that a cabal of Jewish leaders was engaged in an international conspiracy to exploit democracy as a means of attaining their objective of world domination. This forgery—from an 1864 pamphlet written by Maurice Joly, which attributed ambitions of world domination to Napoleon III—was first published in 1905 as an additional chapter in Serge Nilus’s The Great in Little, and became both famous and widely distributed after the October Revolution of 1917 as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Johnson 455-56). In the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution and the ensuing civil war of 1918-1920, Jews were once again murdered in pogroms which exploded during this period in Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, and Rumania. The still-venerated leader of the short-lived Ukrainian republic, Simon Petlyura, was responsible for the massacre of between 70,000 and 100,000 Jews in more than one thousand separate incidents in over seven hundred Ukrainian (and several hundred Russian) communities. In November 1919, four hundred Jews were murdered in a single day during pogroms in Kiev. “As many as 250,000 East European Jewish civilians were slaughtered, or starved or frozen to death between 1914 and 1920. Those who survived were totally impoverished, and there seemed no possibility of re-establishing any basis for Jewish economic life, despite the end to official discrimination. Emigration continued at a high level until 1930, when western countries closed their borders because of the Great Depression” (Vigod 6). Before the outbreak of World War I in 1914, 3,000,000 Jews had fled Eastern Europe.

The Eastern European Jewish exodus brought 42,000 (mostly Lithuanian) Jews to South Africa and 3,950 (male) Jews to Australia between 1881 and 1911. From 1891-1900,
an estimated 9,000 (mostly Russian, Polish, Rumanian, and Austrian) Jews arrived in Canada (Vigod 9). From 1901-1910, another 68,176 Jews arrived, of whom 12,000 emigrated to the United States (Vigod 8, 9). The Jewish population in Canada increased from 2,443 to 6,501 between 1881 and 1891; from 6,501 to 16,493 between 1891 and 1901; and from 16,493 to 74,760 between 1901 and 1911 (Vigod 9). By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, “the total number of Jewish Canadians surpassed 120,000” (Vigod 8). By 1914, there were well over one hundred synagogues in Canada, and the face of Canadian Jewry was irrevocably altered: “By 1914 it was not the Anglicized, comfortable, integrated community it had been thirty years before. Rather, the majority of Canada’s Jewry were now Yiddish-speaking, Orthodox, penurious immigrants” (Abella, Coat 103).

The 1911 Dominion Census revealed the largest Jewish populations in Montreal (27,948), Toronto (18,237), and Winnipeg, Manitoba (9,023), plus a total of 6,000 Jews resident in Ottawa (Ontario), Hamilton (Ontario), Vancouver (British Columbia), Saint John (New Brunswick), and Edmonton (Alberta) (Vigod 8). The prairie city of Winnipeg’s first Jewish settler, Edmond Coblentz, had arrived in 1877 or 1878. The Census of 1881 indicates that there were thirty-three Jewish men and their families then resident in Winnipeg, nearly all of them of Anglo-German background. With the huge influx of Eastern European refugees, however, the demographics of the Jewish community in Canada changed irrevocably, as indeed they also did in the United States, South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Australia.

Through the aegis of Canada’s first High Commissioner to Great Britain, Alexander Tilloch Galt (one of the prime movers behind Confederation), whose mandate was to
encourage settlement in Canada's “empty” Northwest, preferably by immigrants of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic descent, Eastern European Jews were to be settled on the prairies for the purpose of agricultural development. In this way, Galt (and his chief, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald) hoped to curry favour with the Rothschilds and other Jewish capitalists in Europe in order to attract their investment in the chronically underfunded Canadian Pacific Railroad. Accordingly, “on April 24, 1882, 240 [Jewish] refugees left Liverpool with tickets to Winnipeg in their hands” (Abella, Coat 79). More followed this first group. On May 26, twenty-three Russian Jews arrived in Winnipeg; on June 1, two hundred and forty-seven more; and on June 10, another seventy—“in all, 340 people to a community of only a handful of families” (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 115). Believing they had been promised free land by Galt, the Russian Jews who arrived in Winnipeg in 1882 found no land waiting for them; rather, they were housed in immigration sheds and encountered poverty, few work opportunities, and overt hostility. Finally, in 1884, through Galt and the Dominion Lands Commission, the first Jewish agricultural colony was established on land allocated for that purpose near Moosomin, Saskatchewan (220 miles due west of Winnipeg). However, the twenty-seven Russian Jewish families who moved to New Jerusalem (their optimistic name for the Moosomin colony) were not, and had never been, farmers. Crops failed the first year, and were destroyed by hail in the second year. The colony failed, and in 1889, fire obliterated it.

A second Jewish colony, Wapella, Saskatchewan, was established in 1888 fifteen miles north of Moosomin. This time Jews with agricultural training settled the land, and, although life was harsh, the colony was marginally successful. Herman Landau, an English
Jewish financier, was the backer of the Wapella colony. He, in turn, enlisted the aid of Franco-German Jewish financier and philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch to underwrite the settlement of Eastern Jewish refugees in the Americas. Baron de Hirsch established the Jewish Colonization Association in 1891, with the intent of settling Russian Jews in agricultural colonies in Argentina and Canada. (A baseless rumour, which first circulated in 1891, that de Hirsch was planning to settle 500,000 Russian Jewish refugees in an agricultural colony in Australia was met with such vehement hostility there that he had to assure the Victorian government that he had no such plans.) In 1892, the Jewish Colonization Association gave the Young Men’s Hebrew Benevolent Society of Montreal—founded in 1863 to assist the Jewish poor and, in 1891, renamed the Baron de Hirsch Institute—$35,000 with which to establish a farm colony in Western Canada. Thus, in May 1892, a new Jewish colony was founded in Hirsch, Saskatchewan:

By 1895, after a series of crop failures and natural disasters, many of the settlers had abandoned their homes and gone elsewhere.

Perhaps they gave up hope too soon. Within a year the fortunes of the settlement changed. Several bountiful harvests, higher prices for their crops and the return of good weather made Hirsch attractive to new immigrants. . . .

By the turn of the century, Hirsch was a thriving community—it would survive another fifty years—with a synagogue, two Jewish schools and Saskatchewan’s first Jewish burial ground. (Abella, Coat 89-90)

Other Jewish agricultural colonies were founded on the Canadian prairies at Sonnenfeld, Saskatchewan (1906), Edenbridge, Saskatchewan (1906), Rumsey/Trochu,
Alberta (1906), Alsask/Montefiore, Saskatchewan (1910), Narcisse/Bender, Manitoba (1903), and Camper, Manitoba (1911). Although agricultural colonies similar to those in Canada were established by the Jewish Colonization Association in Argentina, no such attempts were made to found farming settlements of Eastern European Jews in the vast tracts of unsettled land in New Zealand, Australia, or South Africa. And although the experiment to people the Canadian Prairies with Jews was not a stunning success,

... it resulted in substantial growth of the Jewish communities in the major cities. Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg registered remarkable changes as a result of the influx, not just in numbers but in the very character of their communal life. (Tulchinsky, Taking Root 128)

Thus by the time of the 1911 Dominion Census, Winnipeg had in a space of merely thirty years become home to the third largest Jewish community in Canada.

In 1914,

... in the country’s three largest cities, Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg, Jews constituted more than six per cent of the population and were the largest immigrant communities in each. ... By 1914 the acculturated Anglo-Jewish community had all but disappeared. ... Leadership still remained in the hands of the old guard; their wealth, influence, contacts and ability to speak English assured that. But they were losing their control over the Jewish community. (Abella, Coat 115-16)

Even during World War I, an average of 4,000 Jewish refugees arrived per year. The Eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in their own urban sh'tells—The Main (St.
Lawrence Boulevard) in Montreal, The Ward (St. John's) in Toronto, and the North End (north of the C.P.R. tracks) in Winnipeg—in the poorer sections of the cities, far away from their established, uptown Anglo-German co-religionists. And, as they did in both Australia and South Africa, the Jewish newcomers overwhelmed the existing Jewish community through both their numbers and their energy, gradually accruing power and eventually assuming the leadership of the Canadian Jewish community. Canada's first national Jewish society, the Federation of Zionist Societies of Canada (later the Canadian Zionist Federation), had been formed by the Jewish establishment in 1899 and was controlled from Montreal by Clarence de Sola, son of Reverend Abraham de Sola. The Canadian Jewish Congress, on the other hand, was convened on March 16, 1919, in Montreal and had the support of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants whose voice it heard and whose interests it represented. Although the C.J.C. faltered and virtually disappeared a few short years later, it was revivified in 1933 in response to the virulent antisemitism rife in Quebec, elsewhere in Canada, and in Germany, where the metastasizing Nazi menace threatened all European Jewry.

The Dominion Census of 1921 recorded 125,445 Jews in Canada; a decade later the number had risen to 155,766 (1.5% of the total Canadian population in 1931) (Vigod 9). Although the massive influx of Eastern European Jews did not produce the race riots and bloodshed which South Asian, Japanese, and Chinese immigration to British Columbia did during the same period (1881-1914), it did result in an antisemitic backlash in Canada (and elsewhere), which, in turn, had a profound and tragic impact on the immigration of Jews, especially those trying to escape Nazi Germany during the half-decade prior to the outbreak
of World War II. The English-born and Oxford-educated scholar Goldwin Smith (1823-1910) moved to Toronto in 1871 and became an intellectual leader in his adopted homeland. He “was the first president of the National Club, and helped found several important journals” (Abella, Coat 105). He was one of the leaders of the Canada First Movement, an Anglo-Protestant nationalist movement organized in 1868 by George Denison (1839-1925), Henry Morgan (1819-1893), and Ontario poet Charles Mair (1838-1927). The central aim of this often disunited group was the economic growth of Ontario through continentalism.

Smith favoured economic union with the U.S.A. However, one of his favourite topics was the Jews, for whom he harboured an especially vicious hatred. Unfortunately, his prolific antisemitic writings found a sympathetic audience, significantly influencing both Henri Bourassa (1842-1891) and William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950).

Bourassa was one the chief articulators of ultramontane Catholicism, the Quebec nationaliste movement of the early twentieth century which opposed the Canada First Movement’s vision of an Anglo-Protestant Canada. Jews were portrayed as the enemies of a French, Catholic, Quebec theocracy and denounced: “The newspaper he founded, Le Devoir, would over the next fifty years be one of the most vocal opponents of Jewish immigration to Canada, and a constant thorn in the side of Quebec Jewry” (Abella, Coat 107). Catholic newspapers—La Vérité, La Semaine religieuse, L’Action sociale catholique—edited by ultramontane priests characterized Jews as “the enemy of the church” (Abella, Coat 108). L. G. Robillard founded the Union of Franco-Canadians, a Jew-hating group of approximately twenty-thousand members, and, throughout Quebec, antisemitic literature and discourse were widely promulgated.
In the evolution of South Africa, "antisemitism was never a defining feature of South African culture. Although Jews were the recipients of negative cultural and literary stereotyping, they faced little formal exclusion and ostracism. Only occasionally did they suffer in practical terms" (Shain 151). Australian antisemitism was, likewise, a fact, but, for the most part, similarly benign. However, though in no way emulating the murderous Jew-hatred of Eastern Europe, it is clear that "the Canada of the 1920s and 1930s was a country permeated with anti-semitism" (Abella, Coat 180). The Montreal interns' strike in June 1934—when fourteen of Samuel Rabinovich’s fellow medical interns at Notre Dame Hospital in Montreal went on strike rather than work with their Jewish colleague—and the Christie Pits riot in August 1934—when members of a local Swastika Club fought the members and supporters of a Jewish baseball team on the streets of Toronto—were only two of the hundreds of antisemitic incidents which occurred in the streets of the country's cities as Jew-hater physically confronted Jew (Abella, Coat 180). An unreleased 1939 C.J.C. "Report on Anti-Semitic Activities" found:

For Jews . . . quotas and restrictions had become a way of life. According to the study, few of the country’s teachers and none of its school principals were Jewish. Banks, insurance companies and large industrial and commercial interests, it charged, also excluded Jews from employment. Department stores did not hire Jews as salespeople; Jewish doctors could not get hospital appointments. There were no Jewish judges, and Jewish lawyers were excluded from most firms. Not only did universities and professional schools devise quotas [numerus clausus] against Jewish students, they did not hire
Jewish faculty—Canadian universities were almost totally *Judenrein*, at least in their academic staff. Few civil servants were Jews, and the exceptions were rarely promoted. The report added that it was almost impossible for Jewish nurses, architects and engineers to find jobs in their fields. Some only succeeded when they adopted Christian surnames—at least until they were unmasked. (Abella, *Coat 181*)

Restrictive covenants prevented Jews from buying properties. Signs on Toronto beaches, at Laurentian hotels in Quebec, at a tourist camp in Gimli, Manitoba, and at hotels and resorts in Muskoka, Ontario, announced “No Jews Allowed.” Father Lionel Groulx, a rabidly antisemitic Catholic priest, emerged as the new leader of the French-Canadian *nationaliste* movement in Quebec and declaimed against the Jews. “Across the country, such organizations as the Social Credit Party [formed in Alberta], the Native Sons of Canada, the Orange Order and the Canadian Corps were rife with anti-Jewish feeling” (Abella, *Coat 185*). Fascist organizations—such as Adrien Arcand’s Order of Goglus, in Quebec, William Whittaker’s Brownshirts in Winnipeg, and the numerous Swastika Clubs in Ontario—were formed. At this time, the Great Depression of the 1930s, Jews became the convenient scapegoats for North American economic malaise. Few spoke out for the Jewish community—one who did was Henri Bourassa, having abandoned his earlier antisemitism (Abella, *Coat 187*).

To protest Canadian antisemitism and the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany, the Canadian Jewish Congress (dormant since its inception in 1919), under the leadership of Hananiah Meir Caiserman, its general secretary from 1919 until 1950, was
reconvened in June 1933 and held its Second Plenary Session in Toronto in 1934. One of the top priorities on the C.J.C.’s agenda was to pressure the federal government to allow more Jewish immigration. However, for both internal and external reasons, the national leadership was able to achieve little. Canada would not prove to be the sanctuary for Europe’s Jews that it could well have been. All Jews (unless born British subjects) were re-read and redefined by the Immigration Branch (without consulting Parliament) as a “Special Permit Class.” Thus immigration was more restricted for Jews than for other immigrants holding identical citizenship. As a result, fewer than 4,000 Jewish refugees were permitted to immigrate to Canada between Hitler’s assuming power in Germany in 1933 and the outbreak of World War II in 1939, “a record which compares most unfavorably with that of other countries in the Western Hemisphere” (Vigod 12). A paltry five hundred more Jews fleeing Nazi Europe were allowed into Canada during the war years. Ironically, another 2,250 German and Austrian Jews who had fled Nazi Germany and post-Anschluss Austria to find refuge in the United Kingdom were deported to Canada as “Enemy Aliens” and were interned in camps, often with Nazi German prisoners of war, for several years during the hostilities in Europe. Many of these talented internees remained in Canada upon their release, including Henry Kreisel (1922-1991), the writer and Professor of English; Emil L. Fackenheim (1916- ), the writer and Professor of Philosophy; and Eric Koch (1919- ), the writer, playwright, and Head of Programs on the Arts and Sciences for the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation).

Not until the publication of Irving Abella and Harold Troper’s book *None Is Too Many* (1983), however, did it become public knowledge that the curtailment of Jewish
immigration had been a deliberate government policy under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King’s Liberal government, a policy implemented by the director of the Immigration Branch (Department of Mines and Resources), Frederick Charles Blair (1874-c. 1946), a civil servant whose antisemitic formulation chillingly encapsulated his government’s inhuman Jewish refugee policy and became the title of Abella and Troper’s book. Even after the war had ended and the horror of the Shoah had become public knowledge, Canada accepted a mere 8,000 Jewish immigrants between 1945 and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 (Abella, None xxii). Indeed, Canada’s immediate postwar immigration policy was as shameful as that executed before and during the war. The crowning national ignominy: except for Argentina, no other country in the entire world welcomed more Nazi war criminals than did Canada.

Eventually, 40,000 Jewish survivors of the Shoah managed to immigrate to Canada (Abella, Coat 231). The Dominion Census of 1991 recorded a Jewish Canadian population of 356,315 (a 14.2% increase since the 1981 Census), of which more than 27,000 (7.7%) were Shoah survivors (Tporczyner 230, 240). Beginning in 1945, the antisemitism which had so perniciously affected the lives and livelihoods of Canadian Jews began to subside, and Jews gradually became equal partners in a Canada being re-read and increasingly reconstrued as multicultural. Over 30,000 Jews immigrated to Canada between 1981 and 1991—mostly from the Soviet Union, the U.S.A., Israel, South Africa, and North Africa (Sephardic francophone Jews from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) (Tporczyner 230, 252). By 1981, Toronto had overtaken Montreal in terms of its Jewish population and “emerged as Canada’s preeminent Jewish community during the 1980s” (Waller 215). In 1991, the
Jewish population of Toronto reached 162,605, representing 45.6% of total Canadian Jewry and 4.3% of the total Metropolitan Toronto population (Waller 215). In contrast, Montreal’s Jewish population dropped from 103,425 in 1981 to 101,210 in 1991. Winnipeg, long home to Canada’s third most populous Jewish community, lost that position to Vancouver by 1991. Indeed, between 1981 and 1991, Vancouver’s Jewish population grew by 31% to 19,375, the largest increase in Jewish population recorded for any Canadian city. During the same decade, Winnipeg’s Jewish population declined 6.2% to 15,050 (Torczyner 250). In 1991, “[i]n relation to other countries, Canada had the fifth largest Jewish community in the world”—after the U.S.A., Israel, Russia, and France—and the largest Jewish community in the Commonwealth (Torczyner 229). The Jewish population of Canada in 1991 represented about 1.3% of the total Canadian population. If this figure is extrapolated to the total Canadian population of 29,409,900 Statistics Canada recorded in 1995, then there are approximately 382,000 Jews living in Canada in 1996.

This brief, but detailed, sociodemographic history of Canadian Jewry highlights its distinctiveness in relation to the equally unique histories of the frontier Jewish communities of Australia and South Africa. The sheer physical magnitude of Canada’s vast geography resulted in a diverse and widely-spaced mosaic of marginal Jewish settlements in all the regions of the country—settlements out of which a national “community” was constructed. From the beginning of Jewish settlement, however, this far-flung community maintained its centre of balance in urbane Montreal. As in Australia and South Africa—where the largest concentrations of Jews are (and were) located in their major cities: Sydney and Melbourne, Johannesburg and Cape Town—most Canadian Jews live (and lived) in Canada’s major
cities: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Ottawa-Hull, Calgary and Edmonton. And it is from these diverse urban centres, especially Montreal, that modern Jewish Canadian literature has emerged to add its unique perspective and thus to challenge the canonical construction of a national literature narrowly read as bicultural (Anglo-Saxon/Protestant and French/Catholic) by re-reading for multiplicity.

Precursors: Isidore Gordon Ascher, Hyman Edelstein, and Ted Allan

In the Introductory Essay to his Selections from Canadian Poets; with Occasional Critical and Biographical Notes, and an Introductory Essay on Canadian Poetry (1864; the first Canadian poetry anthology), Reverend Edward Hartley Dewart (1828-1903) intoned, three years before Confederation, that “[t]he literature of the world is the foot-prints of human progress” (ix). The concept of an embryonic “Canadian Literature,” as it was then being formulated, was the object of Dewart’s book: “A national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character” (Dewart ix). As the first anthologizer of the literature of a nation which had not yet officially confederated, he was instrumental in promoting a personal reading of what constituted the “Canadian” character. Thus both his purposes and his selections were overtly literary but covertly political. Dewart’s versions of “human progress,” “national literature,” and “national character” were determined by his Methodist, Anglo-centric, Upper Canadian perspective and his preconceived notions of a united nation and the imprint of its literature. His was a monocultural, not a multicultural, point of view. Nevertheless, it was Reverend Dewart who included in his anthology
selections from the first Jewish poet published in British North America: Isidore Gordon Ascher (1837-1933).12

Isidore G. Ascher, born in Glasgow, Scotland, had been brought to Montreal when he was a young boy by his father, G. T. Ascher, a businessman. He grew up in an observant family. In 1862, he became “one of the earliest Jewish law graduates of McGill [University]” (Brown 50). He was one of the approximately thirty bachelor co-founders of the Young Men’s Hebrew Benevolent Society (renamed the Baron de Hirsch Institute in 1871), created in Montreal in July 1863. In that year, he published in Montreal and New York his first volume of poetry, *Voices from the Hearth: A Collection of Verses*. A lawyer by profession, Ascher “was widely accepted as a Canadian literary figure” (Godfrey 350). Nevertheless, “[l]ike so many other Canadians of the day, Ascher looked upon acclaim in Canada as less significant than acclaim in the mother country. In 1864 he returned to England, where he lived until his nineties as a minor but not unsuccessful litterateur” (Brown 50). Although he strongly identified himself with the Montreal Jewish community and wrote about Jewish causes, neither his lyric poetry, nor his fiction—*An Odd Man’s Story* (1889), *Doom of Destiny* (1895), *A Social Upheaval* (1898)—emphasizes Jewish concerns or portrays Jewish characters.

Five of Ascher’s poems from *Voices from the Hearth* were included by Dewart in his *Selections from Canadian Poets* in 1864. To Ascher’s first selected poem, “Short Days,” Dewart appended a footnote in which he commented about the work of the “young Jewish lawyer, of Montreal”:

Though not without occasional defects, which seem more the result of

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carelessness than of inability to do better, this volume reveals a subtle and
delicate imagination, earnest and tender aspirations after the beautiful and the
true, and, in several pieces, a rich musical harmony, which is full of promise of
higher achievement in future, should Mr. Ascher continue to work the vein he
has so auspiciously opened. (Dewart 27)

Dewart’s closing trope was doubtlessly meant metaphorically, its nuances geological or
literary, not anatomical or venous. Another of Ascher’s poems, “Indian Summer,” was also
included in the first major post-Confederation Canadian poetry anthology, Songs of the
Great Dominion: Voices from the Forests and Waters, the Settlements and Cities of
Canada, selected and edited by William Douw Lighthall in 1889.

Hyman Edelstein

Hyman Edelstein (1889-1957) “is the most important of the Canadian Jewish authors
of his own time,” pronounced Canada’s foremost Jewish bibliographer, David Rome, in
1964 (v). Edelstein was born in Dublin, Ireland, and received a classical education,
graduating as First Rank Classical Honourman and Prizeman, and First-in-all-Ireland
Classical Exhibitioner from Dublin University. He immigrated to Canada and settled in
Montreal in 1912.

Watters’s Checklist notes that Edelstein’s first publication was From Judean
Vineyards: Poems, published in Montreal in 1914. This was followed in 1916 by Canadian
Lyrics and Other Poems (a completely revised edition of which was published in 1921 with
a Foreword by William Douw Lighthall), several other books of verse, the last of which was *Spirit of Israel and Other Poems* (1950), and a novel, *The Higher Loyalty*, published under the pseudonym Don Synge in 1946. Edelstein's poetry and prose fiction very often thematize specifically Jewish themes, places, and ideas; however, although his works were generally well received critically when published, the quality of most of his writing is such that he has been overlooked by most anthologists and literary historians.\(^\text{13}\) His importance to Jewish Canadian letters is not found in his "literary" writings but in his role as editor of several seminal Jewish publications. In his editorial capacity, he was able to voice his passionate Zionist sentiments, his strong Jewish identity, and his devotion to both Canada and Britain, and to comment on Jewish issues both local and international.\(^\text{14}\)

Edelstein edited the Montreal-based *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (successor to the *Canadian Jewish Times*) from about 1914 until 1917, at which time he took over as publisher and editor of *The Jewish Weekly*, holding both positions until 1918. He published and edited another Montreal-based journal, *The Jewish Herald* from 1926 until 1927. In 1928, he became the co-editor of the first English-Yiddish weekly in Canada, the *People's Journal*. In his many capacities, Edelstein was a pioneer of Jewish Canadian, English-language poetry and journalism.

Edelstein’s pseudonymously published novel, *The Higher Loyalty* (hereafter *HL*), is the first post-Shoah Jewish Canadian work of prose fiction. Although the novel tells a predominantly Jewish story set within the specific time frame of 1938 to 1945 (and, retrospectively, referring to the period of both the Russo-Japanese War and World War I), and although it is narrated through the specific historical context and consciousness of the
Shoah, and although it portrays the interactions among and between several generations of the families of Jewish and Christian characters in their Montreal environments, its convoluted plot relies too heavily on numerous implausible coincidences, mistaken and multiple identities, and missed, misconstrued, and almost meetings to propel awkwardly the characters and to develop clumsily the novel’s thematic focus on Jewish-Christian relations, intermarriage, and antisemitism. The plot thus defies credibility. Structured as an amalgam of non-metaphysical detective story cum quest—the unsuccessful search by Vladimir Rudin, a German Jewish journalist who flees Germany in 1938, for his lost and last surviving family member, Alexandra Rudin, his granddaughter, informs the involuted (and, ultimately, interconnected) mysteries at the novel’s core—the novel propounds a very earnest, sincere, utopic, liberal humanist message/theory about the relation between Jew and Christian in post-Shoah Canada and their aspiring to a higher loyalty: the spiritual ideal of a universal humanity. Unfortunately, however, the import and the historical context of the novel are trivialized by the medium of its narration: content and style are unintentionally disjunct. Representation—both of the catastrophic reality of the historical events framing the story and of the tragic consequences of those events in the lives of the various characters—is subservient to the prose fictional conventions of romantic melodrama, Victorian sentimentality, and artificial pathos. This subservience results in clichéd, stilted, lifeless prose (often academic and Classical in tone, and seldom colloquial), unsuitable and anachronistic diction and register, bathos, and cardboard characterization—all entirely inappropriate to the thematic content.

After being released from his internment by the Japanese after the Russo-Japanese
War ends, Vladimir Rudin, a Russian soldier and a brilliant Jewish journalist and intellectual, returns to his home in Kishinev in 1906. There he discovers that his wife, Alexandra, and their two daughters were murdered during the (now infamous) 1905 Kishinev pogrom. He and his fifteen-year-old-son Max, the family’s sole survivors, find refuge in Cologne. While attending the Sorbonne in 1908, Max Rudin meets Yvonne Deschamps, the daughter of a French-Canadian Catholic father and a Jewish mother who live in Montreal. They marry and have two children: Alexandra (born in 1910), named for her slain grandmother, and Henri (born in 1911). Leaving her daughter with her parents in Paris, Yvonne Rudin takes her son Henri to Germany to visit family friends, the Wahls, in 1914 and dies giving birth to her premature third child, Jacques-Ernst. At the outbreak of World War I, Vladimir Rudin and his close friend and neighbour, Dr. Ernst Wahl, enlist and fight on different fronts for the Kaiser. With Europe at war, her Canadian grandparents, the Deschamps, take their four-year-old granddaughter Alexandra from Paris to Montreal, where, after the war and the death of her grandparents during the influenza epidemic of 1919, she “disappears” into a convent. During the war, Vladimir sustains a brain-injury which causes him a mental blackout for twenty years. Discovered, Vladimir is operated on in Vienna and, regaining consciousness one month later, is “a rational being once more” (Edelstein, HL 10)

Vladimir wakes up just in time for the Munich “Putsch” of 1938 and flees to New York, where he continues to publish his journal Kotoryi Chas? (What’s The Time?). His son Max has been interned in France as an enemy alien. Simultaneously, Dr. Ernst Wahl, Vladimir’s German Catholic friend and comrade-in-arms, and his Jewish wife Elisabeth,
now the guardians of the presumed-dead Vladimir’s two grandsons—Henri and Jacques-
Ernst—flee Germany with both their own grandchildren—Amalie and her brother Friedrich
Josef Wahl—and the two Rudin boys, arriving in Ottawa in May 1938. In Montreal,
Vladimir and Dr. Ernst Wahl are reunited.

Vladimir is unable to locate Alexandra Rudin, his granddaughter, but takes his
grandsons to New York to live with him. Henri Rudin eventually marries Amalie Wahl, and, while acting in the premiere performance of Vladimir Rudin’s play about antisemitism, Monosyllable (a play written “to express the eternal theme illustrated in many tongues by
one hissed syllable—‘Zhid!’—‘Jud!’—‘Jew!’—‘Juif!’”), both are murdered by a female
Nazi German terrorist (who, to avoid capture, immediately kills herself by taking poison) on
the stage of a New York theatre (Edelstein, HL 16-17). Jacques-Ernst joins the Canadian
army and becomes an Intelligence Officer. He is murdered by the Gestapo in Holland in
1944.

In the meantime, Friedrich Josef Wahl, now Fred Wall, is a medical student at McGill
University, and part of a group of six university friends who form the Philosophomores’
Club—Fred, Marcelle Humbert, Leonard Jackson, Lucy Bowridge, Grant O’Neill, and
Esther Silvers. Leo and Grant are also medical students. Both Leo and Esther are Jews, the
former living on The Main, the Montreal Jewish ghetto, and the latter living in the City of
Westmount, the wealthy, upper-class anglophone ghetto. Marcelle Humbert is an orphan
whose benefactress is an unmet and secretive “aunt.” (As it transpires, Marcelle is also
Jewish, although she never discovers this fact.) As Leo and Lucy and Grant and Esther try
to work out the religious ramifications of their respective proposed intermarriages, the
differing attitudes towards assimilation between the Jewish generations are foregrounded:

Thus it was to the Jacksons. The marriage of their Leo with Lucy was not to be a mating of mere bodies and minds—but of one world with another—the world of navies and armies and guns and bayonets, and pirates and lords and kings and queens, and musical English accents and social glitter, with the world of pogroms, martyrdom, humiliation, squalor, poets, musicians, Nobel Prize winners, Spinozas, Yehudi Menuhins and Einsteins! . . . the goy with the goy with the goy with the ghetto! . . . She was to marry, in short, the infinite heights and depths, all the Blessing and all the curse—ah, the Curse!—of that tremendous, all-inclusive Monosyllable, "Jew!"—with its universal exclamation mark! (Edelstein, HL 153-54)

However, Leo is "emancipated" from the fear of the monosyllabic curse, and, "like most Jewish youth of the modernist concept," acquiesces to the assimilation of his Jewish identity to some nebulous, humanistic higher loyalty (Edelstein, HL 154). In addition, he neither wants nor expects Lucy to convert to Judaism. Like the other five Philosophomores, Leo is in love "with all humanity by a common ideal" and believes all barriers to intermarriage to be "artificial and un-human": "To lovers of human brotherhood like themselves, intermarriage—at least among all of a common, transcendent, spiritual and intellectual outlook—could only consolidate as it would perpetuate the living forces striving after world-reunion and universal peace" (Edelstein, HL 64, 65). Lucy does decide, temporarily, to convert; however, her ludicrous attempt, with Esther Silvers's help, to go kosher ends disastrously and curtails her gastronomic conversion to Judaism.
Fred Wahl and Marcelle Humbert are married in 1945. However, their marriage is very short-lived. A taxi, carrying Madame Edmond Seguin, crashes into the newlyweds’ car and kills Marcelle. As the mystery unfolds, Madame Seguin—known by the aliases Mile, Alice and Alouette Deschamps—is discovered to be the missing Alexandra Rudin. Sent to a convent after her grandparents’ deaths in 1919, seduced into marriage to Edmond Seguin, bearing a daughter, abandoned by her husband (who had the marriage annulled on the grounds that she did not reveal she was a Jewess), giving her daughter into the care of an orphanage, becoming a prostitute (precursor of Hoda in Adele Wiseman’s Crackpot twenty-eight years later), running a high-class brothel, Alexandra Rudin has concealed her identity and led a life punctuated with self-hatred: “I was a Jewess, a mongrel outcast” (Edelstein, HL 190). After the taxi in which she was riding kills her only daughter, Marcelle Humbert, and after avenging herself by having an exposé of her ex-husband published in the newspaper (his family name and his Jew-hating brother, a priest, disgraced, Edmond promptly hangs himself), Alexandra poisons herself and dies. Vladimir Rudin never discovers his lost granddaughter, and Marcelle Humbert dies never knowing her mother. Alexandra’s dying words intone the Biblical Song of Deborah, which commemorates Jael’s slaying of Sisera with a tent peg.

Though a badly flawed novel, The Higher Loyalty nonetheless foregrounds many of the issues of Jewish identity, tradition, assimilation, continuity, exile, marginalization, alienation, and life in a post-Shoah world which find their thematic reiteration in much of the Jewish Canadian fiction which followed its publication. Though understandably ignored by Canadian literary historians and critics, The Higher Loyalty is significant nevertheless—
not for its dubious aesthetic qualities, but for its position as the first Jewish Canadian novel (either pre- or post-Shoah) to thematize Jewish concerns and to construct Jewish characters.

Ted Allan

Montreal-born Allan Herman (1916-1995), who published pseudonymously as Ted Allan (and, for a 1957 science-fiction novel, *Quest for Pajaro*, as Edward Maxwell), had a long and varied career as a writer of short stories, novels, plays (for stage, radio, and television), Hollywood screenplays, non-fiction prose, biography, and a children’s book; a journalist; a stage and television actor; and a storyteller for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). He began writing at age eighteen as the Montreal correspondent for the *Toronto Daily Worker*, a left-wing, pro-Communist publication. In April 1937, he published his first short story, “Cadieux Street Childhood”—about his boyhood in Montreal—in another left-wing Canadian journal, the short-lived *New Frontier* (Toronto).15

Soon after, he served, with other Canadian volunteers, in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigade on the side of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). There he acted as political commissar in the world’s first mobile ambulance corps and blood-transfusion unit, founded by a Canadian doctor, Dr. Norman Bethune (1890-1939), about whom he had written in the *New Frontier* in 1937. After the defeat of the Republicans in Spain, Bethune joined Mao Tse-Tung’s army’s Great March in China, where, after his death through a blood infection contracted during a medical operation in a field hospital and after the Communist victory in 1949, he became enshrined
as both a hero of the Communist Revolution in China and a cultural icon in Canada.

Bethune’s life became the subject of two plays—*Bethune: A Play* (1975), by Rod Langley (1942- ), and *Gone the Burning Sun* (1985), by Ken Mitchell (1940- )—and two films—*Bethune* (1977), a made-for-Canadian-television movie directed by Eric Till and starring Canadian-born actor Donald Sutherland in the title role, and *Bethune: The Making of a Hero* (1990), a feature film directed by Phillip Borsos which also starred Donald Sutherland.

Ted Allan’s wartime experiences in Spain resulted in two books. His first novel, *This Time a Better Earth*, was published in 1939. Written in a style derivative of Ernest Hemingway (1898-1961), *This Time a Better Earth* is perhaps the first significant Canadian novel of social protest. The protagonist, Bob Curtis, a twenty-one-year-old Canadian volunteer in the International Brigade, falls in love with a German press photographer against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War. Unfortunately, the clichéd, derivative language and storyline detract from the novel’s impact. The second publication, Allan’s most commercially successful and popular book—over a million copies in print in nineteen languages—is the biography of Bethune he co-wrote with Sydney Gordon, *The Scalpel, The Sword: The Story of Doctor Norman Bethune* (1952; revised 1971).

Allan lived for some thirty years in England before returning to North America to take up residence in Toronto (summers) and Los Angeles (winters). In 1984, after having had several of his scripts and plays successfully produced—including *Double Image*, co-written with Roger MacDougall in 1957, which ran at the Savoy Theatre in London—he published a second novel, *Love Is a Long Shot*. However, the Jewish fiction for which Allan is most noted is an autobiographical short story he published in the September-October 1949
issue of the Canadian Jewish Congress’s *Congress Bulletin*, “Zaide and Me: A Short Story of Montreal”—which, retitled “Lies My Father Told Me,” became a Canadian classic.16

“Zaide and Me” (hereafter “Zaide”) is a retrospectively told story in which an adult Jewish narrator reconstructs himself as a six-year-old child and remembers his beloved Zaide (Grandfather). To the boy, Eleshka, Zaide appears to be a larger-than-life Biblical figure:

> My grandfather stood six feet three in his worn-out bedroom slippers. He had a long grey beard with streaks of white running through it. When he prayed, his voice boomed like a church-bell as he turned the pages of his prayer-book with one hand and stroked his beard with the other. His hands were boney [sic] and looked like tree-roots; they were powerful. My Zaide had been a farmer in the old country. In Montreal he conducted what he called “a second-hand business.” (Allan, “Zaide” 10)

Eleshka identifies with his Zaide, and his “happiest times” are spent riding with him on a decrepit cart drawn by an aged horse, Ferdeleh (“Little Horse,” in Yiddish), as they traverse the muddy lanes of Montreal on Sunday mornings buying used rags, clothes, and bottles from the public (Allan, “Zaide” 10). The Zaide, the immigrant farmer urbanized in Canada, has, in his old age, become a very pious man, a role model for his grandson, whose love for him is unconditional, and the preserver of Jewish tradition across the generations.

However, among the members of the extended family, there is intergenerational discord. As the adult narrator recreates his boyhood consciousness, to his Zaide’s tradition, vitality, and presence he counterpoises his father’s assimilation, cynicism, and absence:
I didn’t like my father. He said things to me like, “For God’s sake, you’re
smart, but not as smart as you think. Nobody is that smart.” He was jealous of
me and he told me lies. He told me lies about Ferdeleh. . . .

On top of everything, my father had no beard, didn’t pray, didn’t go to the
synagogue on the Sabbath, read English books and never read the prayer
books, played piano on the Sabbath and sometimes would draw my mother into
his villainies by making her sing while he played. On the Sabbath this was an
abomination to both Zaide and me. . . .

It was a house divided, with my grandmother, mother and father on one side,
and me, Zaide and Ferdeleh on the other. (Allan, “Zaide” 11)

The estrangement between son and father, mirroring that between Jewish tradition
and secular assimilation, is a central theme in the story—a motif which recurs in subsequent
modern Jewish Canadian fiction. The divisions apparent in the unnamed family parallel
those apparent in Montreal society itself. During one of their Sunday promenades,
Grandfather and grandson travel up the road leading to “the mountain in the centre of the
city,” as they sometimes do, and relax, “surrounded on each side by tall poplars and
evergreens, . . . at home among the trees and black earth and thick grass” (Allan, “Zaide”
10). On their return journey, however, they are stoned by a group of young boys and girls,
who shout at them in French:

“Juif . . . Juif . . .” Zaide held his strong arm around me, cursed back
muttering “anti-semites” [sic] under his breath. When I asked him what he said
he answered, “It is something I hope you will never learn.” The boys and girls

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laughed and got tired of throwing stones. That was the last Sunday we went to the mountains [sic]. (Allan, “Zaide” 11)

Eleshka’s direct encounter with the francophone youths’ blatant antisemitism has several consequences: the sudden self-awareness of Jewish difference; the experience of Jewish vulnerability—physical attack is answered with powerful but ineffectual language; and the loss of access to the mountain.

The loss of access to that part of the city which is most natural and Edenic and which is the grandson’s closest connection—vicariously, through Zaide—to that which the latter had to leave behind when forced to emigrate is followed by another, much more traumatic loss: the deaths of Zaide and Ferdeleh. However, when told of their demise by his father, Eleshka cries—not for his Zaide or Ferdeleh (who he knows would never abandon him), but about his father, who he believes has once again told “such a horrible lie” (Allan, “Zaide” 21). The retrospective frame of the story allows the adult narrator to reimage and re-read his experiences and to determine the relation of his father’s lies to the truth.

Henry Kreisel

In July 1938, Henry Kreisel (1922-1991) arrived in England, having fled Vienna after the Anschluss brought Austria into the Nazi German sphere of terror. Working at a Leeds clothing factory, he started to learn to speak and write English. In mid-May 1940, he, along with the other German and Austrian Jewish refugees who had sought asylum in England from Nazi German oppression on the European continent, was reclassified as an “Enemy
Alien” and interned at a barracks in Pontefract (Yorkshire). In July 1940, Kreisel, his father, and fifteen hundred other internees, predominantly Jewish, boarded a boat at Glasgow, Scotland, and were shipped to Canada. (Those who were not sent to Canada boarded the Dunera and sailed to Australia, where they were interned.) After a brief stop in St. John’s, Newfoundland, the boat sailed up the St. Lawrence River and berthed at Quebec City. A train brought the internees to Trois Rivières—the ancestral home of Aaron Hart and his family, a destination the irony of which was doubtless lost on the hapless refugees—where they remained for a month. Kreisel was then transferred to Camp “B” near Fredericton, New Brunswick. In June 1941, he was moved to Camp “I” on Ile aux Noix (Camp Lennox), St. Valentin. On July 1, 1941, the Jewish internees’ position was officially changed from Prisoners of War to Refugees, thus allowing the possibility of their attaining “Landed Immigrant” status in Canada.

In the autumn of 1941, after eighteen months of incarceration, Kreisel was among the first group of internees to be released. He went to Toronto to meet the family who had sponsored his entry into Canada and started attending Harbord Collegiate there in November 1941. He matriculated in June 1942 and began his studies in English Language and Literature at the University of Toronto in the fall of that year. After receiving his B.A. (1946) and M.A. (1947) from that university, he began a distinguished academic career at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. He received his Ph.D. from the University of London in 1954.

From the day of his internment in Leeds, England, on May 16, 1940, Kreisel began to write a diary. In 1973, he rediscovered this document in an old suitcase, and, transcribed
and prefixed with an Introduction by Kreisel, it was published in 1974 as the “Diary of an Internment.” The diary is an intermittently written mosaic of the young Kreisel’s various impressions, feelings, and experiences during the eighteen months of his imprisonment. In it, the young author, deliberately writing in English (except for the letters to his mother and brother, which are written in German), records, analyzes, reads, and interprets the events of his circumscribed life. By its very nature, a diary invites both reading and re-reading. In the Introduction he wrote for the diary’s publication, Kreisel retrospectively re-reads the significance of his internment as he looks back on himself looking back at the events of the 1930s in Europe:

In many ways the internment camp experience is central to my own development. Suspended in a kind of no man’s land for more than eighteen months, I could look back at the horrendous events of the 1930s and see them in some kind of perspective, and I could prepare myself intellectually for the tasks I wanted to undertake in the future. (Kreisel, “Diary” 23)

Clearly, Kreisel’s perspective is, and was, multiple, complicated further by his decision in England to exile himself from his native language and to begin to write in English—in order “to free [him]self from the linguistic and psychological dependence on German” (Kreisel, “Diary” 21). His imaginative mentor in this self-appointed task was Joseph Conrad. However, as he wrote to Robert Weaver on March 27, 1956, his awareness of irony and paradox grew from his immediate life experience of exile, alienation, and victimization as an internee:

I felt a sense of outrage, because I was so completely conscious of never
having done anything, and I was acutely aware of my status as ‘victim’—
victim first of Nazi tyranny, and then, ironically, victim because by nationality
I belonged to a nation with which Britain was at war, but with which I also felt
myself at war. I therefore resented the appellation of ‘enemy alien.’ I had
never before been so acutely aware of irony and paradox, and I think that the
experience has left a lasting effect on the way I see things. (Kreisel, “Letter”
45-46)

The process of Kreisel’s ironic transformation from “Enemy Alien” to Jewish
Canadian writer involved a second imaginative and spiritual mentor: the Jewish Canadian
poet and novelist Abraham Moses Klein (1909-1972). In a 1980 interview with Mervin
Butovsky (a professor of English at Concordia University, Montreal), Kreisel discusses the
influence of Klein on his own literary development:

The very first essay I wrote in Toronto was on Klein. Klein became one of my
great culture heroes, because he showed me that you could use your culture,
you could use your tradition and you didn’t have to be afraid; you didn’t have
to try and invent something for the audience, but could work out of your own
tradition—he had a very important psychological impact. (Kreisel, “Interview”
189)

Klein’s impact is further elaborated in the article, “Language and Identity: A Personal
Essay”:

Conrad’s solution of how to deal with the raw materials of his experience
could not be mine. It was A. M. Klein who showed me how one could use,
without self-consciousness, the material that came from a specifically European and Jewish experience. I began to understand that identity was not something forever fixed and static. It was rather like a tree. New branches, new leaves could grow. New roots could be put down, too, but the original roots need not be discarded. In the end, I thought that I could perhaps use a double perspective that allowed me to see European experience through Canadian eyes, and Canadian experience through European eyes, and so to say something that, however modest, might have some value. Thus language and identity could be brought into focus, each modifying the other, but without the one destroying the other. And the new language could be made to express the old as well as the new. It was a constant struggle. (Kreisel, "Language" 127)

The personal experiences of perception and ignorance, irony and paradox, exile and alienation, language and identity, Judaism and antisemitism form the thematic and symbolic matrix of Kreisel’s first published novel, *The Rich Man* (1948; hereafter *RM*).

Although *The Higher Loyalty* (1946), by Hyman Edelstein (published under the pseudonym Don Synge), and *The Sealed Verdict* (1947), by Lionel S. B. Shapiro (1908-1958) were the first post-World War II works of fiction published by Jewish Canadian authors, the former novel lacks the quality and impact which might have ensured its literary longevity, and the latter novel does not foreground Jewish material. *The Rich Man* is the first literarily significant post-*Shoah* Jewish Canadian novel to thematize Jewish concerns and one of the first modern Canadian novels to represent immigrant experience.

Jacob Grossman, the ironically described rich man of the book’s title, is a poor Jewish
immigrant from Galicia who has worked as a presser for Perfect Clothes Ltd. in Toronto for thirty-three years. Waking up late for work at the outset of the novel, Grossman is initially disoriented, but then remembers that he purposely had not set the alarm clock. For this morning is special. It marks the beginning of his Kafkaesque metamorphosis—not into a giant insect, but into a similarly alienated and paradoxical creature: a poverty-stricken rich man. He has decided to ask the manager, Mr. Duncan, for seven weeks’ vacation in order to visit his aged mother and three sisters in Vienna, a city which, because he emigrated from the family’s Galician shtetl in the former Austro-Hungarian empire in 1902, he has never seen. However, Grossman’s anxiety at having to speak with Mr. Duncan in English—a tongue in which the immigrant presser has insufficient fluency, thereby accentuating his powerlessness and marginalization both at his job and in Canadian society—underlines the novel’s thematic foregrounding of language and communication. Grossman imagines and rehearses his almost meeting with his superior: “‘Mr. Duncan,’ he would say, shaking the manager’s hand, ‘Mr. Duncan. . . .’ And then what? How would he go on? It was difficult to find the right words. Ah! If he could talk to him in Yiddish, everything would be fine. But in English!” (Kreisel, RM 9). He dresses up, because he does not want to appear “[I]ike a nobody, like a . . . like a . . . He couldn’t think of another fitting term” (Kreisel, RM 9). In contrast, Yiddish offers a fluency and facility of expression:

The word Noo was the richest and most expressive word in his vocabulary. He could play with this little word like a virtuoso. He could thunder it in a loud bass, and he could whisper it softly, drawing it out gently. He could pronounce it sharply, almost threateningly, like a stab, and he could speak it lightly and
playfully, modulating his sing-song, his voice wavering and trembling until it
died away like the closing notes of a sad aria. In the mouth of Jacob Grossman
this little sound was capable of expressing the profoundest emotions and the
most delicate shades of meaning. (Kreisel, RM 18)

However, even Yiddish, Grossman's "[modder language," proves at the end of the novel
to be an inadequate vehicle for truthful communication and, ultimately, powerless to save
the rich man's Viennese family from the impending Anschluss (Kreisel, RM 20).

As he shaves, Grossman hears on CFRB, a Toronto radio station, a modern
arrangement of "The Blue Danube Waltz":

It was a jazz version of the old tune, hammered out very fast and loud, all brass
and drums. Jacob loved the waltz, but not when it was played like that. He
wanted a lot of violins, hundreds of them, the way it was always done in
movies about gay Vienna. (Kreisel, RM 10)

However, Grossman's romantic illusion about "gay Vienna" proves to be as lethally self-
destructive as his myopic, egotistic, and deluded reconstruction of himself as a rich man, a
self-created fantasy from which he does not awaken until it is far too late. To this New
World rendition of an Old World waltz classic is juxtaposed a news report about Nazi
Germany's rearmament: "Air minister Herman Goering of Germany said yesterday that
rearmament is Germany's greatest contribution to world peace, because it is purely
defensive[']" (Kreisel, RM 10). The deliberate focus on language—and its use for the
purposes of manipulative and propagandistic miscommunication—is heightened by the
retrospective 1935 setting of the novel. The distinction between the benign illusion

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Goering's words present and their murderous reality is made more immediate and acute by the reader's knowledge of what these words actually portend for Europe and for the Jews trapped there. The novel's manifold ironies are enacted within the shadow of an imminent Shoah, that constant, overwhelming, foreboding sub-text which forms the subterranean, subconscious nightmare from which there is no waking and through which the events of the novel must be (re-)read.

Having been granted a compassionate leave by Mr. Duncan, Grossman orders himself a new white suit and purchases various gifts for his mother, sisters, and nephews in Austria and for his daughter, Rosie, in whose Toronto house he has lived since the death of his wife, Malke. As Grossman unwraps and spreads the gifts over his bed, his dream/fantasy appears to possess a material reality:

And then he looked at the gifts spread out before him, almost covering the whole surface of the bed, and he felt that this was one of the moments he would long cherish and remember, for here, tangible and real, was part of a dream materialized. He would come back to his visit his mother and his sisters like a merchant arriving after long travels in foreign lands, bearing great gifts.

(Kreisel, RM 28)

However, once this modern Marco Polo has decided to "throw money around like a rich man," he must struggle to sustain the illusion (Kreisel, RM 29).

On board the Ile aux Noix, the ship which Grossman misnames the Illinois and in which he departs from New York on May 14 to recross the Atlantic Ocean, he begins to believe that "[h]e had at last realized the dream of every immigrant—he was going back, a
settled, prosperous-seeming man” (Kreisel, RM 36). He befriends Tassigny, a French artist and musician returning to France. However, neither can understand the other’s English, and so they communicate “more by sweeping, expressive gestures than by words” (Kreisel, RM 32). This sense of miscommunication and misunderstanding permeates their interactions. Grossman plays the rich man—“[t]he illusion was too complete to be wantonly destroyed” (Kreisel, RM 40)—and, after being shamed into buying one of Tassigny’s paintings, L’Entrepreneur, for thirty dollars, he considers himself a “patron of the arts” (Kreisel, RM 47).

L’Entrepreneur is an expressionistic, non-representational, Cubist-like rendering of a political contractor, a prototypical faceless Fascist dictator with a “thick, cylindrical, megaphone-like contraption” for a head (Kreisel, RM 42). As Grossman struggles to understand what the painting portrays, he expresses his theory of the meaning of art—“I like a picture should tell a story, or it should show a person that looks like a person, so I know right away what it means” (Kreisel, RM 44): simply, a de-troped realism devoid of symbol, nuance, or metaphor—surface illusion without depth. Tassigny, on the other hand, articulates a different artistic aesthetic: “[‘]If people do not understand, I cannot help it. Perhaps they will understand sometimes. Perhaps never. I hope they will, but if they don’t, it is nothing to me. So long as I have always told the truth, the way I see the truth’” (Kreisel, RM 44). He interprets for Grossman and for the reader, the meaning of meaning.

For him, the painting represents a man

...[“]who has something to show off and he shouts and screams so people will hear and come and pay to see. They come, they pay, sometimes only money,
sometimes more, the whole body and the soul. And what do they see, Monsieur? . . . They see nothing, a few cheap exhibitions.” He paused dramatically and pointed a finger at the mis-shapen grimace whose body lay concealed behind the right leg of the figure. “But the man cares nothing, for he is full of falseness. And more and more people come, Monsieur, because his voice is so . . . so powerful and loud. When he shouts, the people can hear nothing else. They are caught by the voice. One goes and all follow, like a herd of sheep. Do you know what I mean, Monsieur Grossman?” (Kreisel, RM 43)

Tassigny’s final interrogative is answered affirmatively by the literal Grossman, but it is his interlocutor’s words only whose meaning he understands. During his subsequent nightmare, however, Grossman experiences indirectly the metaphoric meaning of the painting’s symbolic truth(s). Alone at his factory machine at night, enveloped in steam, Grossman works feverishly to complete before morning the pressing of a huge pile of white suits:

Suddenly a faceless giant with enormous legs came stalking through an open window, roaring, “There’s no percentage working for somebody else, you gotta go in business for yourself.” The voice grew louder and more insistent and more threatening. The monster came closer and closer, walking very slowly, very deliberately. Jacob tried to flee, but his legs refused to carry him. He could not take his eyes off the giant. Looming behind his right leg there was a thin, mask-like face, and when Jacob looked closer he saw to his amazement that it was Sam Silver. Now the ghoul was within arm’s length, and he could
feel its breath, and he wondered where that breath was coming from since there was no face. Two powerful, hairy arms reached out and grabbed him, and the last thing he saw was Tassigny sitting on the window-sill, eating a corned beef sandwich and laughing. Then he woke up. (Kreisel, RM 46)

Overwhelmed by historical forces, abandoned by those who sit laughing on the window-sills of the world while pretending to artistic truth and humanity, Grossman—marginal immigrant, pseudo-rich man, Jew—is overpowered by a terrifying nightmare which both highlights his impotence to effect any meaningful intervention and prefigures (through indirection) the catastrophic events which will swallow his Viennese family along with most of European Jewry.

Grossman arrives to find the Old World in decay. Everywhere are the signs of poverty, disintegration, and shabbiness. “Gay Vienna” is not. In addition, from his first encounter with a sinister Gestapo SS agent at the German border town of Aachen, Grossman is confronted with the evidence of antisemitism. Reunited in Vienna with his mother—Sarah, and his sisters—Manya, Rivka, and Shaendl, and introduced to his brothers-in-law—Reuben, Manfred, and Albert, and his young nephews, the sons of Shaendl and Albert Reich—Bernhardt and Herman, Grossman revels in nostalgia and “in the fact that he could speak his own language again” (Kreisel, RM 56). However, the son’s returning to both the “modder language” and his mother is accompanied by a childlike reversion, echoed in her calling Jacob by his boyhood name, Yankel. Unresolved tensions and dissensions within the family flare up, displaying familial disquiet analogous to that in the Viennese streets and at the carnival-like Prater, a “mad, whirling, strident cacophony” (Kreisel, RM
Grossman’s Yiddish fluency does not guarantee truthful communication. In fact, it becomes the vehicle for his disingenuousness and dishonesty as he pretends to an affluence he does not possess and a position at the Toronto factory—designer—he does not hold.

While Grossman enacts the charade of an almost meeting with his impoverished family, he plays the rich man who, grossly, ironically, cannot—and who his relatives come to believe will not—produce the money which would save them. The birth of Shaendl’s son, followed closely by her husband Albert’s sudden death when he is struck down by a truck, precipitates a crisis. The family cannot pay Albert’s considerable debts, so Reuben, Manya’s husband, eventually asks Grossman to help Shaendl, his now-widowed sister. Though he knows it is impossible, he promises to provide financial aid. Finally, his fantasy reaches its tawdry climax:

The illusion, the wonderful illusion of the past few weeks had now suddenly come to a shattering, painful, ugly end. He was an insignificant, poor presser again, No 1003, pushing his way into crowded street-cars every morning, hurrying to punch the time clock, and all the grandiloquence, all the splendour, all his luxurious pretensions had now quite fallen away, and from the recesses of the past mocked at his pitiable nakedness. (Kreisel, RM 223)

And he confesses his poverty, first to an incredulous Reuben and Manya, and then to a compassionate Shaendl. Though stunned and disappointed, Shaendl believes and forgives her brother and, with great dignity, vows to sustain her three sons.

At home on neither side of the Atlantic Ocean, awake in neither Old World nor New, able neither to leave nor to return, eternally exiled and multiply alienated, anti-heroic
Grossman ends his quest with the request to his sisters, Manya and Shaendl, and his brother-in-law, Reuben, not to reveal the impoverished truth to his mother until after he has departed. In the midst of his shame and self-hatred, he realizes that he will “never be able to shake off the experience” he has had, that it will be “impossible to forget” (Kreisel, *RM* 229). Alone on the train transporting him back to France, Grossman throws his splintered and torn painting, *L'Entrepreneur*, out of the window into the black European night with a final, bitter, desperate monosyllabic self-interrogation: “‘Noo?’” (Kreisel, *RM* 263). In transit, Grossman remains as trapped emotionally as his family and the doomed Jews of Europe are physically and as impotent as the rest of Canadian Jewry to rescue even a remnant. His memory alone will serve as the memorial marker of their lives.

**A. M. Klein**

In Henry Kreisel’s short story, “The Almost Meeting,” the Edmonton-based writer, Alexander Budak seeks, unsuccessfully, to meet the Toronto-based Jewish Canadian author David Lasker, “one of the greatest writers the country had produced, a great poet as well as a great novelist, who had created an astonishing body of work, but had then suddenly fallen silent” (Kreisel, “Almost” 11). A letter from Lasker to Budak about the latter’s first novel advises: “[‘]An almost meeting is often more important than the meeting. The quest is all’” (Kreisel, “Almost” 17). Later, Lasker and Budak almost meet on two separate occasions. Although Lasker is not A. M. Klein, he presents a Klein-like absence in the unfolding story of Budak’s quest for his elusive father-figure/doppelgänger. Indeed, Klein’s novel *The
Second Scroll (1951)—with its Jewish protagonist questing for his uncle-figure/doppelgänger, its mosaic of almost meetings, its doublings, wanderings, commentaries, glosses, and re-readings—prefigures in its thematic affinities Kreisel’s short story. In his non-fictional prose writing, Kreisel acknowledges Klein’s example and impact. Traces of Klein’s influence can be detected in the poetry and prose fiction of many of the authors who followed in this pioneer Jewish writer’s literary footsteps. In fact, within the genealogy of Jewish Canadian writing, Klein stands out as a literary Patriarch, his work central, crucial, and seminal.

A. M. Klein was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in the Ukrainian town of Ratno in 1909. The following year, his family moved to Montreal, the city where Klein lived for his entire life. He received a traditional Jewish education in Hebrew language, Torah, and Talmud, and, in 1926, he enrolled at McGill University. Throughout his life, he was committed to both Zionism and social reform. Graduating in 1930, Klein then attended law school at the Université de Montréal, receiving his degree in 1933. Dissatisfied with the practice of law, Klein nevertheless continued to work as a lawyer, augmenting his income by editing The Canadian Jewish Chronicle (from 1938 to 1955) and by becoming a speech writer and public relations officer for Samuel Bronfman, then president of the Canadian Jewish Congress. In 1949, he ran as a candidate for the C.C.F. (Canadian Commonwealth Federation, precursor of the New Democratic Party) in the federal election, but failed to win the seat he contested.

While attending McGill University, Klein met the McGill Fortnightly Review editors, the “Montreal Group”—Leon Edel, Leo Kennedy, F. R. Scott, and A. J. M. Smith; however,
his one submission to the Review was rejected because he refused to change the single word which the editors had determined deficient in modernity: "soul." Despite this rejection, during his undergraduate years, Klein began to publish his writing in various periodicals: Menorah Journal (New York), Poetry (Chicago), The Canadian Forum (Toronto), the Canadian Mercury (Gardenvale, Quebec) and the Judaean (Montreal). For the rest of his career, Klein continued to publish in periodicals—among others, The Canadian Jewish Chronicle (Montreal), The Canadian Zionist (Montreal), New Frontier (Toronto), Contemporary Verse (North Vancouver and, later, Victoria), First Statement (Montreal), Preview (Montreal), and Northern Review (formed from the 1945 amalgamation of First Statement and Preview).

In 1936, two of Klein’s poems were published in New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors, a benchmark anthology of early Canadian modernist poetry. That same year, Macmillan published William Edwin Collin’s The White Savannahs, an influential book-length study of English-Canadian literature, written from its author’s modernist critical perspective. Klein, one of the four “Montreal Poets” whose work Collin examined, was received very favourably. Klein’s first collection of poetry, Hath Not a Jew . . ., was published in 1940, followed by Poems and The Hitleriad in 1944, and The Rocking Chair and Other Poems, which won the Governor General’s Award for poetry, in 1948. His only novel, The Second Scroll, was published in 1951, two years after Klein had been sent on a fact-finding trip to Israel and to European and North African Displaced Person camps by the Canadian Jewish Congress. His mental health began to deteriorate, and, after several attempts at suicide in 1954, he gave up the practice of law, resigned his editorship of The
Canadian Jewish Chronicle, and ceased writing. Becoming ever more reclusive, Klein lapsed into a silence which lasted until his death in 1972.

_The Second Scroll_ (hereafter _TSS_) is a key work of post-Shoah Jewish Canadian fiction, a text which enacts an “almost meeting” between the nameless narrator and his Uncle Melech Davidson, between _Shoah_ and survival, between Diaspora and Israel, between destiny and history, between _galuth_ (dispersion) and _geula_ (redemption), between periphery and centre, between marginal _Keri_ (what is written = commentary) and textual _Chetiv_ (what is read = manuscript), between poetry and prose, between the conventions of realism and literary artifice, between a totalizing modernism and a skeptical postmodernism.

The novel’s nameless narrator retrospectively reconstructs his quest for his elusive and mythical Uncle Melech Davidson (Melech = King; thus King David’s son, or the Messiah) (Steinberg xii). The novel begins with a double absence: the narrator’s father (now dead), and Uncle Melech (whose name was taboo, unmentionable in the narrator’s father’s presence). As the past is recalled, inscribed, and commented upon, the narrator remembers the sudden arrival on Simchat Torah—the festival of the rejoicing of the Torah: “A year of the reading of the Law had been concluded, a year was beginning anew, the last verses of Deuteronomy joined the first of Genesis, the eternal circle continued”—of the first of the several translated letters transcribed in the novel (Klein, _TSS_ 20). Uncle Melech writes from his home town in 1917 about the murderous pogrom which he has just survived and which, his older sister’s family in Montreal later learns, has caused him to lose his faith in God. The transformation of Uncle Melech from The _Illui_, the legendary Talmudic prodigy of Ratno, to Comrade Krul, the dialectical Bolshevik and “international authority
upon the decadence of European literature” (Klein, TSS 26), is interpreted by the narrator’s 
father as an act of “‘Hegel-baigal[’]” apostasy he can neither forgive nor allow his family to 
speak of (Klein, TSS 24). In the narrator’s family home, Uncle Melech is henceforth never 
mentioned; however, in the narrator’s imagination, despite the second commandment’s 
proscription of images, Uncle Melech is re-visioned: “I made myself a new image of the 
uncle who together with angels had stood invisible and auspicious over my Hebrew lessons. 
It was a strange metamorphosis, this from Talmudic scholar, syllogizing the past, into 
Moscow student, conspiring a world’s future” (Klein, TSS 26-26). The first chapter, 
“Genesis,” ends with Uncle Melech caught in Kamenets by the Nazi German invasion of 
Poland in 1939, trapped with European Jewry in the flames of the catastrophic anti-Genesis 
enacted during the Shoah, “enveloped by the great smoke that for the next six years kept 
billowing over the Jews of Europe—their cloud by day, their pillar of fire by night” (Klein, 
TSS 26).

In “Exodus,” the adult narrator recalls his publisher’s directing him in 1949 to gather 
and translate the Hebrew poetry of the newly-established state of Israel, his preparing for his 
trans-Atlantic pilgrimage, and his receiving, belatedly, a misdirected letter postmarked Bari, 
Italia, addressed to his (now deceased) parents from Uncle Melech. The contents of this 
letter, translated from the original Yiddish, form the balance of the chapter. Having 
abandoned “those two-faced masters of thesis and antithesis,” after the signing of the 
Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact had condemned Polish Jewry to death, Uncle Melech 
renounced Communism and became again an observant Jew: “My ideology had been a 
saying of grace before poison” (Klein, TSS 32). The lone survivor of the massacre of the
ghettoized Jews of Kamenets, Uncle Melech crawled from the bloody pit of their mass grave, and, like one reborn, survived the war. He explains that “we were all in that burning world, even you who were separated from it by the Atlantic—that futile bucket” (Klein, *TSS* 30). However, as the archetypal, messianic Survivor/Witness of the Shoah, Uncle Melech’s direct experience of the burning world differs significantly from that of North American Jewry, which, though equally impotent to quench the flames, was nevertheless safe. He carries an unbearable burden of guilt and feels a visceral obligation to the dead:

> At times I feel—so bewildered and burdened is my gratitude—that the numbered dead run through my veins their plasma, that I must live their unexpired six million circuits, and that my body must be the bed of each of their nightmares. Then, sensing their death wish bubbling the channels of my blood, then do I grow bitter at my false felicity—the spared one!—and would almost add to theirs my own wish for the centigrade furnace and the cyanide flood. Those, too, are the occasions when I believe myself a man suspect, when I quail before the eyes of my rescuers wondering *Why? Why did this one escape? What treaty did he strike with the murderers? Whose was the blood that was his ransom?* I try to answer these questions, but my very innocence stutters, and I end up exculpating myself into a kind of guilt. (Klein, *TSS* 30-31)

As he hopefully awaits his turn to sail to Israel from the Italian port where he composes the letter his nephew now reads, he interprets and reinterprets his survival, introspectively and Talmudically seeking to read and re-read the significance of his life’s dialectic of cyclical
text and inexhaustible marginal commentary: “In the meantime I pause over my hope, I revolve it—as ben Bag-Bag was wont to do to the texts of Holy Writ—about and about. I weigh it, savour it, seek in all its aspects to realize and absorb” (Klein, TSS 37).

However, instead of sailing to Haifa, Uncle Melech makes a series of detours through which he retracts and recapitulates the wanderings of Diaspora Jewry since its expulsion and exile by the Roman colonizers of Israel two millennia before. In “Leviticus,” while flying over the Atlantic, “read[ing] and reread[ing his] uncle’s letter,” the narrator decides to resume his messianic quest for his wandering relative (Klein, TSS 39). Following the traces, signs, and evidence of his Uncle’s presence in post-Shoah Europe and North Africa, the narrator becomes a metaphysical detective trying to solve and resolve a mystery the (re)solution to which, his unseen and unknown Uncle, always just eludes him.

In Bari, the narrator learns that his Uncle had left for Rome six weeks earlier with Nachum Krongold. In Rome, still seeking Uncle Melech’s present whereabouts, the narrator questions Monsignor Piersanti at the Vatican Library. However, the Monsignor, who, during his attempted conversion of Uncle Melech to Roman Catholicism, had persuaded him to look at the Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes, has no current information. Instead, he hands the narrator another avuncular letter (reproduced in “Gloss Gimel”), which is soon after purloined by the menacing Settano, a satanic figure (possibly an agent of the secret police), the accuser with the “dialectical smile” (Klein, TSS 46). The letter reappears under the narrator’s hotel room door later that night. Missing its first page, written in Hebrew, “but dominated by a polyphonal evocation of Aramaic,” this fragmentary letter is an exegesis of Michelangelo’s ceiling paintings of Christian history re-read from the
perspective of the Shoah (Klein, TSS 50). In the work, Uncle Melech perceives the foretelling of the catastrophic Jewish extermination he has just survived and a subsequent redemption:

Uncle Melech was not content with deducing from the frescoes their prophecies of doom and slaughter; triumphantly he deduced from them also the sure promise of survival. . . . In a single circular sentence, without beginning or end, he described God coming to the rescue of His chosen. It was a sentence in which I distinguished, between commas, in parentheses, and in outspoken statement, all the thirteen credos of Maimonides. . . . Uncle Melech was hidden, but not lost. (Klein, TSS 52)

At the American Joint Distribution Committee, the narrator learns from Krongold that Uncle Melech has sailed—not for Haifa, but Casablanca, where the J.D.C. has obtained for him a minor administrative post. Trying to explain this sudden change of heart and direction, Krongold diagnoses Uncle Melech’s disease as the “[‘]Diaspora infection[’]” (Klein, TSS 55):

[“]Davidson has not yet got the galuth [dispersion] out of his system. He hates it, he loves it. He is infatuated with suffering.[”] . . .

“He wanted to feel in his own person and upon his own neck the full weight of the yoke of exile. He wanted, he said, to be with his Sephardic brothers, the lost half of Jewry. So there it was again, that passion for belonging to the minority.[”] (Klein, TSS 54, 55)

Krongold perceives in Uncle Melech the quintessential Diaspora Jew, a new signification.
And the symbol for Uncle Melech's doubled and multiple roles in the novel is found in the photograph that the narrator receives in Casablanca after following his incognito relative to Morocco in "Numbers" and finding him gone: "All my life I had waited for this picture, and now at last I was to see him, Uncle Melech plain! . . . But his face—Uncle Melech had again eluded me. It was a double, a multiple exposure!" (Klein, TSS 61).

In the odorous, odious mellah—the Casablanca Jewish ghetto—whose "alleys are its cloaca," the narrator finds everywhere the excremental squalor of a marginalized minority living on the impoverished periphery of French colonialism and Arab antipathy (Klein, TSS 65). Uncle Melech, having caused "[']an affair of scandal['"] in the organization for whom he works by expressing his righteously indignant protest against the intolerable conditions of the mellah, has been shipped to Israel, via Marseilles (Klein, TSS 69). The only evidence of his Uncle's having been there is the manuscript of a one-act play of protest the narrator is given at one of the training schools in the mellah, a text reproduced as "Gloss Dalid."

In "Deuteronomy," the narrator flies to Israel: "It was as if I was part of an ascension, a going forward in which I was drawn on and on by the multiple-imaged appearing and disappearing figure of Uncle Melech" (Klein, TSS 70-71). And there the narrator's doubled quest continues as he meanders and crisscrosses the land:

... how I longed for the gift of ubiquity! Only thus, I began to think, would I be able to accomplish my twofold mission: the discovery, among Israel's speeches, proclamations, fervours, grumblings, and hopes, of the country's typical poetic statement, and the recognition—the word was acquiring for me more and more of its Greek connotation—the recognition of Uncle Melech....
He was somewhere in Israel, but where they could not tell. I soon realized that I had imposed on myself an almost impossible task. Find Uncle Melech!

(Klein, *TSS* 74)

However, “to look for Uncle Melech was to suspect him everywhere and to find him nowhere” (Klein, *TSS* 75). Eventually, the narrator begins to feel that his role as pursuer has been reversed and that he is now being pursued by his phantom Uncle. He is likewise unsuccessful in finding the characteristic poetic voice of the new Israel: the contemporary poetry—“Israel’s retort to Europe, couched in Europe’s language”—he believes Uncle Melech would read only once, suggesting that authentic texts require re-reading(s) (Klein, *TSS* 80).

In the city of Safed, centre of kabbalistic study, the narrator visits the simple Synagogue of Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534-1572), the Ari (Lion), the great teacher of the mysteries of the mystical *Sefer-ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Lights*, itself a symbolic commentary on all creation). There an Elijah-like Rabbi enumerates the signs indicating that these are Messianic times and invites the narrator to stay for the Sabbath and to meet the “[‘]Safed sage[’]” who will be shortly returning (Klein, *TSS* 89). The narrator intuits that this sage is his long-sought Uncle. However, in a reiteration of the Russian pogrom at the novel’s outset, Uncle Melech is murdered by Arab pogromists and his body, doused with gasoline, is burnt so badly that his “features were unrecognizable”:

Thus was my Sabbath turned to mourning. Across the continents I had looked and searched for my kinsman, and now that I had found him—I would not ever look upon his face. Forever would I have to bear in my mind my own
conjured image of Uncle Melech. (Klein, TSS 91)

All Israel attends the funeral: “they spoke of Uncle Melech and of how he had become a kind of mirror, an aspaklaria, of the events of our time[,] . . . of how he had through the sheer force of his existence again in our life naturalized the miracle” (Klein, TSS 92). This fifth and final chapter (followed by the five glosses) ends with the image of another conflagration. However, this symbolic fire has now become regenerative, transmuted from its signification as destruction—the Shoah, Uncle Melech’s incineration—elsewhere in the novel: “I turned for the last time from the city of Safed, holy city on whose hills once were kindled, as now again, the beacons announcing new moons, festivals, and set times” (Klein, TSS 93). The monthly new moons, annual festivals, and set times of Jewish life and religious practice, heralded by the ancient lunar revolutions, are once again marked by fire in a reborn incarnation of Israel.

The narrator’s quest for Uncle Melech becomes, ultimately, a search for Self. As the relation between the seeker and the sought becomes reversed, it is clear that the nameless and the named, the protagonist and the deuteragonist, are equivalent—doubles, doppelgängers, benign dybbuks. The quest for Jewish identity in a post-Shoah world is inextricably intertwined with language, the narrator’s second quest. However, the language of identity the narrator seeks is not to be found in the Hebrew of the poets and littérature. Rather, it is found

[i]n the streets, in the shops, everywhere about me. I had looked, but had not seen. It was all there all the time—the fashioning folk, anonymous and unobserved, creating word by word, phrase by phrase, the total work that when
completed would stand as epic revealed!

They were not members of literary societies, the men who were giving new life to the antique speech, but merchants, tradesman, day labourers. In their daily activity, and without pose or flourish, they showed it to be alive again, the shaping Hebrew imagination. (Klein, *TSS* 84)

In the demotic speech of the common citizens, the narrator hears both the “discovered poetry” he has sought and “its one obsessive theme”: “the miraculous” (Klein, *TSS* 85). Indeed, the “key image” the narrator finds, the “fixed epithet” with which to “designate Israel’s poetry, the poetry of recaptured time,” is “the miracle!” (Klein, *TSS* 87), where Israel and Diaspora, unity and diversity, the one and the many, synchrony and diachrony, illusion and reality, *Chetiv* and *Keri*, centre and margin (almost) meet. Hebrew, miraculously reborn as a national language, unites the polyglot, multicultural Jews who have come from the four corners of the Diaspora to the newly-(re)founded state of Israel.

The trope of the second, or doubled, scroll is both a structuring metaphor in the novel and a metaphor for structure. Onto the first Hebrew scroll, the holy *Sefer Torah* (The Pentateuch = Five Books), is superimposed an English second scroll, the secular sacred text of the Diaspora and a commentary on the originary:

In a letter to Herbert Weinstock, his editor at Knopf (14 August 1951), Klein refers to *The Second Scroll* as ‘above all, a commentary,’ specifically, as its title indicates, a commentary on the first scroll, the Pentateuch. The work as a whole is flanked by commentaries: the two epigraphs at the beginning, and the epilogue, consisting of the thirtieth Psalm, at the end. And there are five
separate commentaries, in the form of glosses, corresponding to the five chapters. Less immediately obvious examples of commentary, but at least as important, are to be found in the numerous self-contained texts scattered throughout the novel—letters; newspaper articles; literary criticism; essays on philosophical, aesthetic, or historical themes; biblical exegeses, etc.—which comment in one way or another on the action of the novel. *The Second Scroll*, then, is not only a scroll which is unrolled as narrative, but also a ‘palimpsest’ (letter to Herbert Weinstock [14 August 1951]) which is overlaid with layer after layer of commentary. (Pollack 241)

Therefore, within the formal structure of the novel, the division between text and commentary—and between first and second scrolls—is blurred, indeterminate, palimpsestically doubly—or multiply—exposed. *The Second Scroll*, like its progenitor, is plural, paradoxical—revealing through its multiple re-readings a mosaic of immediate and deferred meanings.

The cyclical nature of the scroll—which is rolled and rerolled in a specific annual cycle of beginnings and endings and of readings and re-readings in the synagogue liturgy—and the dialectical nature of text and commentary foreground Klein’s juxtaposing of “two fundamental theories of history” in the novel:

the cyclic, which he [Klein] may have derived from Vico, and the progressively linear, inherited from the dialectics of Hegel and Marx on the one hand, and talmudic *pilpul* on the other. To the rationalism and resolution of dialectics, he opposes his own negative dialectics; to cyclic completion he
opposes more “open” and mystical circles; and both remain irreconcilable in Klein’s aesthetics of fluctuation. (Greenstein 23)

Perhaps in the very irreconcilability of the doubled theories of history lies Klein’s aesthetics of the miraculous, which, for the quester in The Second Scroll, forms the historical and literary basis for the very existence and linguistic expression of the fledgling state of Israel.

Arguing for The Second Scroll’s being “an origin, a new covenant, for Jewish-Canadian literature,” Michael Greenstein comments: “Klein’s palimpsest results in blurred and double vision, returning to a religious past even as it progresses toward a secular future—a pattern followed by later Jewish-Canadian writers” (34). However, between the “religious past” and the “secular future” is the present miracle, reiterated—here and now, and not a past event memorialized and textualized in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible). The final section of the novel, “Gloss Hai,” ends with Psalm 30, an exultant, ecstatic poem of praise and thanksgiving to the Master of the Universe, who, as both Creator and Preserver of life, is the agent of, and throughout, all history—whether theoretical or actual. Psalm 30 begins the Shabbat Shacharit service (morning prayers) and is part of the liturgy for the Feast of Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, which celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews, under the leadership of Judas Hasmon, the Maccabee, and his four brothers, defeated and expelled the Seleucid Greeks in 164 BCE. Klein’s choice of Psalm 30 is thus very appropriate to the rededication of Israel, the Third Temple; however, in a novel which in its self-reflexivity, fragmentation, and indeterminacy is demonstrably postmodern—but free of the emotionlessness and vacuousness which contemporary postmodern texts sometimes display—to invoke such closure is to perhaps falsify Klein’s
skeptical/mystical double vision. Ultimately, perhaps, like the editor of the Talmud who appended his own acronymic commentary—Taiku—to irreconcilable arguments and questions, the novel awaits a resolution which can only be effected by Elijah, the Prophet: Tishbi yetarat iz kushioth v’abayoth; the Tishbite would resolve all problems and difficulties (Klein, TSS 84). Thus Elijah’s miraculous reincarnation and return will herald both the resolution of the irreconcilable and the irresolvable and the arrival of the Messiah, King David’s son, Melech Davidson.

Adele Wiseman

In counterpoint to The Second Scroll’s nameless narrator’s disjointed quest for a mythical, mystical, messianic double on the eastern shores of the Atlantic—that bucket which proved futile to extinguish Nazi Germany’s genocidal auto-da-fé of European Jewry—Winnipeg-born Adele Wiseman traces in her 1956 Governor General’s Award-winning novel The Sacrifice (hereafter TS) a reverse trajectory of dislocation and discovery. In her re-reading of the first scroll’s first book—Bereshit (Genesis)—Wiseman (1928-1992) creates from the Akedah story (Abraham’s binding, and almost sacrificing, of his son Isaac) her own new Diasporic original: a palimpsest. In the novel, an immigrant family’s trans-Atlantic migration from Eastern Europe to Canada is superimposed over the Biblical Patriarch’s family’s exodus and transplantation from Ur to Canaan; originary Biblical names are repeated through those of the immigrants’ generations; a father’s faith is tested; a sacrificing of a beloved son is almost enacted; Mount Moriah segues into Mad Mountain—
all within a New World prairie city ghetto which reiterates and replaces an Old World Yiddish shtetl.

At the outset of the novel, a surnameless Jewish immigrant family arrives by rail at an unnamed prairie city strongly resembling Winnipeg. Although the family’s tickets indicate a destination two day’s travel further west, Abraham, the father, decides suddenly that after fifteen months and eleven days they have run long enough from their Eastern European home:

Enough! With a sudden rush of indignation, as though he had been jerked awake, it came to Abraham that they had fled far enough. The thought took hold in his mind like a command. It came alive in his head and swept through him angrily, in a wave of energy, a rebellious movement of the blood. It was as simple as this. Enough. He must act now. (Wiseman, TS 3)

Abraham’s internally enunciated Judaic interjection—“Enough!”—is an exclamatory cry against the millennia of Jewish suffering, wandering, and victimization in the Diaspora (Greenstein 105). And his awakening to the decision to act is accompanied by an angry and energetic resolve. However, his multilingual attempts—in Ukrainian, Yiddish, Polish, and German—to determine his location from the conductor prove futile. Even in this New World, Can(aan)ada, he is still misunderstood and, through his linguistic miscommunication, isolated.

To the trope of missed communication is added that of misperception. In answer to the question Abraham poses to his wife, Sarah, and his son, Isaac—“‘Who awaits us?’”—the omniscient narrator comments: “It did not really matter whether they stopped here
blindly, or went blindly on to the other city for which they had bought the tickets”
(Wiseman, TS 4-5). Blindness, isolation, non-communication, anger, rebellious action:
Within the first few pages, the nuances of the novel’s tragic trajectory are indicated. Both
Abraham’s initial excitement “at making a positive gesture in the ordering of his fate” and
his deciding that the family “[‘]must stop running from death and from every other insult[’]”
by disembarking at this station prove to be ironic (Wiseman, TS 5).

Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac survived the pogrom in which Isaac’s two elder brothers,
Moses—the astounding cantor—and Jacob—the brilliant and promising scholar—were
slaughtered. The surviving family members surface on the fourth morning from their
confinement in a dark earthen cellar in which a neighbouring peasant has hidden them.
Their emergence is likened to an ascension from darkness to light, a resurrection from
“[‘]tomb[’]” to life (Wiseman, TS 57). Similarly, the family’s exodus from Eastern Europe
to Western Canada is imagined by Abraham as an opportunity for a new life, new roots for
“the often uprooted” (Wiseman, TS 6). However, the tragedy of the Old World is reprised in
the New. Abraham has a preternatural expectation that “something extraordinary was going
to happen in [his] lifetime,” and this intuition is linked to his self-interpreted relation to his
eponymous ancestor in Bereshit (Genesis): “I was born with this feeling, as though it had
been promised to me in another place, another lifetime” (Wiseman, TS 53).

The analogy between the immigrant butcher and the Abrahamic forefather of the
Jews, however, is, in Wiseman’s re-reading, tragically ironic. Devastated by the horrific
deads of his oldest sons in Eastern Europe, Abraham now focusses his energy on, and
projects his expectations onto, his third son, Isaac, and the young man’s putative New World
potential—"The boy was young, the boy was blessed, the boy would grow"; "Isaac will yet do something fine. He was not spared for nothing" (Wiseman, TS 6, 11). To Chaim Knopp—the shoichet (ritual slaughterer)\(^{19}\) and mohel (ritual circumciser)—whom he meets at work at Polsky's butcher shop and who becomes his closest friend, Abraham describes Isaac as "'[m]y life'" (Wiseman, TS 60). In the novel's unfolding, however, the fine action Isaac does perform results not in his being saved or spared, but in his sacrifice.

Isaac grows, attends school, and finds work during the Great Depression, eventually marrying Ruth, with whom he fathers a son, Moishe Jacob. At the centre of the novel, Abraham retells the biblical story of the Akedah to his grandson and son. In response to his son's description of the Patriarch's life as a "[']circle of . . . days,['"] Abraham stresses the circular relation binding the three participants in the original scroll—Abraham, Isaac, and the Almighty:

"Can you imagine what he felt, with his hand raised to strike? What they all felt? In that moment lay the future of our people, and even more than that. In that moment lay the secrets of life and death, in that closed circle with just the three of them, with Abraham offering the whole of the past and the future, and Isaac lying very still, so as not to spoil the sacrifice, and the glint of the knife and the glare of the sun and the terror of the moment burning into his eyes. . . . And God himself is bound at that moment, for it is the point of mutual surrender, the one thing He cannot resist, a faith so absolute. You are right when you say that it is like a circle—the completed circle, when the maker of the sacrifice and the sacrifice himself and the Demander who is the Receiver of
the sacrifice are poised together, and life flows into eternity, and for a moment all three are as one.

“That was the moment that even God could not resist, and so He gave us a future.” (Wiseman, TS 177-78)

For the immigrant family, however, the circular reiteration of their history results in a severely curtailed future.

A conflagration—“[a] woman began to scream hysterically that it was a pogrom”—engulfs the white synagogue, through whose flames bursts an ignited Isaac clutching the first scroll, the Sefer Torah (Wiseman, TS 195). Unfortunately, the severe injuries Isaac sustains exacerbate a heart condition from which he suffers—the result of the typhus which almost killed him in Poland during the family’s exodus—and, after being bedridden for some months, he dies. His father’s grief is also circular, a grim déjà-vu reminiscent of the previous deaths of his two other sons: “This was something that he had lived through before; the red and purple clouds, the dark figures waiting for him, had waited for a long time. It was as though he were walking into a picture that had hung on his own wall all of his life, waiting for him” (Wiseman, TS 220-21). However, the picture remains incomplete.

Abraham’s daughter-in-law Ruth, Isaac’s widow, castigates her father-in-law for his misperception of his son, telling him that Isaac was “[‘]a figment of your imagination” (Wiseman, TS 290). She justifiably accuses Abraham of being complicit in Isaac’s self-sacrificial desire to live up to his father’s unattainable and selfish expectations: “Why did he kill himself working at ten different jobs at once, if not to prove that he was something you thought he was? With a heart like his he had to run around from morning till night?
You wanted one son should make up for three. What did you care that God only gave him heart enough for one’’” (Wiseman, *TS* 290). In his despairing recognition of his culpability in Isaac’s death, Abraham finds himself at the home of Laiah, the community whore, whom he slaughters in a ritualistic, sacrificial manner, thus exposing a duality at the heart of his ambiguous nature: “Did he come at last to accept the shadow, to embrace the emptiness, to acknowledge his oneness with the fruit without seed, with death, his other self?” (Wiseman, *TS* 300). To the guilt he feels as the symbolic murderer of his sons, Abraham now adds that of being the actual murderer of Laiah. When asked if he understands that he has taken a human life, Abraham responds with the recognition that Laiah represents the darker aspect of his divided nature, his *doppelgänger*:

“That I have taken life”—Abraham swayed—“that I have killed my sons, that I have made myself equal with my enemies, that it was in me, womb of death, festering, in no one else. Who was I? Who was I to demand, to threaten, when it was there, in my arms, breathing, alive. But no. It was in me. I was not content to be, as He willed it. I wanted more. I had to be creator and destroyer. Why did I weep, then, when I saw them [Moses and Jacob] hanging, swaying at the will of the wind? Why did I tear my hair when he [Isaac] lay there? When in me, all the time—?” (Wiseman, *TS* 326)

Found insane by the legal authorities, Abraham proves to be an antithetical imitation of his biblical namesake, foregoing the covenantal theophany of Mount Moriah for incarceration in the asylum on Mad Mountain.

However, the circle of life remains ruptured. In the final chapter of the novel,
Chapter 17 (one short of the number eighteen, the alphabetical equivalent of which in
Hebrew spells Chai, the word “Life”), Moishe Jacob, the violin prodigy, visits his
grandfather at the asylum on Yom Kippur. Though Abraham confesses that he has “[‘]built
a crooked house[’]” for his grandson, there is a poignant and moving catharsis as the latter
allows himself to feel the deep bond of love which unites him with his estranged
grandparent (Wiseman, TS 343). As they touch hands across the divided generations, there
is a sense of continuity of identity and trust:

And for a moment so conscious was he of his grandfather’s hand on his own,
of its penetrating warmth, of its very texture, that he felt not as though it
merely lay superimposed on his own but that it was becoming one with his
hand, nerve of his nerve, sinew of his sinew; that the distinct outlines had
disappeared. It was with the strangest feeling of awakening that he saw their
hands fused together—one hand, the hand of a murderer, hero, artist, the hand
of a man. He could not for the life of him pull his hand away, nor did he want
to. It was as though he stood suddenly within the threshold of a different kind
of understanding, no longer crouching behind locked doors, but standing
upright, with his grandfather leading him, as he always had. (Wiseman, TS
345)

Moishe’s reconciliation with his grandfather both completes and repeats a genealogical
circle reaching back to Abrahamic origins and forward to messianic redemption, all linked
l’*dor v’dor— from generation to generation—in a continuous Jewish text and commentary
constantly re-read and reinterpreted throughout the generations.20
Mordecai Richler

Mordecai Richler is one of the most prolific, popular, and acclaimed fiction writers in Canada, having written—in a career spanning over forty years—nine novels, one volume of short fiction, six books of essays, an historical analysis of the systemic antisemitism underlying Quebec nationalism, an autobiographical/historical/political reminiscence/account/memoir of his life and his 1992 trip to Israel, a travel book about Spain, and two children’s books, and having edited two anthologies. In addition, he is one of only a handful of Canadian writers who enjoy an international reputation. Born at the beginning of the Great Depression into an Orthodox family living in Montreal’s Jewish ghetto (his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, the “Skaryszewer Illuy,” was a celebrated Chassidic scholar and writer), Richler was educated at Baron Byng High School, an institution then populated predominantly by Jewish students, and spent a year at Sir George Williams College (which later became a constituent part of Concordia University) before dropping out and travelling to Europe in 1951. Settling in London, England, in 1954 (the same year the Jewish South African expatriate writer Dan Jacobson arrived in that metropolis), Richler began his professional writing career. In 1972, he, his wife (Florence) and their five children moved back to Montreal. As a journalist, screenwriter, editor, novelist, satirist, and acerbic political observer and commentator, Richler has established himself as Canada’s resident (Ch)acidic controversialist, cantankerous iconoclast, and literary icon.

Like Dan Jacobson, Mordecai Richler has created works of fiction which depict Diaspora Jewry’s alienation in the post-Shoah world. Jacobson’s Lyndhurst and Richler’s
Montreal Jewish ghetto—the Main—establish a place, a presence, and a perspective from which each writer explores the relations between Jews and between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities of his respective native land. During the 1950s and 1960s, Richler published six novels. *The Acrobats* (1954), *A Choice of Enemies* (1957), *The Incomparable Atuk* (1963), and *Cocksure* (1968) are narratives in which the interaction between a disillusioned and dislocated non-Jewish Canadian protagonist and a Jewish character necessitates the redefining and restructuring of their relation to each other. The two other novels written during this period, *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959; hereafter *ADK*), present Jewish protagonists—Noah Adler and Duddy Kravitz—whose ambivalent relation to both the Montreal Jewish ghetto from which they emerge and the non-Jewish society in which they seek both acceptance and success results in a conflict between the expression of their innate Jewish identity and the suppression of their Jewishness in order to assimilate to the majority culture of the goyim.

For Duddy Kravitz, the anti-heroic *picaro* whose apprenticeship Richler chronicles in the novel which established his literary stature, the fastest way to escape the ghetto and make it in the Gentile world is to acquire land and, thus, the power and status he believes such acquisition will confer. Repeating the mantra taught him at age seven by his immigrant grandfather, Simcha Kravitz—"A man without land is nobody. Remember that, Duddel'"—until it becomes a cliché, Duddy, the young adult, does remember the words (Richler, *ADK* 48). However, he forgets the context in which this precept is spoken—that of Simcha’s profound sense of personal disappointment and failure as a father—and thus fails to catch the figurative nuances the words carry, understanding their literal import only. In
his blind quest for the familial recognition and approval he craves, and that he believes the ownership of land will secure, Duddy alienates his friends, his family, and, most poignantly, his Zaide—the single family member who pays him any attention and, consequently, whose approbation means so very much.

Duddy finds the land he wants when, while working during the summer season as a waiter at Rubin’s Hotel Lac des Sables in Ste. Agathe des Monts, he is shown Lac St. Pierre by Yvette Durelle, a local employed at Rubin’s resort as a chambermaid. Wanting “to be a somebody” and “[n]ot a loser,” Duddy seeks to emulate the putative success of another St. Urbain Street Jewish boy who has escaped the ghetto—Jerry Dingleman, the Boy Wonder, whose polio-crippled legs are emblematic of his deformed and criminal consciousness (Richler, *ADK* 62). However, instead of lending Duddy the money he needs to allow Yvette to start buying the farms surrounding Lac St. Pierre, Dingleman takes Duddy to New York and uses him to smuggle heroin back into Canada. In turn, Duddy uses Yvette and Virgil Roseboro—an easygoing American Duddy meets while in New York who suffers an epileptic seizure while driving a truck for him and becomes a paraplegic as a result of the subsequent accident—to outsmart Dingleman (who is also interested in the property) and to secure the lake and the land around it for himself. Duddy betrays, and finally destroys, his friendship with his two employees when he obtains the money he needs for the final piece of land by forging Virgil’s signature on a cheque. As he chases Dingleman off his newly-acquired property, Duddy symbolically displaces and replaces the mythical Boy Wonder in the pantheon of the ghetto’s *wunderkinder*:

... Duddy cupped his hands and hollered. ‘On my land,’ he shouted, ‘no
trespassers and no cripples. Except on Schnorrer’s Day.’ . . . [‘]He came all this way to beg me for an in. FASTER, YOU BASTARD. RUN DINGLEMAN. LET’S SEE YOU RUN ON THOSE STICKS.’ (Richler, ADK 311)

However, Duddy’s victory is a hollow one.

In revenge, and to hurt Duddy as much as possible, Yvette has told Simcha Kravitz how his grandson obtained the land. Simcha refuses to accept the offer to choose one of the farms on Lac St. Pierre, accusing Duddy of having obtained the land by swindling others. Duddy lashes out at his Zaide, who reacts with silence and, later, alone in the car, with tears. Rejected by his grandfather, Duddy protests that the land makes him now a “[‘]somebody. A real somebody’” (Richler, ADK 313). The confirmation of his belief that he has achieved a new status occurs at the end of the novel at Lou’s Bagel and Lox Bar when the waiter ascertains that Duddy is indeed “[‘]the Mr Kravitz who just bought all that land around Lac St Pierre’” and marks the bill for him:

And suddenly Duddy did smile. He laughed. He grabbed Max, hugged him, and spun him around. ‘You see,’ he said, his voice filled with marvel. ‘You see.’ (Richler, ADK [316]).

However, Duddy’s double emphasis on ocular perception is unselfconsciously ironic. For his now mythical progress is both haunted and hindered by moral and emotional blindness.

Throughout the novel, Duddy constantly runs from his distorted self-image as a nobody towards a pre-defined version of himself as a somebody. As this ghetto Jew renames himself Dudley Kane and remakes himself as an important landowner, however, his
acquisition proves to be an impotent antidote for his self-hatred and self-doubt. Although Irwin Shubert, an assimilated Jewish university student employed at Rubin’s for the summer, tells his colleagues that “‘[i]t’s the cretinous little money-grubbers like Kravitz that cause anti-semitism’” (Richler, ADK 68), and although Uncle Benjy Kravitz, dying of cancer, informs Duddy, his disregarded nephew, that he is ignored “‘[b]ecause you’re a pusherke. A little Jew-boy on the make. Guys like you make me sick and ashamed’” (Richler, ADK 242), Duddy’s ability to become the locus of others’ hatred through his callous self-interest and ethical ambivalence is counterpointed by his fierce familial loyalty and frequent expression of genuine compassion. The novel presents Duddy as a complex character, easily judged, but less easily understood.

Psychologically, Duddy’s lack of self-perception and self-worth has been conditioned by the Kravitz family members’ inability (or disinclination) to truly see and relate to him. Only Simcha, the Zaide, perceives the inner mensch behind the surface pusherke. But it is also Simcha, the patriarchal immigrant, who, while establishing his family, has determined its hierarchical emotional geography. Transplanted from an Old World (Lodz) to a New World (Montreal) Diaspora, Simcha’s family thrives as poorly as his ghetto garden: “... outside in the gritty hostile soil of his back yard, Simcha planted corn and radishes, peas, carrots, and cucumbers. Each year the corn came up scrawnier and the cucumbers yellowed before they ripened, but Simcha persisted with his planting” (Richler, ADK 45). Simcha’s name means “happiness,” “joy” in Hebrew. By the third Kravitz generation, however, scrawny Duddy, the less favoured younger son of Simcha’s less favoured younger son (Max), grows up “dirty and sad, spiky also, like the grass beside the railroad tracks”
Uncle Benjy, a successful clothing manufacturer, though assimilated, is revered by his Orthodox father, Simcha; Max, a taxi driver (the cab was Benjy’s wedding gift to Max) and part-time pimp, is dismissed by both his father and older brother as a fool. Replicating with his own two sons the emotional inequality he experienced within his generation of the Kravitz family, Max, in turn, favours his firstborn, Lennie, a brilliant medical student at McGill, and scorns Duddy. Uncle Benjy and Aunt Ida have a loveless, childless marriage. While Ida, unable to conceive children, has various affairs and vacations alone, Uncle Benjy feigns impotence, becomes an alcoholic and, by supporting his nephew Lennie at medical school, treating him as the son he never had—“[‘]You’re going to have to be my kaddish[‘]” (Richler, ADK 165)—further emasculates his brother Max: “I never tried to take him away from you, Max. I was only trying to help out” (Richler, ADK 161). Uncle Benjy disparages Duddy, until, dying of stomach cancer, he begins too late to perceive his nephew’s better qualities. Max similarly ridicules, taunts, and deprecates his younger son, anticipating Duddy’s intergenerational emulation of his own failure: “You wait. He’ll burn his fingers,” Max predicts to Benjy (Richler, ADK 160; cf. 251, 294).

Yet, it is always the nail-biting, chain-smoking, money-chasing Duddy who acts decisively, loyally, and lovingly to resolve the crises which threaten the family. When Lennie Kravitz quits medical school and disappears, a possible suicide, it is Duddy who interrogates Lennie’s McGill classmates and tracks his brother down at a Church Street slum hotel in Toronto. When Lennie confesses to Duddy in Toronto, “O.K. I’m an anti-semite. I prefer the company of Gentiles” (Richler, ADK 184), and that he has sought to assimilate himself within the non-Jewish Westmount crowd at McGill, and that he has consequently
performed an abortion on Sandra Calder for Andy Simpson (the father) at the behest of
Irwin Shubert (who manipulates Lennie’s insecurity and desire to belong)—“But I know
you’re not a frightened little hebe,’ Irwin had said. ‘I know you’ll come through’” (Richler,
ADK 187)—it is Duddy who intuits immediately that Lennie has been used by his supposed
friends as “[‘]the Number I [sic] Sucker of All-Time’” and devises a plan to save his
brother’s career (Richler, ADK 186). Duddy confronts Hugh Thomas Calder (Sandra’s
wealthy Westmount father) with the truth and ensures his co-operation, thus preventing
Lennie’s being expelled from medical school. (Later, engaged to Riva Kaplan, Lennie
admits his Gentile friends were all antisemites, “[‘]out to exploit my racial inferiority
complex[’]” [Richler, ADK 292]. He and Riva plan to go to Israel.) When Uncle Benjy is
dying, it is Duddy who finds Aunt Ida (and her gigolo) in a New York City hotel and
persuades her to return to her husband in Montreal. Max’s hyperbolic and disingenuous
platitude—“[‘]We’re one family and we should stick together, just like the Rockefellers. In
our own small way, I mean’”—is Duddy’s code of action (Richler, ADK 295). And because
Duddy does care, Simcha’s final censure is all the more devastating.

At the centre of Duddy’s life is a physical absence—his dead mother, Minnie—and
an emotional absence—his father, Max. Feeling alienated by both parents contributes to
Duddy’s self-conception as a nobody. To protect himself from the pain of ongoing parental
rejection, Duddy can neither confide in his father nor recollect his mother: “Once more
Duddy was tempted to ask his father if Minnie had liked him, but he couldn’t bring himself
to risk it” (Richler, ADK 129). As Duddy looks outside himself and beyond the Montreal
Jewish ghetto—which both nurtures and limits him—for a tangible reflection of his own
self-worth, however, he rejects his Zaide’s Jewish Orthodoxy and scrupulous honesty. His quest for land thus becomes a search for an assimilated, post-ghetto, “Dudley Kane” identity. With Jerry Dingleman, the Boy Wonder, as his role model and the benchmark against which he measures and compares the dubious success of his impetuous apprenticeship, however, Duddy can succeed, ironically, only within the narrow perspective of the familial ghetto he, paradoxically, both asserts and repudiates. Within the actual power structure of Anglo-Protestant Montreal, represented in the novel by Hugh Thomas Calder, the Jewish ghetto’s mythical wunderkind is unknown, and Duddy fleetingly recognizes that fact: “What, Duddy thought, if the truly powerful people in the city knew nothing about the Wonder? Could it be that Dingleman was only famous on St Urbain Street?” (Richler, ADK 198). Ultimately, Duddy remains marginal to both The Main and Westmount.

With The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Richler enacts his own quest for both a literary form and language suitable for constructing his Montreal version of Jewish Canadian experience. Combining elements of both the picaresque novel and the bildungsroman, Richler infuses the book’s language with the rhythms, words, structures, and cadences of Yiddish. The ghetto denizens speak in the crude, profane, and often scurrilous vernacular suitable to their everyday reality. The richness and inventiveness of Yiddish curses, for example, are translated into an English idiom both efficacious and humorous: “Boil in acid, Duddy thought. I hope all your teeth fall out. All except one. And the one that’s left should give you a toothache for life” (Richler, ADK 289). Conversely, Duddy’s often repeated “Ver gerharget” (“Drop dead”) and many other words
and expressions are reproduced in transliterated Yiddish and left untranslated to emphasize the difference and distance between Jewish and Gentile experience in both Canada and the world. To achieve this authenticity, Richler shattered many of the sexual, linguistic, and religious taboos present in Canadian society and literature in 1959. As a result, Richler’s vital, but often gratuitously scabrous and satiric, portrayal of Jews in this novel (as well as in his others), combined with the author’s ambivalence towards his own and his characters’ Jewish identity—the imbalance between its assertion and its assimilation—has led to accusations that Richler himself exemplifies the self-hatred he transmutes into fiction and thus contributes to antisemitism.

In her study of Richler’s literary depiction of the impact of the Shoah on North American Jewish consciousness, Rachel Feldhay Brenner analyzes the ambivalent oscillation between the mutually exclusive choices of Jewish assertion and Mosaic assimilation:

Richler reveals the predicament of today’s Jewish individual: mistrust of liberal ideals inhibits integration into Gentile society, whereas fear of victimization prompts denial of bonds with ethnic heritage. Richler’s work reveals inability to resolve the conflict between the wish to assimilate and the desire to assert Jewish identity. The resolution is forever elusive; the spectre of the Holocaust seems to have irrevocably destroyed hope for trusting relations between the Jew and the Gentile. . . . The tension between assertion of the Jewish heritage and rejection of Jewish roots constitutes the spectrum of Richler’s exploration of Jewish survival in the post-Holocaust world.
Thematically, Richler’s writing demonstrates constant vacillations between the poles of identity and assimilation. His Jewish characters experience the emotional need to respond empathetically to the plight of their people. At the same time, the consciousness of the Holocaust causes tremendous anxiety and makes them seek potency and security in the ideological platform of liberal humanism. ([ix], 15)

In the Governor General’s Award-winning *St. Urbain’s Horseman* (1971; hereafter *SUH*), the second novel in a trilogy which begins with *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and ends with *Joshua Then and Now* (1980), Jake Hersh embodies this dichotomy. On the one hand, throughout the novel, Jake pursues the elusive cousin he idolizes and idealizes, Joey Hersh—St. Urbain Street’s mythical, ubiquitous avenging horseman—and thus asserts his identification with the Jewish people. On the other hand, Jake marries Nancy Croft, a Gentile, and thus assimilates his confused sense of his Jewish identity to a world in which he feels constantly anxious and alienated.

Like Duddy Kravitz’s imaginary, heroic older brother Bradley, Joey Hersh is an imaginative construct—an alter ego—whose fragmented existence, frequent dislocations, and legendary exploits Jake Hersh faithfully records in a perpetually incomplete journal kept expressly for that purpose. A successful screenwriter now living in London, England, the Montreal-born and raised Jake Hersh doubts his own talent and, by following, collecting, and inscribing the traces and evidence of his cousin’s global wanderings and participation in certain key historical events—the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War, and the search for the infamous
Auschwitz Angel of Death, Doktor Mengele, in the Paraguayan jungle—creates a strong and heroic protagonist, the antithesis of his self-perceived weakness and cowardice. In his inadequacy, Jake attracts and becomes friendly with Harry Stein, a psychopathically perverted personality, and, subsequently, is wrongly accused and tried for raping Ingrid Loebner, aiding and abetting her being sodomized by Stein, and possession of cannabis. Their joint trial forms the present action of the novel’s multiple layering of time and experience.

Adopting the role within the troubled Hersh family of “Cousin Joey’s advocate” (Richler, SUH 174), Jake becomes “oddly convinced that somehow Joey ha[s] answers for him” (Richler, SUH 230). In his quest for the Horseman, his surrogate conscience, Jake, the artist, is ultimately searching for an assertive Jewish persona to counteract the assimilated identity he has, by fleeing the familial ghetto and the pretentious cultural standards of colonial Canada, constructed for himself in England:

... he grasped that for years now he had begun to insinuate tales of St. Urbain’s Horseman between his bedtime stories [to his children] about Rabbi Akiba, the Thirty-six Just Men, Maimonides, the Golem, Trumpeldor, and Leon Trotsky. His Jewish allsorts bag. Pouring himself a drink, he realized that ever since he had turned down the film in Israel because, to his mind, it was an offense against everything his cousin stood for, the Horseman had become his moral editor. Considering a script, deliberating for days as was his habit, consulting Nancy, arguing with himself, vacillating, reading and rereading, he knew that in the final analysis he said yes or no based on what he
imagined to be the Horseman’s exacting standard. Going into production, whether in television or film, he tried above all to please the Horseman. For somewhere he was watching, judging.

Once Cousin Joey’s advocate, he was now his acolyte. (Richler, SUH 309)

When, at the end of the novel, Jake is informed that Joey has died in an airplane crash on July 20, 1967, in Paraguay, his reacts in two different ways. He weeps “because the Horseman, his conscience, his mentor, was no more” (Richler, SUH 460). At the same time, motivated by the suggestion that Joey died while smuggling cigarettes and not while hunting the Nazi Doktor, Jake interrogates both himself and his construction of his cousin: “What if the Horseman was a distorting mirror and we each took the self-justifying image we required of him?” (Richler, SUH 460). His undistorted question produces the realization that Jake could now become the Horseman. And in a new version of his recurrent nightmare, Jake does just that. Upon awaking, he alters in his journal the details of his cousin’s demise, noting that his equine doppelgänger—in his various incarnations as Joey Hersh, Jesse Hope, Joseph de la Hirsch, Yoseph ben Baruch, the Golem—is merely “presumed dead” (Richler, SUH 462).

Jake Hersh’s quest for the Horseman in Richler’s novel is very similar to that of the nameless narrator’s for Uncle Melech Davidson in Klein’s The Second Scroll and prefigures that of Moses Berger for the mythical Solomon Gursky in Richler’s latest novel, Solomon Gursky Was Here (1989; hereafter SGH). Solomon Gursky, presumed dead in an airplane crash, is painstakingly reconstructed by Moses, the alcoholic son of a very Klein-like Jewish Canadian poet, L. B. Berger, who remains unacclaimed by both critics and public and is

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eventually hired as a “speech writer and cultural adviser to the legendary liquor baron,” the Sam Bronfman-like Bernard Gursky, older brother of Solomon and Morrie (Richler, _SGH_ 20). Like a detective, Moses Berger, a Rhodes Scholar, collects and pieces together the dispersed evidence which becomes the biography of the elusive Solomon Gursky. As the Horseman becomes Jake Hersh’s obsession, so Solomon Gursky becomes Moses’s “quest and curse” (Richler, _SGH_ 21).

_Solomon Gursky Was Here_ also displays several of Richler’s ongoing thematic and stylistic obsessions. Time is fragmented; journals, letters, maps, documents, articles, manuscripts, and information are collected and collated; real characters, adopting various aliases, are transmuted into mythical Jewish heroes; trials are held; families malfunction; Judaism is both asserted and ignored; the assimilative transaction between the Jew and the _goyishe_ world is explored; the Spanish Civil War is idealized; the Montreal Jewish ghetto is reprised; Jewish Canadian history is revised. The tangled relations between fathers and sons—Max Kravitz and his sons, Duddy and Lennie; Issy Hersh and his son, Jake; Reuben Shapiro and his son, Joshua (the only father and son to reconcile in Richler’s fiction)—and between grandfathers and grandsons—Simcha Kravitz and his grandson, Duddy—are reiterated in several ways in _Solomon Gursky Was Here_. The Gursky patriarch, Ephraim, is an absence in the life of his son, Aaron, but acts as a mentor to his favourite grandson, Solomon. Bernard Gursky, Solomon’s older brother, is disliked by Ephraim and has a very testy relationship with both his two brothers and his son and business successor, Lionel. Morrie Gursky, the youngest of the three brothers, has a benign relationship with his son, Barney. Solomon Gursky, the brother behind the fortune the Gurskys make as rumrunners
during Prohibition and consolidate later as the respected McTavish distillers conglomerate, like his grandfather, is an absence in his family’s life; his son, Henry, becomes a Chassidic Jew, follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe of Crown Heights, New York, and lives in the Beaufort Sea settlement of Tulugaqtitut, ministering to the Netsilik-Jewish descendants (like his wife Nialie) of his grandfather, Ephraim. L. B. Berger’s relationship with his son, Moses, is competitive and destructive. In Richler’s fictional worlds, Jewish tradition and identity are re-read from a Diasporic Montreal perspective—from generation to generation—and found not to be regenerative, but degenerative and discontinuous.22


Several of Canada’s most prolific and well-known Jewish writers known primarily (but not exclusively) for their poetry have also published prose fiction. Montreal-born Leonard Cohen (1934- ), perhaps the most popular of these writers, established his international reputation as a folksinging troubadour and poet during the 1960s, the decade in which he published his two novels—The Favourite Game (1963; hereafter FG) and Beautiful Losers23 (1966). The former is a Künstlerroman in which Lawrence Breavman, a Jewish poet growing up in Montreal, through the third-person (auto)biography he constructs, translates himself, his friends, and his life into art and myth. Breavman adopts an excessively and obsessively self-conscious perspective from which to observe both himself and his many lovers, thus creating both an emotional and an artistic detachment from
himself, his childhood and adolescence, and his physical and social environment. Breavman perceives life—his own and others—always at a distance. This sense of estrangement is particularly apparent in the relation of Breavman to both Judaism and his family. His father, mostly bedridden or enclosed in an oxygen tent, tells Breavman lies, and dies while his son is still a child. Breavman's martyr-like, guilt-inducing mother goes insane and is committed to the Allan Memorial Institute. As the self-declared Jewish conscience of the Breavmans, Breavman exposes the hypocrisy of his pious uncles and disparages his religion and identity: “If I could only end my hate. If I could believe what they wrote and wrapped in silk and crowned with gold. I want to write the word” (Cohen, FG 222). Instead, scarred, Breavman inscribes the flesh in which he religiously indulges.

Breavman enacts a series of departures: from childhood, from Westmount, from his family, from college, from Judaism, from his unskilled job at a brass foundry, from Montreal, from Columbia University, from New York City, from his job at a Laurentian summer camp, from many lovers (Jewish and Gentile), and from his dialectical friend Krantz. The form of the novel reinforces the thematic patterns of dislocation, fragmentation, and incompleteness. Essentially plotless, the novel is an artist parable cum romance cum Shell game structured as a series of retrospectively reinterpreted and succinctly juxtaposed episodes, incorporating fragments of scrapbooks, diaries, home movies, letters, memories, paintings, music, and conversations and conveyed in a minimalist, lyrical style. However, in his pursuit and abandonment of Shell, of Beauty—“a repose between solitudes” —Breavman discovers neither truth nor a satisfactory secular identity, but his life’s loneliness and its transmutation into art—the bereaved artist’s favourite game (Cohen, FG 371).
Irving Layton (1912- ), né Yisroel Pinchas Lazarovitch, was born in Romania, but came to Montreal with his parents at the age of one. Over a fifty-year period, Layton has published prolifically and created a persona as a poet/iconoclast that has made him both popular and controversial. As Mervin Butovsky insightfully records of Layton: “His life-long act of writing has produced no single poem more impressive than his assertive, hectoring self, a mock-heroic figure who invented just the kind of person he had to become if he was to deliver himself from the obscurity and ineffectuality that had engulfed others around him” (166). In his short fiction, however, Layton’s poet persona is far less blatant. “A Death in the Family,” for example, is the story of the death of Asher Eisenfogh and its effect on his youngest son, Sammy. Although the story is told from a third person omniscient point of view, it centres on the sensations, experiences, and actions of Sammy as he encounters death for the first time in his young life. As Asher, fifty-four years old, lies dying in his bed, his immediate family members mouth platitudes and ignore Sammy. When Asher dies in the hospital, his body is brought home to be ritually prepared for burial according to Jewish law. Sammy’s sensitive, childlike impressions of what is happening in the house are juxtaposed with the adults’ preoccupations. Uncle Strul cruelly forces Sammy to look at his dead father in the open coffin. While playing by himself, Sammy is interrupted by his brother Hyman, who slaps him viciously on the face. Only at the end of the story does Sammy feel the sadness and enormity of his loss, and, fearful, he begins to cry. No-one makes any attempt to relate to him or his grief, making the palpable sense of loneliness and estrangement Sammy feels within his own family that much more painful and
poignant.

"By a Frozen River," by Ottawa-born Norman Levine (1923- ), portrays loneliness and estrangement from an adult perspective. In 1965, the narrator of the story has returned to Canada from England for a few months in order to write and to experience again a winter with snow. He travels by train to a remote, unnamed Northern Ontario town by a frozen river where he rents a room in the Adanac Hotel. His neighbours in the hotel include an unnamed Jewish woman married to Hubert Labelle, a French-Canadian photographer. Although he identifies himself as a Jew, the narrator has long been estranged from Jewish practice. However, his encounter with Mr. Bischofswerder, a furrier who has a supply of "‘Jewish food,’” inaugurates a period of seven Shabbats during which the narrator attends the small shul (synagogue) on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings to pray with Mr. Bischofswerder and then joins the furrier and his wife for a large Shabbat meal (Levine 104). The Bischofswerders are the last Jewish family in the town; the narrator is the first Jewish visitor to attend the deserted shul with Mr. Bischofswerder in three years. The encounter with this remote Jewish remnant brings back the memories and smells of the narrator’s Jewish childhood. As winter wanes, the narrator buys a sweepstake ticket imprinted with a time and a future date. The winner of the five-hundred dollar prize will be the person whose ticket records the time and date closest to the actual moment of the frozen river’s breaking up in the spring. However, satisfied that he has all the reminders of a Canadian winter that he needs, the narrator leaves before the frozen river moves. As he is transported away in a light plane, the narrator watches the small town get “lost in a wilderness of snow, trees, and frozen lakes” (Levine 110). Estranged from both a nostalgic
re-reading and reconstruction of his Canadian childhood and his Jewish identity, Levine’s first-person narrator (re)experiences the winter wilderness of exile and discontent wherever he disembarks in the Diaspora.

Elias Wolf Mandel (1922-1992), born in Estevan, Saskatchewan, had a distinguished career as a Governor General’s Award-winning poet, editor, anthologist, literary critic, and Professor of English and Humanities at York University, Toronto. In 1981, Mandel published *Life Sentence*, a collection of poems and journal entries made during his travels to India, Peru, and Ecuador. Purposely blurring the generic boundaries between poetry, prose, documentary, and autobiography, Mandel constructs through the self-reflective and self-reflexive processes of travelling and journal writing both countries and self. As Wandering Jew in the post-*Shoah* Diaspora, Mandel perceives the monstrous (especially in India) as the reflection or reiteration of the universal prototype for monstrosity—Auschwitz. The literary form in which the book is cast—a journal—accomplishes several things: it focusses the narrative on the author (and his language) as the mediator between fiction, place, and reality; it functions as both product and process of its creation; its necessary incompleteness resists closure or conclusion; its self-reflexive constructedness invites re-reading and recontextualization; and its fragmented nature resists unitary, finite interpretations of its meaning. Thus the literary form of the book itself becomes a trope for the type of fragmented articulation Mandel suggests may be the only possible authentic mode of expression in the post-*Shoah* universe—especially for the marginalized Jewish artist. Although *Life Sentence* is not strictly speaking a work of pure fiction, and although it may be marginal to Mandel’s own *oeuvre*, it is a germane Jewish Canadian text which, by
blurring margins and boundaries, subject and object, real experience and its transmutation into writing, poses provocative questions it does not (perhaps cannot) answer.

In contrast to Mandel's transcontinental and transhemispheric wanderings, “Goldberg’s Tallit,” by Montreal-born Seymour Mayne (1944-), a Professor of English at the University of Ottawa, is a retrospectively narrated story which takes place in a synagogue during Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), the holiest day of the Jewish lunar year. The time, setting, and the positive depiction of Jewish religious practice make this story unique in Jewish Canadian fiction. Stating from the outset, “You won’t believe this, I know you won’t,” the narrator tells the story of two tallits (prayer shawls) identical in every detail—his own and fellow congregant Sheldon Goldberg’s—which he believes have inadvertently been switched (Mayne 81). As he participates in the cycle of day’s services, the fasting narrator begins to be plagued by the doubt that he may be wearing Goldberg’s tallit and that Goldberg may be wearing his. The narrator fondly recalls purchasing his tallit in a tiny shop in Mea Shearim, a religious neighbourhood in Jerusalem, and, although he realizes that a “prayershawl’s a prayershawl,” he understands too that “a man’s prayershawl takes on the signature of his face, his soul” (Mayne 83). The narrator also knows that he will be wrapped in his tallit in preparation for burial when he dies. At the end of the final closing service, Neilah, the shofar (the ram’s horn) is blown, “declaring that judgement is being sealed on high for the year ahead”; however, “[i]nstead of an uplifted heart and cleansed conscience,” the narrator is “brimming over with frustrated curiosity and anger” (Mayne 84, 85). When, at the end of the story, the narrator surreptitiously retrieves Goldberg’s tallit from the wicker basket holding the congregation’s communal supply, he
realizes that the twin tallit does not belong to Goldberg and appropriates it. Now the holder of two identical tallits, the narrator equivocates about the ownership of the “extra” one, promising himself to return it the following Shabbat. Because they occur at the end of Yom Kippur—a day of intense introspection, soul-searching, and repentance—the narrator’s moral rationalization and justification for his dubious action are superbly ironic. The narrator’s mind’s ability to become obsessed with a petty distraction inevitably prevents the total concentration needed to properly connect with the spiritual. Thus the tallit, instead of serving its purpose as an objective aid in the process of prayer and spiritual connection, actually impedes this process by instead becoming the object of the preoccupied narrator’s attention and attachment.

Like Layton’s “A Death in the Family,” “A Place of Witches,” collected in *Summer at Lonely Beach and Other Stories* (1982), by Miriam Waddington (née Dworkin; 1917-), a Winnipeg-born poet, social worker, and retired Professor of English at York University in Toronto currently residing in Vancouver, is another story which focusses on a Jewish child’s experience of the world. During the summer before he begins kindergarten, five-year-old Danny becomes aware of his difference from the children of Lynstead, the Montreal neighbourhood in which he lives. When his friends ask him if he is English or Jewish, he reflects self-consciously on his own identity: “Well, you see, it’s like this. My Daddy is English, my Mommy is English, and I’m Jewish” (Waddington 45). The divergence he feels within his family is reflected in the divisiveness he experiences in the larger community. Rejected by the local school, Lynstead, because he is Jewish, Danny is instead forced to attend the more distant Camden School, the walk to which becomes a frightening
ordeal beset with the threatening possibility of confrontation with goblins and witches. The imagined ghosts have their corporeal manifestation in the non-Jewish children living on his street, who now ostracize and taunt Danny. When Karen, formerly one of his closest friends, taunts Danny with "You're a Jew, a Jew, a Jew, a Jew, yah, yah, yah!" he, facing her, steps backwards off the curb right into the path of a truck (Waddington 49). As his mother nurses Danny back to health and questions him about the accident, he withdraws further into himself, repressing the pain of his first searing experience with the hatred of antisemitism. Danny’s loss of innocence and security, his initiation into a world hostile to Jews, is accompanied by a profound loss of trust: "Each time she was met by a look of wonder, astonishment and secrecy, the depth of which terrified her. In her heart she knew that there was now something in Danny’s life which would remain closed to her forever" (Waddington 49). For Danny, being a Jew is literally life-threatening.

J. J. Steinfeld

J. J. Steinfeld is one of a number of fiction writers who, born in the aftermath of World War II, constitute a new generation in Jewish Canadian literature. Others include Robert Majzels, Abraham Boyarsky, and Anne Michaels. Like Australian Lily Brett, Steinfeld is a Second Generation writer (the progeny of Shoah survivors), whose acute awareness of—and identification with—the Shoah (and his parents’ horrific experiences during it) infuses his fiction with a malignant tension informed by a disconcertingly grim and tragic perspective. Born after the war in Munich, (West) Germany, Steinfeld and his
family immigrated to Canada, where he grew up and received his secondary education. After receiving a B.A. in History from Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, Ohio) and an M.A. in 1978 from Trent University (Peterborough, Ontario), Steinfeld settled in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1980 and began to write full time. Since 1983, he has published a novel and five collections of short stories, the latest of which, _Dancing at the Club Holocaust: Stories New and Selected_, was issued in 1993.

For the harrowed protagonists of J. J. Steinfeld’s Kafkaesque fiction, Jewish identity has been refracted through their parents’ experience and consciousness as survivors of the _Shoah_ and is thus both sanity- and life-threatening. Their compulsive and obsessive over-identification with the horror their parents suffered during the war leads them to dangerously unbalanced states of psychotic dissociation and psychic disequilibrium. For Daniel Nathanson, protagonist in the jarringly titled “Starring at Auschwitz” (1991; hereafter “SA”), memories of a past he never directly experienced begin to impinge on the present reality of his own life. A writer living in Toronto again after several fruitless attempts to attain success in New York City as a playwright, Daniel has secluded himself in his fourteenth-floor apartment; however, the past, in the form of Abe Gordon, one of his two closest boyhood friends, arrives unexpectedly at his door in 1988, four years after their last contact:

“Slugger” Nathanson, Harvey Weissberg, and Abe Gordon had been blood brothers and holy terrors of the first order, dealers in mischief and dreams, all three the children of Holocaust Survivors brought together by fate to the same uncrushed Toronto street, the parents finally safe, yet never unworried, forever
prisoners of memory. (Steinfeld, “SA” 129)

Unfortunately, Daniel—whose “memories were waiting for him at birth—inherited like eye colour or facial features”—has also become incarcerated in, and by, his parents’ Shoah memories (Steinfeld, “SA” 138).

Imagery of physical and psychological imprisonment pervades the story. When Abe buzzes Daniel’s apartment, Daniel imagines “Auschwitz as a high-rise with intercoms and garbage shutes [sic], savage little guards pressing the buttons, the inmates squeezed together a thousand to a room” (Steinfeld, “SA” 128). Even Toronto, the city to which he constantly returns, is portrayed as a voluntary jail: “Only Daniel kept moving back to Toronto, as though he were an insecure criminal returning to his cell, even when the door is left wide open” (Steinfeld, “SA” 129). Hemmed in by failure, refusing to allow Abe or anyone else to touch him, isolated, Daniel slowly loses himself.

Like Abe’s upending himself and walking on his hands upon greeting his friend at the elevator door, Daniel’s sense of reality has become inverted. Thus city and apartment have become prisoner Daniel’s concentration camp. The Nathanson parents’ past, symbolized by the number tattooed onto the arm of his mother (now deceased), is now Daniel’s present, living reality: Daniel “squeeze[es] his left forearm, where his mother’s concentration camp number still seared into him. He squeezed as if attempting to remove an engorged blue leech” (Steinfeld, “SA” 130). The child becomes his incarcerated parent when, looking in a mirror, Daniel sees himself “just as his father must have looked when he was a young man imprisoned in a concentration camp” (Steinfeld, “SA” 134-35). His hold on reality deteriorates inexorably, until “he no longer had to attempt to project himself into the
concentration camp through any exertion of imagination—"he was there" (Steinfeld, “SA” 136).

For fifteen years, Daniel has been intermittently writing his master work, an unfinished play titled *Arbeit Macht Frei*, the demonic Nazi German slogan inscribed above the main entrance gate to Auschwitz. Now thirty-six years old, Daniel has learned that he “[...] should write about what’s lodged in the darkest part of [his] soul[...]” (Steinfeld, “SA” 132). Although he wishes “to destroy the manuscript,” Daniel realizes that “it would be easier for him to rip out his own heart” (Steinfeld, “SA” 134). Believing himself to be now living in a concentration camp, Daniel is persuaded by Abe, a professional circus clown, to put on a baggy costume. Stripping himself of his former identity, Daniel now dresses as a clown, symbolically becoming a uniformed camp inmate and adopting the identity of his father: “Daniel could see the identifying yellow star distinctly, his father’s concentration camp number sewn into the costume. He squeezed his eyes shut and saw yellow stars, constellations of despair and desolation” (Steinfeld, “SA” 139). Daniel, “snug in his new identity,” accompanies Abe and Sally (Daniel’s elderly prostitute girlfriend) out of Abe’s dressing room and onto the downtown Toronto streets. Peering “through a break in the slats of the moving railroad car,” directing strangers “‘To the gas chambers,’” starring in the final unwritten act, Daniel (the horror artist) enables his play about Auschwitz to finish “by itself” (Steinfeld, “SA” 139).

The *Shoah* similarly invades the consciousness of another writer/artist figure, thirty-six-year-old Reuben Sklar, and becomes his insane reality in “Dancing at the Club Holocaust” (1986; hereafter “DCH”). Although he “[...] was born in 1949, after it all
happened[']“Reuben, “[']caught in the madness of it all[']” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 35), begins somewhat antagonistic therapy sessions with an unnamed Montreal psychiatrist: “Reuben could not forget that this neat, trim, restrained man earned a living excavating in a terrain only a fool would believe could disgorge truths” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 31-32). When he was a professor at the university, Reuben attended a Halloween party dressed as Albert Camus, urinated on a dean costumed as Hitler (one of two Hitlers at the party), was arrested and, subsequently, fired. Under the terms of his probation, Reuben is now obligated to accept psychiatric treatment.

The crux of the tension between doctor and patient is the former’s belief that the Club Holocaust, which the latter claims to frequent often in New York City, does not exist except as “a delusion or morbid fantasy” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 35). However, the doctor’s construction of reality bears little relation to Reuben’s. Reuben writes stories, many about his mother—a dancer before the war who survived the death camps with crippled legs, received war reparations money from West Germany, and later killed herself—and those which the psychiatrist has been given to read, including some in which he features as an unpleasant character, he describes as being “[’]set in hell’” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 36).

Reuben’s father died in an asylum run by nuns “[’]because he never accepted the fact he had been liberated in 1945’” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 38). Reuben thinks he sees his mother’s concentration camp number on his skin, and, when he admires the view from the doctor’s office window, he sees “[’]Buchenwald, Dachau, Treblinka, Belsen, Auschwitz, Ravensbrück . . .’” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 36)—Montreal transformed into “l’univers concentrationnaire,” counterpart of New York City’s Club Holocaust (qtd. in Epstein 265).
The Club Holocaust, located in a New York City basement, is a Neo-Nazi meeting place where antisemitic Nazi German propaganda films are screened and perverted sexual performances between an SS-uniformed man and a naked, submissive, putatively Jewish boy are staged for the patron’s entertainment. Reuben dreams of dancing the Totentanz, the Dance of Death, on the Club’s stage. Revenging his parents and himself, Reuben sets fire to the Club at the end of the story and, screaming “Ich bin ein Jude” at the audience, dances “a marvellous, masterful Totentanz, movement and heat and damaged decades coalescing, and for the first time in his adult life, he felt happy” (Steinfeld, “DCH” 41). Although Reuben asserts his Jewishness and has a cathartic experience at the story’s conclusion, the insane reality he constructs and inhabits, the Club Holocaust, is a grotesque and disturbing projection of his inner torment, anger, and guilt—all of which remain unresolved and, perhaps, unresolvable.

Robert Majzels

Another fictional psychiatrist, Dr. H. Caulfield (Hyman, not Holden, although, through his protagonist, Majzels makes and analyzes the intertextual connections with J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye [1951]), attempts to excavate the psyche of David Hellman, son of Shoah survivors, in Hellman’s Scrapbook (1992; hereafter HS) by Montrealer Robert Majzels (1950-). Hellman’s Scrapbook is a huge, complex anti-novel constructed as a collage—of journal fragments dated from March 10, 1980, to May 31, 1980; newspaper clippings (some “real”—from the Montreal papers The Gazette, Le Devoir,
and La Presse—and documented at the end of the book, and others imaginary); letters; excerpts from The Legend of Mariang Makiling, a Filipino fable; and material extrapolated from the journal titled The First Voyage Round the World by Magellan, written by Antonio Pigafetta—by writer/artist David Hellman, a psychiatric patient who has been committed to the Hochelaga Memorial Institute (Room 303) in Montreal after (or, perhaps, where) he deliberately starts a fire in a bathroom basin and badly burns the palms of both his hands.

A man in both a physical and a mental hell, David writes his journal (with a damaged hand) in the early hours of the morning and keeps its existence hidden from Dr. Caulfield. Writing is both a clandestine activity—subversive of the medical power of the Memorial Institute in which he is incarcerated—and a means for David to order memory, memorial, history, event, identity, and life: “I can reminisce, but without the writing there is no order, only a chaos of memories” (Majzels, HS 54). To disguise his journal, David collects newspaper articles—“Not the earthshattering front page stories, but the ones they call ‘human interest,’ the stuff they use to fill the gaps in the columns, newspaper sideshows”—which he cuts out and pastes over his written entries in the scrapbook which the hospital has issued to him (Majzels, HS 53). However, even David’s camouflaging clippings are not safe from Dr. Caulfield’s relentless analysis and interpretation:

Of course, I should have known Cluefeld would jump at the chance to analyse my choice of articles. It doesn’t matter that the articles are nothing more than a false cover for my journal. But even if he only has access to the smokescreen, might not a study of the smoke itself yield something? I think I’ve found a way to counter this by making my selection of articles entirely random. That
way, any interpretation he makes will be bound by the arbitrary nature of the material. My scrapbook will serve as both defence and offence, not only concealing my true journal, but also offering the Doctor an entirely false and confusing store of information. (Majzels, HS 55).

Thus Hellman’s scrapbook both subverts and rebels against the very order David is purporting to be arranging in his journal out of the chaos of his life and memories. However, the journal within the scrapbook, although apparently ordered by specific dated entries, is similarly chaotic and arbitrary both temporally and episodically—creating yet another layer of psychologically revealing self-concealment. The “smokescreen” of clippings David arbitrarily provides effectively conceals from his antagonists, including the reader (alter ego of Dr. Caulfield), another smokescreen—his “true journal.” Instead of a true (re)presentation—which its very form as a scrapbook suggests is an impossibility—David constructs various random sideshows from the La Ronde of his Montreal life.

Several disjunct and disjointed fragments from his life form the autobiographical episodes about which David writes in his journal entries. Over an eleven-week period of entries during the late winter and early spring of 1980, David conflates thirty years of his life, juxtaposing his fathers’s experiences, memories (now David’s), and survival of the Nazi German death camps; his Jewish childhood experiences in Montreal; his estranged relations with both parents; his experiences working as a carnie barker at the Coke Rings game at La Ronde, the midway at Expo 67, the World’s Fair held in Montreal during Canada’s centenary celebrations; his living as a hippie in a McGill University fraternity house; his job and his participation in union politics at Continental Steel in Montreal; his
experiences and involvement with Communist anti-Ferdinand Marcos guerillas in the Philippine jungle; and his telepathic ability to access and feel the consciousness, memories, and thoughts of others by holding their hand in his.

One of the most compelling of the several narrative strands is that with which the book begins, from which other versions of the same sequence of events emanate, and to which the text constantly returns: the attempt by a group of Jewish concentration camp inmates, including David’s father, to protect their dying Rabbi, a living symbol of Jewish faith and identity: “The Rabbi, Avram says . . . is our Torah. He is our source. We cannot allow him to die” (Majzels, HS 46). When a brutal Jewish Kapo is murdered while he sits asleep on a toilet in the barrack’s basement latrine, the Nazi German guards remove the Rabbi. In a grotesque re-enactment and rationalization of the Akedah (Abraham’s binding and almost sacrificing of Isaac), Steiner, Avram, and David’s father—who in one version of this recurrent story is the actual murderer of the Kapo—sacrifice the young adolescent Simon, an apostate whom they characterize as one of the “Goy-Jews” “that brought this down on us,” by turning him in in exchange for their Rabbi’s life and watch him hanged (Majzels, HS 48). Before the Kapo’s murder and the betrayal of Simon, David’s father tells his co-conspirators, “Clean hands are all we have left” (Majzels, HS 45; cf. 181). In the very first journal entry, David asks his father, “Do you remember? . . . Do you remember, Papa? Because I do, every bit of it” (Majzels, HS 7).

What David remembers is his father’s taking him to the Mackenzie Street synagogue at age six—his first and only visit. However, David also remembers his father’s memories. And as his father’s concentration camp experiences become his own, David imagines
himself as Simon, as the Kapo’s murderer, as the one who now has blood on his hands—hands which must be purged and purified by fire. At a certain point in the interweaving storylines, David believes he has killed all the characters he has been describing in his journal, the Memorial Institute having become a species of concentration camp (Majzels, HS 259). However, at the end of the novel, David is joined by all the other characters in his journal to form a delegation of inmates united against the Doctor—in all his incarnations—and his reign of terror:

Crackfile, Clayfeet, Clawfield, Caulfear, Cluefeld, Crapfield, Crockafill, Coldfeel, Coolfool, Coinfill, Codfish, Cruelfail, Cunningfile, Coldsweat, Cockophile, Callousfoil, Killfool; the time has come, he concluded, to stand up to them. (Majzels, HS 427)

The novel ends in the Doctor’s office with David’s mother telling her son, “give me your hand” (Majzels, HS 449). However, within the hallucinatory and often surreal world of Hellman’s scrapbook, this is at best an ironic connection or reconciliation.

Dr. Caulfield constantly threatens David with a visit by his parents. As this event is discussed, scheduled, cancelled, and rescheduled, David confides in his journal:

I have to be honest, Papa: in a way I want to see my mother even less than I do you. Not that I want to see you. It’s bound to be an awkward meeting for all of us. Still, I know I can rely on you to steer clear of anything remotely connected to the subject of my accident. . . . Mama, on the other hand, if she actually agrees to come, is not likely to let anything pass. She’ll bring things. Actually, not things: more like guilt, shame, sighing, tears, remorse. But, of
course, all of this will be concealed as ordinary everyday things. A pair of slippers lined with soft guilt, an old bathrobe of despair, a thermos of hot shame soup, chocolate remorse, dry sighing prune cakes. God, how I dread it.

(Majzels, HS 225)

David even writes a script for a one-act play, “An Innocent Family Reunion,” to prepare himself for his parents’ dreaded visit (Majzels, HS 228). At the end of the play—which may, or may not, be a record of the actual reunion—David is strait-jacketed, strapped down on a stretcher, and wheeled out of the room (Majzels, HS 245). Within the context David has created, his mother’s asking for his hand at the novel’s conclusion is not necessarily a sign of de-estrangement or resolution; it may be a sign of the contradictory relation between himself and others David describes throughout.

To prevent Dr. Caulfield from discovering and tampering with his true identity, David invents versions of himself which are, in turn, transmuted and destroyed. Dr. Caulfield “wants to produce plot” (Majzels, HS 224). However, David uses his scrapbook as a means to obfuscate his identity, to avoid self-definition, and to frustrate Dr. Caulfield. He constructs his own unreliability as a defense against those in power, who would define and diagnose him:

Sometimes I think that if I could work out a self before he does, I might escape his diagnosis. But then, if he ever got hold of these notes, that would mean disaster. In fact, sometimes when I reread my own writing, I find myself interpreting, analysing, looking for clues. I end up doing Dr. Caulfield’s dirty work for him. It’s like a disease. Probably, it’s best never to reread what
you’ve written. (Majzels, HS 25)

However, David’s constructing his alternate identities as—and in the form of—a scrapbook ultimately focusses attention on the process of its very creation and, self-reflexively, foregrounds writing and reading.

The literary form in which the novel is cast is significant. Although David purports to be imposing order on chaos, the scrapbook embodies chaos and invites re-reading, interpretation, and analysis, while subverting the ultimate goal of these activities: the search for, or imposition of, meaning. The scrapbook is its own message. Thus meaning inheres in the form; the novel’s content resists meaning. The scrapbook, as a literary form, becomes itself a trope for the subversion of power structures (including narrative fiction)—whether hierarchical, sequential, or canonical. Hellman’s scrapbook also resists and subverts the structures of normality, insanity, identity, reality, and self.

The post-Shoah world David inhabits, and whose death camp horrors inhabit him, is a world gone insane; the text suggests that no-one’s hands can be clean after Auschwitz. Hellman’s Scrapbook portrays the position of the Jewish artist who does not quite “feel Jewish,” who has not “worked out some proper identity,” and the legitimacy of his/her art/writing in the post-Shoah world (Majzels, HS 269). To avoid producing barbaric art, Majzels addresses the Shoah and shows its pervasive repercussions in the world and on the consciousness, memories, lives, psyches, and sanity of the post-survivor generations, for whom it remains a vital but vicarious memory.
Abraham Boyarsky

_A Gift of Rags_ (1995; hereafter _GR_), the most recent novel by Second Generation writer Abraham Boyarsky (1946-), a Professor of Mathematics at Concordia University (Montreal) who was born in Poland and came to Montreal in 1951, is another portrait of the Jewish artist as Second Generation chronicler of survivors’ experiences and memories of the _Shoah_. In the summer of 1959, a group of Jewish concentration camp survivors and their children arrive at Freda Laufer’s ramshackle Four Leaf Clover Hotel in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec for their annual vacation. Drawn together by both deeply felt guilt and an impotent rage for revenge, the summer guests feel mutually secure enough to display their psychic scars. Among the guests are Asher Rosenbloom, a widower, whose three older children died in the _Shoah_, and his thirteen-year-old son, Joseph, who is to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah.

Throughout the summer, Joseph is torn between two opposing forces—personified by Beryl Friedman, “once the brilliant young Yiddish poet of Lodz,” soldier in the Russian army, and now an angry and viciously anti-religious secularist, and Zushe, Jewish partisan, and now a devoutly Orthodox stranger who arrives and spends the summer at the hotel working for Freda (Boyarsky, _GR_ 12). At Joseph’s unorthodox, secularized Bar Mitzvah, Beryl exhorts Joseph to remember the _Shoah_ dead:

“We must keep their memories alive with us. We must engrave their memories in our children and they in their children, until the blood of our loved ones is avenged. And you, Joseph, you who were born after the war, you who
never saw death with your own eyes, you who did not witness the murder of your own sisters and brother, you must also remember, for you are now the guardian of our memories! You are the avenger of our dead! As this is your Bar Mitzvah, you are now a man and the promise of a man is holy. So promise us that you will avenge the blood of the six million Jews! Promise!"

(Boyarsky, GR 14)

Joseph does promise and, having been “made a confidante, one of them, a survivor” (Boyarsky, GR 15), spends his summer exacting revenge by killing frogs—seen by him as “miniature Nazis”—with the BB rifle his father presents him as a Bar Mitzvah gift (Boyarsky, GR 21).

From Zushe, Joseph learns about the depth and beauty of Judaism and Jewish identity: “When a Jew denies his identity, he stands alone; he’s like a single twig. Anything at all can break him. But when he lives as a Jew, in a Jewish community, with the laws of Torah to guide him, nothing in the world can harm him” (Boyarsky, GR 68-69). Estranged from his secular and emotionally brutalized and brutalizing father, whom he characterizes as a torturer, Joseph finds in Zushe the recognition and warmth he craves:

For the first time, Joseph had met an adult who behaved like an adult, who was rational and calm, who acted in a way that was consistent with his beliefs. For the first time Joseph did not feel that he had to serve adults, either by obeying them or by being an instrument for their memories. For the first time someone paid attention to him, not as a child but as a person with intelligence and independent character. In this warm intellectual environment Joseph began to
feel he had worth as a human being, not merely as the son of a survivor, an additional limb to experience his father’s pain. (Boyarsky, GR 64)

At the same time, Joseph also perceives that Zushe’s outward piety conceals inner torment: “You believe in God, yet you’re really no different than the guests in the hotel. You’re broken just like the others but no one can see it” (Boyarsky, GR 134-35). Instructed and guided by a broken teacher, Joseph often wavers during his halting religious apprenticeship.

However, Zushe’s torment is exacerbated and complicated by the secret hatred he has carried with him throughout his meandering, fifteen-year quest for the man who betrayed his family to the Nazi German SS in the Baranovitch ghetto—Asher Rosenbloom. To avenge his dead family, Zushe has vowed to kill Rosenbloom:

And now Joseph had complicated the equation: on the one hand, their warm relationship threatened to sway Zushe from his mission, and on the other, it incited his anger and jealousy that the murderer of his family should be blessed with a healthy, intelligent son while he, the victim, lived in grief and solitude.

(Boyarsky, GR 110)

Nevertheless, Zushe ignores his feelings for Joseph, “rationaliz[ing] a better life for the boy without his father than with him” (Boyarsky, GR 109). However, when Zushe finally confronts Rosenbloom and reveals himself as George Katzenelson, Rosenbloom reminds him of his own infamy. During the Aktion, Zushe’s mistress arrived at the ghetto cellar and, in front of Mrs. Katzenelson, threw herself at her lover’s feet. In Rosenbloom’s memory, this incident shows that Zushe too betrayed his family.

Zushe’s reiteration of the rejection Joseph has felt all his life from his parents
overwhelms the young man. And when his father once again accuses Joseph of being responsible for the cancer death of his mother, he flees the hotel with the intention of throwing himself off a nearby mountain ridge. Yet it is Asher Rosenbloom who falls—into a cesspool—and Zushe who saves him. Asher begs Zushe for forgiveness, and the latter experiences an epiphanic release:

   He closed his eyes and breathed shallowly, and when he again opened his eyes, he was no longer hateful towards Asher nor was he angry with God. A part of him had died, but a pain was lifting from him, rising amorphously with the hushed Psalms seeping through his trembling lips.

   Zushe thought in his heart, Acceptance of the past, this would be my gift to God. But he knew that for him it was more than rags, more, much more.

(Boyarsky, GR 183)

Joseph also “learn[s] the power of forgiveness and the futility of living in the past. The act of killing frogs meant that he was living in the past, in a world that was not his, that was nobody’s. Surely, he had to remember—never to forget what had been done to the Jews—but to kill in the name of that belief was not for him” (Boyarsky, GR 208). Joseph tosses his BB rifle overboard, and, at the end of the novel, he forgives Zushe.

   In this novel about Shoah survivors, Joseph, the artist figure, representative of the Second Generation, is also a survivor and thus must bear witness—but in his own way and not as an appendage to his father’s pain. Beryl Friedman tells Joseph, “‘The world must be forced to remember this—and that’s your job, because you’re a writer’” (Boyarsky, GR 210). The act of writing—itself a form of remembering and memorializing the Shoah—is
thus as much a moral as it is an artistic imperative and, as such, is an integral part of the process of healing broken lives and a damaged world. Within the thematic framework of the novel, choosing reconciliation over discord, love over hate, forgiveness over condemnation, compassion over enmity, life over death, and Torah-centred Jewish identity over self-hatred is the survivor’s ultimate revenge against the forces of evil and the means of ensuring the survival of future generations.

Anne Michaels

_Fugitive Pieces_ (hereafter _FP_), the first novel by Torontonian Anne Michaels (1958- ), nominated for the 1996 Giller Prize, is another Jewish Canadian artist parable. This beautifully written and moving bipartite book juxtaposes two first-person autobiographical memoirs. The much longer first section presents the journals (subdivided into seven titled sections) composed by Jakob Beer, a poet, translator, and child survivor of the _Shoah_. The second section records the narrative of Ben, the child of _Shoah_ survivors, who grows up in Weston, Ontario (then a separate municipality, and, in the present of his life, a suburb of Toronto), and who eventually finds on the Greek island of Idhra the two journal volumes which form part one of the novel. Although their individual histories differ, the lives of both men have been profoundly shaped and distorted by the _Shoah_.

Preceding part one is a short passage which relates the fact of the 1993 accident in which both Jakob (then aged sixty) and Michaela, his wife, were killed by a car while they were standing on a sidewalk in Athens. This prefatory section also foregrounds the novel’s
thematic motifs of geology and geography, immersion and emergence, burial and exhumation, inscription and redemption, and the interplay between history and memory:

During the Second World War, countless manuscripts—diaries, memoirs, eyewitness accounts—were lost or destroyed. Some of these narratives were deliberately hidden—buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors—by those who did not live to retrieve them.

Other stories are concealed in memory, neither written nor spoken; others lost, and sometimes recovered, by circumstance alone. (Michaels, *FP* [vii])

From Jakob’s death, announced at the outset, the novel moves to his life—as resurrected through his journals.

A metafictional comment indicates the time and place Jakob’s journals were composed: “Each morning I write these words for you all. For Bella and Athos, for Alex, for Maurice and Irena, for Michaela. Here on Idhra, in this summer of 1992, I try to set down the past in the cramped space of a prayer” (Michaels, *FP* 191; cf. 155). The people he mentions form the emotional topography of his life. However, beginning by acknowledging that “Time is a blind guide” (Michaels, *FP* 5), Jakob admits:

I did not witness the most important events of my life. My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound. From behind a wall, from underground. From the corner of a small house on a small island that juts like a bone from the skin of the sea. (Michaels, *FP* 17)

For his “deepest story,” Jakob must return to his childhood and retrieve the memories
immured there. Hidden in a cupboard wall in his family home in Poland, seven-year-old Jakob hears the Nazi Germans burst in the front door and murder his mother and father; he does not hear what happens to his older sister Bella, and the silence of her absence haunts the rest of his life. Burying himself in the earth by day and foraging for food by night, Jakob surfaces from the mud—"Bog-boy" (Michaels, *FP* 5), "stiff as a golem" (Michaels, *FP* 12)—at an archaeological site in the drowned Polish town of Biskupin and, desperate, confronts Athanasios Roussos (Athos), a Greek member of the team excavating the site: "So hungry. I screamed into the silence the only phrase I knew in more than one language, I screamed it in Polish and German and Yiddish, thumping my fists on my own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew" (Michaels, *FP* 12-13).

Literally wearing Jakob under his coat, Athos escapes by car back to his home on the Greek island of Zakynthos. There he hides and teaches Jakob for the duration of the Occupation: "Athos said: 'We must carry each other. If we don't have this, what are we. . . .'" (Michaels, *FP* 14). Recognizing that he has been "offered a second history" (Michaels, *FP* 20), Jakob immerses himself in Athos's geological appreciation—a "private trinity of peat, limestone, and archaeological wood" (Michaels, *FP* 19):

Athos was an expert in buried and abandoned places. His cosmology became mine. I grew into it naturally. In this way our tasks became the same.

Athos and I would come to share our secrets of the earth. He described the bog bodies. (Michaels, *FP* 49)

As they struggle to survive the war, Athos impresses on Jakob important lessons: "Find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful" (Michaels, *FP* 44;
cf. 121). Most importantly, although Jakob “already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate,” Athos teaches him, through poetry, “the power of language to restore” (Michaels, FP 79). Later, as both poet and translator, Jakob unearths and excavates in his poetry the mass graves of the Jewish victims of Nazi German genocide and works out his own deep grief:

How many years pass before the difference between murder and death erodes?

Grief requires time. If a chip of stone radiates its self, its breath, so long, how stubborn might be the soul. If sound waves carry on to infinity, where are their screams now? I imagine them somewhere in the galaxy, moving forever towards the psalms. (Michaels, FP 54)

After the war Jakob and Athos immigrate to Canada and settle in Toronto, “a city built in the bowl of a prehistoric lake,” where Athos has been offered a post in the new Department of Geography at the University of Toronto (Michaels, FP 89). Like Biskupin on the Gasawka River, Toronto, through which flows the Humber River, is a drowned city—both prehistorically and, historically, during the flooding caused by Hurricane Hazel in October 1954. For Athos, Toronto is a geological narrative, which he imparts to Jakob:

Fortunately, I had my own private guide and companion, not only through geologic time, but through adolescence and into adulthood.

With a few words (an incantation in Greek or English) and the sweep of his hand, Athos sliced a hill in half, drilled under the sidewalk, cleared a forest. He showed me Toronto cross-sectioned; he ripped open cliffs like fresh bread, revealing the ragged geological past. Athos stopped in the middle of busy city
streets and pointed out fossils in the limestone ledges of the Park Plaza Hotel or in the walls of a hydro substation. “Ah, limestone, accumulating one precious foot every twenty-five thousand years!” Instantly, the streets were flooded by a subtropical salt sea. I imagined front lawns crammed with treasure: crinoids, lamp shells, trilobites.

Like diving birds, Athos and I plunged one hundred and fifty million years into the dark deciduous silence of the ravines. (Michaels, FP 97-98)

Geology functions here and throughout the novel as both terrestrial fact and trope. As Jakob examines retrospectively the geological process of his psyche’s recuperation, he, like Athos, “applie[s] the geologic to the human,” and thus “construct[s] his own historical topography” (Michaels, FP 119). He discovers that history, like geology, is a process: “Nothing is sudden. Not an explosion—planned, timed, wired carefully—not the burst door. Just as the earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so history is the gradual instant” (Michaels, FP 77). In this oxymoronic juxtaposition—“the gradual instant”—an historical moment becomes multiple; there is no single correspondence between time, space, and event. In the same way, the relation between history and memory is never unitary:

History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. History is the Totenbuch, The Book of the Dead, kept by the administrators of the camps. Memory is the Memorbucher, the names of those to be mourned, read aloud in the synagogue.

History and memory share events; that is, they share time and space. Every
moment is two moments. (Michaels, *FP* 138)

Thus Jakob’s journals function simultaneously as both history and memory—both a book of the dead and a book of memorial to his dead family and all the other victims of the Shoah—a recuperative elegy in which memory, superimposed over history, forms a palimpsest through which history is humanized and rejuvenated.

In the novel the process of language itself—transmuting Jakob’s memories into autobiographical journals and volumes of poetry—is redemptive: “And later, when I began to write down the events of my childhood in a language foreign to their happening, it was a revelation. English could protect me; an alphabet without memory” (Michaels, *FP* 101). It is through language, word play, and crossword puzzles that Jakob encounters Alexandra Gillian Dodson Maclean, the woman whom he marries and, after five years, divorces. She reminds him of Bella. And it is Bella who haunts his memories, marriage, and memories of his marriage. It is only after he and Alexandra have divorced that Jakob realizes Bella’s message to him is to live:

*To remain with the dead is to abandon them.*

All the years I felt Bella entreating me, filled with her loneliness, I was mistaken. I have misunderstood her signals. Like other ghosts, she whispers; not for me to join her, but so that, when I’m close enough, she can push me back into the world. (Michaels, *FP* 170)

After Athos’s death, after his divorce from Alexandra, and after eighteen years of dividing his time between Toronto and the Roussos’s family home on Idhra, Jakob meets Michaela at a party in the Toronto home of his friends Maurice and Irena Salman. Unlike
his marriage to Alexandra, marriage to Michaela is, like the earth and language, redemptive: “Every cell in my body had been replaced, suffused with peace” (Michaels, FP 182). Through their mutual love, Jakob feels “for the first time safe above ground” (Michaels, FP 189). The hope for a child, however—to be named either Bela or Bella—is killed in a gradual instant by the car that ends the lives of Jakob, Michaela, and their unborn child (about whose presence she had not yet surprised him).

Near the end of his journals, curtailed by his tragic death, Jakob writes: “My son, my daughter: May you never be deaf to love” (Michaels, FP 195). Love, and its redemptive force, is absent from the life of Ben, who, like J. J. Steinfeld’s Daniel Nathanson and Reuben Sklar, Robert Majzels’s David Hellman, and Abraham Boyarsky’s Joseph Rosenbloom, is the surviving son of Shoah survivors. In part two of Fugitive Pieces, Ben writes and interprets his life, addressing himself to Jakob Beer. Ben (and his wife Naomi) met Jakob and Michaela at the home of the Salmans. While Ben was studying at the University of Toronto, Maurice Salman supervised his thesis on “weather and biography”—subjects that integrate the motifs of fronted systems, war, the physical world, indeterminacy, probability, marriage, and the particulars of daily life (Michaels, FP 211). Maurice had recommended Jakob’s book of poems, Groundwork, to his students. When Ben met Jakob, he “wanted to believe language itself had freed you. But the night we met I knew it wasn’t language that had released you. Only a remarkably simple truth or a remarkably simple lie could put such peace in a man. The mystery darkened in me” (Michaels, FP 207). Ben’s autobiographical quest for Jakob’s journals is also the search for meaning and the unravelling of the mystery of Jakob’s peace of mind.
Like Jakob and Athos, Jakob and Ben are alter egos, doppelgängers, whose experiences of the Shoah, though different, have had similar debilitating results. The novel emphasizes their connection by reiterating, in part two, most of the titles into which part one is divided. Reading Jakob's poems helps Ben understand and contextualize some of his childhood experiences—"as if you'd surfaced into air from under water, breathing for the first time" (Michaels, FP 206). Jakob's sense of being submerged and having to hold his breath is a feeling shared by Ben. He describes his family in terms of emptiness and silence, finally of absence:

There was no energy of a narrative in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering into a strong wind. My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking... Most discover absence for themselves; trees are ripped out and sorrow floods the clearing. Then we know what we loved.

But I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. Rains had made the lowest parts swampy, the green melancholia of bog with its swaying carpet of pollen.

I lived there with my parents. A hiding place, rotted out by grief. Right from the start Naomi seemed to know us. She gave us her heart, natural as breathing. But for me, love was like holding my breath.

Naomi stood on firm ground and stretched out her arm. I took her hand but
otherwise didn’t move. (Michaels, FP 204, 233-34)

Rejected by his father (a piano teacher at the Conservatory), whom he is unable to please, and confederate with his mother—“[a]ny details of my parents’ lives before they came to Canada I learned from my mother” (Michaels, FP 222)—Ben excavates his nameless parents’ past after the death of his father, only to discover that some secrets his mother had divulged only to Naomi.

A June 1941 family photograph reveals that Ben had two siblings (Hannah and Paul), about whom he was never told and who did not survive the Shoah. When he realizes that Naomi already knows about his absent sister and brother, Ben feels betrayed by both his mother and his wife. He subsequently discovers from Naomi that his name actually signifies namelessness: “My parents prayed that the birth of their third child would go unnoticed. They hoped that if they did not name me, the angel of death might pass by. Ben, not from Benjamin, but merely ‘ben’—the Hebrew word for son” (Michaels, FP 253). Although Naomi has been unwittingly keeping secrets from Ben, he separates from her in 1993, after eight years of marriage. (They had met when she audited a course he was teaching, Forms of Biography.) After the deaths of his parents and of the Beers, Ben leaves Toronto for Idhra in order to retrieve Jakob’s lost journals for Maurice Salman.

While on Idhra, Ben has an affair with a Bella-like, twenty-two-year-old American tourist named Petra. Through Petra’s ransacking of Jakob’s bookshelves, Ben inadvertently finds the missing journals—dated June 1992 and November 1992—for which he has been looking for four months. Reading Jakob’s words, Ben realizes that he has “wasted love” in his marriage and in his life (Michaels, FP 286). As he imagines and foresees his return to
Naomi in Toronto, Ben remembers the strength his parents drew from each other and, in relation to Naomi, understands that the redemption love bestows is not in the receiving but in the giving: “I see that I must give what I most need” (Michaels, *FP* 294). Although he feels that his “parents’ past is [his] molecularly,” and that he is therefore destined to suffocate in their memories, the novel ends with Ben—Jewish Canada’s surviving “Son”—on the edge of a breathing moment of choice: to live, in order to prevent the continuation or recurrence of the *Shoah*, or to die, and to re-live it endlessly (Michaels, *FP* 280).

Confronted with a similar choice, Jakob chooses life and love. Through his poetry and his journals, he communicates to Ben (the next generation) that such a choice can and must be made.

*Like Hellman’s Scrapbook*, *Fugitive Pieces* focusses on the acts of reading and writing. Both Jakob Beer and Ben are Jewish artist figures and refugees, and the forms their autobiographical writings take in the novel are appropriate for a fragmented world: fugitive pieces. In writing their lives, Michaels creates her own mosaic, the literary form of which invites re-reading of the fugitives’ pieces, and the totality of which points to the power of language and love to redeem, to bring peace, and to give meaning to a post-*Shoah* world.

**Concluding Remarks**

Canada’s Jewish community is now the largest in the Commonwealth and the fifth largest in the world. There has been a Jewish presence in Canada from its earliest colonial days. And, starting with the first Jewish Canadian writers, there has been a distinct Jewish
literary ethos expressed in their art. As David Rome noted in 1964, unlike their Jewish
counterparts writing in English in Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, or
elsewhere in the English-speaking world,

[t]he Jewish writers in Canada, commencing with Asher a hundred years ago
and continuing to the most recent poet or novelist, naturally wrote of their own
background, experiences and interests, and they included their Jewish
background and their Jewish experiences among their basic interests. The
Jewish artists in Canada considered these Jewish interests legitimate material
for their art; they considered it pertinent, and they introduced it into their work.
They did not suppress it as too personal, private or narrow for public interest as
did their colleagues in other English-speaking countries. (vii)

In 1964, Rome could quote several literary critics of Canadian Literature—Roy Daniells and
Milton Wilson, for example—who, Rome summarizes, concluded “that by the very nature of
the position of Jewish culture in the Canadian frame of life, it is more than coincidental—it
is natural and almost inevitable—that Jewish poets and Jewish novelists should write the
most characteristically Canadian works, truly expressive of the Canadian spirit and
artistically descriptive of the Canadian scene” (ix). From a 1996 perspective, after more
than three further decades of literary history, theory, and publication, the claim that Jewish
Canadian literature is the most characteristic or most representative of all Canadian
Literature seems hyperbolically essentialist and untenable. With the explosion of Canadian
writing in the late 1960s and 1970s and the ongoing political and aesthetic debates about the
various versions, visions, and constructions of the multicultural nation “Canada,” Jewish
Canadian literature may better be understood as the first of a growing number of ethnic minority literatures which are contributing to the Canadian literary mosaic.

Within Canada, however, the labels “ethnic” and “multicultural” (and how they are defined and applied) are problematic, if not derogatory. In an interview with Marlene Kadar, Mordecai Richler reacts testily to the interviewer’s asking him what he thinks of ethnicity:

My initial response is anger because I find the term tiresome and pejorative. What is ‘ethnic’ writing, and why is a Scots Canadian ‘ethnic’? Or why is Jewish ‘ethnic’? Or Ukrainian? This is a country made up of many people, thirty per cent of whom are neither English nor French. And within twenty years the majority will not be English or French. It’s a pejorative WASP term. If you look up the Oxford Dictionary definition, ‘ethnic’ is very insulting. . . . No writer ever thinks about whether he’s ethnic or not ethnic. He writes about what he knows. (Richler, Interview 41-42, 43)

An echo of Richler’s sentiments can be found in the views of Matt Cohen (1942- ), a Kingston, Ontario-born and Ottawa-raised Jewish Canadian novelist best known for his Salem novels, which chronicle the lives of Protestant families living in rural Ontario north of Kingston.

Interviewed by Mervin Butovsky, Matt Cohen comments:

First of all, I’m not sure I like the words ‘ethnic writer’. Ethnicity in Canada, or multiculturalism, always seems to imply that there are two dominant streams—the English and the French—and in addition a bunch of minorities
who occupy marginal positions and run different kinds of restaurants. I’m not sure this any longer reflects the Canadian reality. . . . ‘Ethnic writing’ is . . . almost by definition writing outside what is supposed to be the mainstream—itself hardly in existence. At this point I think it’s fair to say that critics of Canadian literature have no consensus about what either the canon is or what the criteria for ‘Canadian literature’ are supposed to be. Like the writers, they have fragmented into postmodernists, regionalists, feminists, internationalists, etc. (173, 175)

Refusing the label “ethnic writer,” Cohen later equivocates about even being a “Jewish” writer: “In fact, to tell the truth, I don’t know if I even regard myself as a ‘Canadian Jewish artist’. It seems like a very ambiguous role to take on” (Interview 178). However, the role of the Jewish writer in the post-Shoah world, a role which in Albert Memmi’s formulation is necessarily dual—to create a “true Jewish literature . . . of explicit accusation and revolt” and “to express the Jewish fate” and demonstrate its congruence with the universal fate of humanity (Memmi, LJ 178, 175-76)—is fraught with ambiguity, especially for those writers whose works eschew Jewish content.

However, if in 1990 Matt Cohen was unsure or ambivalent about his role as a Canadian Jewish or Jewish Canadian artist, in 1994 he wrote an article in which he expresses his sense of alienation as a Canadian Jew, of being an outsider. In “Outside Spain” (hereafter “OS”), his brief account about both the conception of the novel which became The Spanish Doctor (1984), his first “Jewish” novel24 (followed by another, Nadine, in 1986), and the research he conducted in Spain in preparation for its writing, Cohen refers
obliquely to his status as a perpetual tourist—even in his native land: “I’d visited many countries, always enjoyed them, sometimes learned something about them as a result, but always felt, naturally, like an outsider, even if well tolerated. Just like being in Canada, I would say to myself, which had been my explanation of why I found travelling so easy” (“OS” 184). Upon arrival in Spain, Cohen is shocked to see that everybody looks exactly like him: “Suddenly I knew, with a conviction that has never left me, that I was in the land of my ancestors” (“OS” 184). In the course of his research, Cohen connects with the ruins of Spanish Jewry, destroyed through the Inquisition and expulsion, and realizes that he, as a Jew, is inextricably linked to two momentous and contiguous events in world history: the expulsion and survival of the exiled Spanish Jewish remnant and the founding of New World empires:

But now when I looked at the people on the streets of Madrid they were utter strangers. I was no longer inside them—instead I was in the nightmare their ancestors and mine had shared—the nightmare that for some had ended in death and exile, for others the beginnings of a new and dazzling empire. (“OS” 187)

The New World Jewish artist, exiled from the Old World, despite his estrangement, still maintains a connection with ancestral memories and identities.

The questions of ancestry, continuity, and identity connote a sense both of community and of belonging. In an article titled “The Writer and Canadian Literature,” Adele Wiseman constructs a confident self-definition:

All my young life I knew perfectly well who I was. I was a North Winnipeg
kid of Ukrainian Jewish immigrant parents, living among immigrants of about twenty-eight other nationalities, all immigrants of about one to four or five generations back, except for the original immigrant Indians. And I was building Canada, helping to hammer out a country out of conflict and stress and poverty and cooperation and hope. A depression and a war or so later, in a period of relative prosperity in which I emerged into my full estate as an adult, I suddenly discovered Chicken Little running around the country yelling I was a Canadian and therefore didn’t have an identity; the sky is falling in; who am I? Who could believe such nonsense? No writer of fiction. ‘I am that I am’.

As a Canadian writer I am writing Canada. (Wiseman 83)

However, the striking reference to the Almighty identifying Himself to Moses in Exodus 3.14 adds a note of burning ambiguity to Wiseman’s assured declaration that she is simply a Canadian writer. “I am that I am” is a powerful evocation of an existential and eternal Jewish identity. Thus Wiseman is not only “a Canadian writer . . . writing Canada,” she is simultaneously a Jewish Canadian writer writing the Diaspora.

The Jewish Canadian artist feels a sense of estrangement in his or her own homeland. And government-mandated multiculturalism cannot assuage this overwhelming paradox of belonging. To be termed a “multicultural writer” is as inadequate and limiting a description as the label “ethnic writer.” Indeed, Jewish Australian writer Rosa Safransky warns that, in certain hemispheres, “[m]ulticulturalism has become synonymous with Martian” (204). The debate over the definition of the problematic concept/metaphor of multiculturalism and its implementation is heatedly engaged in Canada. Neil Bissoondath (1955–), a Canadian
fiction writer originally from Trinidad, argues that the practice of government-sponsored multiculturalism has entrenched and systematized a structure of division and exclusion which masquerades as a benignly inclusive pluralism. Although there is merit in this criticism, Bissoondath’s rhetoric is inflammatory and often hysterical: “Depending on stereotype, ensuring that ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness in a gentle and insidious form of cultural apartheid, multiculturalism has done little more than lead an already divided country down the path to further social divisiveness” (90; cf. “psychic apartheid” [156]). Bissoondath reinforces his criticism by developing this analogy between Canadian multiculturalism and South African *apartheid*—a fallacious and somewhat pernicious equivalence which exaggerates the threat of the former while trivializing the (now discontinued) murderous reality of the latter—thus making his argument bathetic.

Asking rhetorically, “Is there a moment when one stops being, in the eyes of others, an alien, an exile, an immigrant?” Bissoondath suggests that assimilation, the diminishing of difference, will lead to the mutual acceptance of all others as “Canadians” in a utopic Canada (121). The multicultural alternative “is leading us into a divisiveness so entrenched that we will face a future of multiple solitudes with no central notion to bind us” (Bissoondath 192). Although Canadian multiculturalism may have become a system which constantly reminds those from elsewhere not to forget their cultural identity, in the post-*Shoah* world, even the most assimilated Jews know that to forget or ignore their identity can be fatal—for a Nazi may remind them that they are Jews. Post-*Shoah* Jewish Canadian fiction reminds readers that the Jews of the Canadian Diaspora have always lived within a multicultural, multi-ethnic, but essentially mono-religious, mosaic of third, schizoid, and
multiple solitudes. Jewish Canadians live with the ambiguity Bissoondath seeks to resolve.

Being described as "ethnic" or "multicultural" appears to have marginalized much of Canada's Jewish fiction. Despite the inclusion of a few prominent Jewish Canadian fiction writers such as Henry Kreisel, A. M. Klein, Adele Wiseman, Mordecai Richler, and Leonard Cohen in the canon of Canadian Literature, most remain peripheral, their work present only in specialized anthologies of Jewish Canadian writing and absent from the syllabi of post-secondary level courses in Canadian Literature. Post-Shoah Jewish Canadian fiction thematizes Jewish alienation and marginalization and contests—through both the fictions' content and the literary forms into which it is shaped—versions of a Canada constructed as an exclusively bicultural entity. Jewish Canadian fiction resists being categorized as simply "ethnic" or "multicultural" writing—tantamount to exclusion from a putatively and objectively pure mainstream—and thus contributes, from a uniquely Mosaic perspective, to the ongoing re-reading, redefining, and reconstructing of literary solitudes, canons, and mosaics.
CHAPTER 5

Epilogue:

Towards a Commonwealth of Jewish Literature

As this bibliography and critical commentary on post-Shoah English-language Jewish fiction in Australia, South Africa, and Canada have attempted to demonstrate, dozens of Jewish writers from three very distinct Commonwealth countries have created a diverse, intriguing, and complex collection of fictional works. This flourishing critical mass of fiction is providing both the infrastructure and the impetus for the establishment and emergence of a unique and multifaceted Post-Colonial Jewish literary culture. Contributing to their respective national literatures—in relation to which they are often categorized (whether pejoratively or otherwise) as “ethnic,” “migrant,” “immigrant,” or “multicultural”—Jewish writers whose fiction foregrounds Jewish consciousness are contesting through their texts a monolithic, homogeneous construction of their particular nation (Australia, South Africa, Canada) and its literary canon. These respective canonical traditions have, in general, marginalized the contributions of these Jewish writers and thus excluded their voices, perceptions, and identities from the literary mainstream. By challenging existing exclusionary structures and strictures, they are establishing the literary relevance of their fiction.

In the post-World War II world, Jewish experience and consciousness, haunted by
Auschwitz, permeates modern Post-Colonial Jewish fiction—either overtly (through explicit inscription) or covertly (through silent erasure)—and insists that both individual nations and the entire world accept that the Shoah is also their and civilization’s catastrophe. In terms of Albert Memmi’s experientially intuitive insight that the Jew signifies the archetype of colonized and oppressed humanity and that the “Jewish fate . . . is only an abridged form, more condensed and gloomier, of the general fate of mankind,” these fictional texts contribute to the accentuation and expression of that Jewish fate, compel humanity to recognize its own reciprocal relation with it, and thus alter world consciousness (PJ 236). In addition, fulfilling the criterion Memmi understands to be the signifier of an authentic Jewish literature, Post-Colonial, post-Shoah Jewish fiction is a “literature of explicit accusation and revolt” against the Jewish fate and, thus, against the fate of other minority cultures (LJ 178).

In terms of Post-Colonial resistance to Eurocentrism, the Shoah marks within Jewish consciousness and fiction a new relation to Europe. Despite the fictive expression of nostalgic recollections and representations of the shtetl and yearning for der heim, during the war Europe became a slaughterhouse and a cemetery for the Jews and is now the headstone marking the grave of Jewish/European civilization. Therefore, the contemporary Jewish writer’s relation to Europe is quite markedly different from that of non-Jewish authors. Jewish writers have a moral obligation to thematize this new relation to Europe, to remember, and, in order to prevent Hitler’s posthumous victory over the Jews, to resist all forms of self-extinction. As Michael Woolf remarks in an article about post-World War II Jewish British fiction: “The Holocaust is a necessary presence in any Jewish view of
recent history, whether explicitly or not” (125). And this ongoing dialectic between the recent European past and the Post-Colonial present in a post-Shoah world figures thematically in many of the texts commented upon in previous chapters.

The relation between the past and a present shadowed by the Shoah is contextualized in this postwar fiction in terms of the intra- and intergenerational relations within the Jewish family: “The family is, in many respects, an inevitable subject for the Jewish writer not least because so many moral values and ethical structures are presumed to adhere to it” (Woolf 135). However, far from providing stability and structure, the family is often imaged as the locus for the Jewish protagonists’ anxiety, unhappiness, pain, and sense of alienation—the physically and emotionally constricting “place” from which to disengage and to escape. The Jewish family provides an arena where a dysfunctional dialectic is dramatized: between parents and children, inclusion and exclusion, past and present, assertion and assimilation, and certainty and ambiguity.

These multiple tensions are recurrently imaged in the troubled relations between fathers and their sons. In the fiction of Judah Waten, Morris Lurie, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Albert Segal, Dan Jacobson, Antony Sher, Rose Zwi, Adele Wiseman, Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, Robert Majzels, Abraham Boyarsky, and Anne Michaels, fathers are portrayed as ineffectual, emasculated, absent, and weak; at the same time, stripped of their authority, they can explode violently against their offspring, inflicting physical and emotional scars. A variation on this troubled relation occurs between mothers and their sons. Mothers, especially immigrant mothers in Australia, are portrayed as living in a fantasy land of their remembered and reconstructed European pasts in the stories of
Judah Waten and Serge Liberman. Distant from their sons, these mothers nonetheless burden them with guilt, responsibility, and their unresolved emotional baggage. Remote, cold, pre-occupied, and controlling mothers negatively affect their sons in the Jewish South African fiction of Jillian Becker and Albert Segal. In Jewish Canadian fiction, mothers are dead or absent or monstrous (as Mordecai Richler, Abraham Boyarsky, and Leonard Cohen portray them). This maternal relation is especially fraught with ambiguity and irresolution if the mothers are survivors of the Shoah—as they are in the work of J. J. Steinfeld, Robert Majzels, and Anne Michaels—for they inevitably induce and reproduce in their sons their own horror and suffering.

Another subset of this recurrent familial theme is the complicated antagonistic relation between fathers and their daughters—Arthur Markowitz and Victor Barwin—and between mothers and their daughters—Nadine Gordimer (whose work also absents fathers) and Rose Zwi. The complex relation between Shoah survivor parents and their Second Generation daughters, as portrayed in the fiction of Lily Brett, constitutes a further variation. Interestingly, a much stronger and more meaningful connection between past Jewish tradition and present secularization is preserved through the relation (sometimes tempestuous) between grandfathers and their grandchildren, especially in the fiction of Morris Lurie, Rose Zwi, Ted Allan, and Mordecai Richler—or, as in A. M. Klein’s novel, between nephew and messianic uncle.

The dynamic tension of intergenerational and intraparental conflict results in familial fragmentation and personal estrangement. This familial and personal alienation functions thematically and metonymically within these Jewish texts as a microcosmic representation.
of various kinds of social, cultural, and political fragmentation present within the macroscopic national and, ultimately, international families of the world. The works of B. N. Jubal and Dan Jacobson look from the individual narrator’s point of view to this larger global community in their portrayals of the human condition in a precarious post-Shoah world.

Another recurrent theme in the fiction under discussion is that of Jewish identity. The past, rich in tradition and religious practice, has been superseded by a post-Shoah present of secular and liberal values in conflict with Judaism. Familial alienation often results in self-hatred, leading protagonists to repress their innate Jewish identities in the non-Jewish world, choosing assimilation over difference. This assimilation is often imaged in tropes of intermarriage, marital betrayal and infidelity (often with non-Jews), and self-erasure. The phenomenon of Jewish self-erasure—arising from a deep-seated psychological self-hatred—occurs startlingly often and most strongly in the Jewish fiction of South Africa, where the political and social apparatus of apartheid forced the Jewish conscience to confront an insoluble conflict: to stay and to live, as a privileged White, in an overtly and brutally racist society, or to leave (voluntarily) and live yet another form of exile. Inevitably, the Jewish protagonists in Australian, South African, and Canadian fiction renegotiate the past and construct for themselves in the present new hybrid forms of Mosaic identity. However, this discontinuity with the continuum of Jewish identity and tradition (often accompanied by a loss of faith and/or an abandonment of religious ritual) results in irreconcilable paradoxes and irresolvable ambiguities with which the protagonists must live and from which they try to construct meaning.
The image or trope of the Jewish immigrant/refugee from Europe recurs in much of the fiction discussed in the previous chapters:

... the figure of the refugee becomes central in that it reflects Jewish displacement and suffering and expresses a heritage that cannot be discarded or assimilated. The past is a painful burden that the writer inevitably carries into the present, into the future. (Woolf 133)

The uprooted and wandering Jewish immigrant features in the work of Henry Kreisel, Adele Wiseman, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Nadine Gordimer, Rose Zwi, and especially in the fiction of Australian writers—Nathan Spielvogel, Solomon Stedman, B. N. Jubal, Judah Waten, David Martin, and Serge Liberman—whose alien son protagonists live the paradox of simultaneously belonging and not belonging in Australia. The Jewish immigrant/refugee is both a representative figure of alienation, persecution, and dislocation in the modern world (especially in the immediate pre- and postwar years) and a symbolic representation of the past millennia of Jewish history he/she reiterates in the present.

Since the early 1980s, a new and ironic variant of the Jewish immigrant/refugee has been portrayed in fiction: the native-born offspring of Shoah survivors. Texts about the survivors of Shoah survivors (often written by Second Generation authors) have added an entirely new dimension to the understanding of the devastating impact of the Shoah on the next generation. This Second Generation of writers, who experienced the Shoah indirectly, vicariously, through their parents, and who frequently feel like “refugees” themselves, often depict their fictional protagonists as maniacal inmates of an emotionally suffocating familial concentration camp. The largest survivor communities of the Commonwealth are found in
Australia and Canada, and, typically, the writers who portray the Second Generation in their fiction are from these two countries: Lily Brett, J. J. Steinfeld, Robert Majzels, Abraham Boyarsky, and Anne Michaels. South African fiction, drawing on a much smaller Shoah survivor community, has not portrayed these “new immigrants.” Indeed, except for Dan Jacobson, Froma Sand, and Rose Zwi, most Jewish South African writers have even been deathly silent about the Shoah itself—perhaps as a consequence of the various forms of self-erasure prevalent in their fiction.

The paradox of where a post-Shoah Diaspora Jew belongs is further complicated by the existence of the modern state of Israel. Inevitably, the question of Israel arises in the fiction under discussion. Morris Lurie, Lily Brett, Dan Jacobson, Rose Zwi, A. M. Klein, and Mordecai Richler have all written fiction in which Israel plays a role. Except for Ella Tennenbaum—a character in Lily Brett’s short stories “A Glimpse of Stocking” and “On Different Fronts” (WGW), who emigrates to Israel, reconnects with and asserts her nearly moribund Jewish identity, and finds that she truly belongs in the Jewish state—the characters who visit Israel in these writers’ fiction all return to the Diaspora. Woolf’s comments about the role(s) of Israel in postwar Jewish British fiction are here pertinent and applicable:

...Israel is an alien location for the diaspora Jew and... visions of a ‘promised land’ are bound to fail when the myth meets the flawed reality. For all that, the subject of Israel remains crucial; it is worried over, explored, re-explored, searched for meaning. The Jewish writer is required, in one way or another, to interpret this place which is both country and idea, state and dream.2
For Post-Colonial Jewish authors, the state of Israel remains a remote idea. Writing the Diaspora, in which they live, takes artistic priority.

Within the Jewish fiction under scrutiny, there appear many artist figures in parables about the creation of written texts—often the very text being read. B. N. Jubal, Judah Waten, David Martin, Morris Lurie, Lily Brett, Nadine Gordimer, Froma Sand, Rose Zwi, A. M. Klein, Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen, Robert Majzels, and Anne Michaels create artist-narrators and/or artist figures in their fiction. The focus in these stories on the creation of written texts foregrounds the politics of literary form. B. N. Jubal’s sketches, for example, create at the level of form an analogue with the thematic emphases on fragmentation, alienation, loneliness, absence, and the Jewish immigrant experience in Australia. The short stories of Judah Waten and Lily Brett perform a similar function. However, to deduce from these Jewish Australian writers’ use of the sketch and short story (and the conventions of literary realism) that these particular literary forms are, therefore, primarily serving a sociological or autobiographical function undermines their artistry and ignores their political function. By shaping an accepted Australian form—the realistic short story—to the purposes of ethnic minority expression, these writers challenge the canonical assumptions that would exclude or marginalize their work. In South Africa, Dan Jacobson’s short stories perform a similar function, which is both ideological, in challenging the racism of apartheid, and literary, in appropriating Jewish experience to familiar forms.

In Canada, a similar case could be made for the short stories of A. M. Klein, Henry Kreisel, and J. J. Steinfeld. However, in Jewish Canadian writing there is an emphasis on
the novel. Although Jewish Australian, South African, and Canadian fictions are consistently realistic in composition, in Canada the literary form of a novel such as A. M. Klein’s or Robert Majzels’s, for example, serves the political function of challenging uniform ethnic majority readings of “Canada” by insisting on re-readings which recontextualize the cultural and social landscape as a multicultural mosaic of multiple ethnicities and solitudes. In addition, the Jewish Canadian novel is much more likely to be experimental or postmodern than its Australian or South African counterparts. This may be due in part to Canada’s proximity to the postmodern literary experiments of novelists writing in the United States. However, proximity is not the entire answer. Postmodern literary forms allow Canadian writers a means to inscribe difference in a multicultural society and to interrogate simplistic and exclusionary metaphors/tropes of the nation and its literary canon.

In a 1994 article titled “Death of the Jewish Novel?”—by which she really meant the Jewish American novel—novelist and journalist Anne Roiphe echoes critics such as Irving Howe and Leslie Fiedler, who, in the 1980s, declared the demise of Jewish American fiction. Roiphe titles her article interrogatively; however, her prognosis is sardonically pessimistic:³

Unless there is a renewal, a deep spiritual and cultural renewal in American Jewish life, a turn toward the symbols and myths, the history and uniqueness of Jewish experience, Jewish fiction in America is a dead issue. . . .

There will always be American Jewish writers but they may not write as Jews, because the Jewish part of themselves may be dim, ordinary, an echo.
But maybe I’m wrong, maybe the Jewish voice will reappear, critic of the suburbs, critic of the mall, prophets condemning self-satisfaction, calling out the name of the corruption and expressing with wit and detail the particular expectation that the messiah is on his way. Maybe the next generation will produce a new flock of Jewish writers who will forge out of their bar- and bat mitzvah fragments a true American Jewish howl. We’ll see. (53)

The presence of this bibliography and critical commentary constitutes an argument for the recognition of a post-Shoah, Post-Colonial English-language Jewish literary culture which is neither American nor British. The Jewish novel may well be in decline in the U.S.A., or it may be reinventing itself—as it appears to be doing in Britain. However, in response to Roiphe’s speculations, the Jewish novel itself is far from moribund. The Jewish fiction being written in South Africa and, especially, in Australia and in Canada is contributing to its sustained and energetic vitality and innovation. There is, moreover, a significant body of Jewish fiction written in languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Yiddish, and Hebrew which lies outside the parameters of this critical commentary.

The relation of Jewish Australian, Jewish South African, and Jewish Canadian fiction to the Jewish fiction being written in Britain and the United States has yet to be explored, analyzed, and interpreted. In “A Minority Literature,” Rachel Ertel proposes the concept of a “Jewish literature written in non-Jewish languages”:

After all, an author participates in different collectivities, in various cultural systems. It would certainly not be too strange to suggest that Jewish writers are at least as involved in Jewish culture (or in one of several Jewish cultures)
English-language Jewish literature, then, is one of the ways in which Ertel's argument can be contextualized. For Ertel, the existence of such a Jewish literature—by which she means writing which presents "themes and characters drawn from the Jewish world" (225)—is self-evident and natural:

To my mind, speculating on the existence of a Jewish literature in a non-Jewish language is tantamount to reflecting upon the existence of the Jewish people itself. If the Jewish people—geographically and linguistically dispersed, partaking of various national, social and cultural groupings—exists, so does its literature exist. It is created in the image of the Jewish people: it is diverse. (226)

And as Jewish authors of fiction write the diversity and multiplicity of Australia, of South Africa, and of Canada, they are simultaneously writing the Diaspora, and thus contributing their substantial body of imaginative and creative work to a Commonwealth of Jewish Literature.
Notes for Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Following George Steiner, Claude Lanzmann, and Israeli linguistic practice, I will use the Hebrew word Shoah (literally, “catastrophe”) to stand for the popular, but wholly inappropriate, usage of the Greek word Holocaust.

2. In the Septuagint, the most influential Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word διασπορά (Diaspora), meaning “dispersion,” was used mistakenly to translate the Hebrew word ניזון, meaning “horror,” in the last sentence of Deuteronomy 28.25. Thus the Septuagint mistranslation reads the line as “Thou shalt be a diaspora in all kingdoms of the earth”; the Torah original, following Rashi’s commentary, reads the line as “Thou shalt be a horror unto all the kingdoms of the earth.” The line occurs in a series of verses describing in grotesque detail the curses which will befall the Children of Israel if they fail to follow the 613 commandments and laws contained in the Torah. The Oxford English Dictionary thus defines “Diaspora” as: “The Dispersion; i.e. (among the Hellenistic Jews) the whole body of Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Captivity (John 7.35).”

The word Diaspora originally referred exclusively to Jews, who, after the Babylonian and Roman conquests and resultant destruction of their sovereign state, Israel, were literally and involuntarily dispersed throughout the world. For two millennia, the Jews had no national homeland and lived in exile in the Diaspora. However, in recent years, “diaspora” has been appropriated by many other ethnic and cultural groups and used as a trope to refer to their (often voluntary) dispersion from their existent native lands.


4. Texts such as Patrick White’s Riders in the Chariot (1961) and Thomas Keneally’s Schindler’s List (1982), both authored by eminent non-Jewish writers, are examples of important Australian books which inscribe, sympathetically, major Jewish characters and motifs. The portrayal of Jewish characters and motifs in fiction by non-Jewish South Africans has been at best ambivalent. Stephen Black’s The Golden Calf (1925), Oliver Walker’s Wanton City (1949), and A. A. Murray’s Anybody’s Spring (1959) create antisemitic portraits of Jews, whereas Peter Abraham’s The Path of Thunder (1948) and Alan Paton’s Too Late the Phalarope (1953) are philosemitic in their representation of Jews. For an comprehensive investigation of the image of the Jew in South African fiction, see Marcia Leveson’s study.

The history of the Canadian Jewish community differs substantially from that of its
Antipodean and South African counterparts. Interestingly, there are very few significant literary texts by non-Jewish Canadian writers that incorporate any major or minor Jewish character or motif. The notable exception is Gwethalyn Graham’s *Earth and High Heaven*, which won the Governor General’s Award for fiction in 1944. George William Hardy’s *Father Abraham* (1935) and Dr. Wilder Penfield’s *No Other Gods* (1954) are about the Patriarch Abraham. Claudius Gregory’s *Solomon Levi* (1935) and Philip Child’s *Day of Wrath* (1945) are about Nazi German antisemitism. In the work of significant non-Jewish Canadian authors, one does find an antisemitic stereotype of the Jewish peddler *cum* farmer (Moses Schweigel, in Frederick Philip Grove’s *Fruits of the Earth* [1933]), and a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism (Nathaniel Benjamin, in Morley Callaghan’s *They Shall Inherit the Earth* [1934]). The phenomenon of non-Jewish writers incorporating Jewish themes and characters in their fiction, though interesting, is tangential to the focus of this bibliography and critical commentary.

Notes for Chapter 2: Jewish Australian Fiction

1. J. S. Levi and G. F. J. Bergman’s *Australian Genesis: Jewish Convicts and Settlers 1788-1850* is the definitive, scholarly text about the origins and history of the Australian Jewish community from 1788 to 1850. Its factual information is used in this chapter for the purpose of delineating the historical overview of Jewish settlement in Australia. It is not a book of literary history or criticism.


3. This proportion has remained constant until the present day. “In 1973, out of a total population of approximately 13 million, 70,000 were Jews” (Levi 319). Gael Hammer notes that “Jews have never numbered more than 0.5 per cent of the Australian population. In 1988 that means 80,000 people” (16). Similarly, W. D. Rubinstein writes: “About 0.5 per cent of the Australian population—one person in 200—were Jewish during the nineteenth century, a percentage which has persisted down to the present, although it is higher in Melbourne (about 1.5-2 per cent of the population) and Sydney (about 1.25 per cent)” (Introduction 3-4).

   According to figures based on the 1991 Australian federal census, Hilary Rubinstein writes in the section on Australia in the *American Jewish Yearbook 1995* that the Jewish population (extrapolated by increasing the raw number of Jewish respondents by a percentage equal to that of the general population who stated no religion or did not state a religion) stands at approximately 100,000 (352).

4. “In 1924 the Zionist Athletic Club [of Perth, Western Australia] began the publication of the *Westralian Judean* under the editorship of S. Masel, but this paper also faced financial
problems and lapsed for a number of years. In 1929 J. Pilpel revived the paper and the 
*Westralian Judean* continued publication until 1959 on a fortnightly basis as ‘a community 
magazine and a literary vehicle for budding writers’’ (Rutland 163).

5. This novel, about the lives of Jewish immigrants in the London “ghetto,” was written by 
Israel Zangwill (1864-1926) and first published in 1898 in London by Heinemann, in Leipzig 
by B. Tauchnitz, in New York by Harper and Brothers, and in Philadelphia by The Jewish 
Publication Society of America.

6. Gael Hammer states that Benjamin Newman Jubal was born in Vienna in 1901, and dates his 
arrival in Australia as 1939 (105). Nancy Keesing, on the other hand states that B. Newman 
Jubal was born in Poland in 1901, and dates his arrival in Australia as 1938 (132).

7. “Handle” is a punning anglicization of the Yiddish verb *handlen*, which means “to bargain”; 
“to do business.”

8. Yiddish is the Jewish-German “vernacular used by Jews in or from Central and Eastern 
Europe, based chiefly on High German with Hebrew and Slavonic borrowings, and written in 
Hebrew characters” (*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*).

9. For the source of this biblical allusion, see Daniel 5.1-30.

D. Rubinstein reiterates these numbers: “If the pre- and post-war figures are taken together, 
it seems likely that between, say 1933 and 1963 Australia took in around 35-40,000 Jews 
who were or had been victims of Hitler and who left Europe either to escape Nazism or as 
survivors of the Holocaust. This figure was actually much larger than the total size of the 
pre-existing Jewish community in Australia, and the relative size of this intake, small though 
it was compared with the millions who perished, ought to be kept in mind when international 
comparisons are made, especially as from May 1948 a Jewish state existed which willingly 
took any Jew in the world who wished to come. The frequently heard (and apparently true) 
statement that Melbourne contains the highest percentage of Holocaust survivors of any 
Diaspora Jewish community cannot readily be squared with the assertion that there were 
insurmountable bars to their entry” (69).

11. Mendele Mocher Sfořim means “Mendele the Bookseller,” and is the pseudonym of Sholom 
Jacob Abramovitz, the forefather of Yiddish literature. Sholom Aleichem means “Peace be 
unto you,” a traditional greeting among Jews, and is the pseudonym of Sholom Rabinowitz. 
His stories about Tevye the Dairyman were adapted in the late 1960s and early 1970s into 
both a rather sanitized musical and a subsequent movie titled *Fiddler on the Roof*. Isaac 
Leib Peretz is the third of this triumvirate of world-class Yiddish fiction writers.

12. Arnold Zable’s magnificent *Jewels and Ashes* (1991) has not been included in this chapter 
because, although it employs narrative techniques and structures found in fiction, it is a non-
fictional, (auto)biographical reconstruction of Zable’s family’s Bialystock history and
genealogy—scorched and decimated by World War II. It is a beautifully and powerfully written Shoah memoir, and thus belongs to a body of literary testimony beyond the scope of this chapter's focus on fiction.

Notes for Chapter 3: Jewish South African Fiction

1. Interestingly, a similarly Eurocentric perspective is usually adopted with respect to the Jewish community of Australia. For example, Suzanne D. Rutland's history is titled Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia (1988).

2. “The phrase ‘Jewish self-hatred’ was popularized by Theodor Lessing, Der jüdische Selbsthass (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1930), but is rooted in work done in Germany before World War I” (Gilman 393). Lessing was a Protestant convert whose work embodied, indeed thematized, his own Jewish identity crisis.

3. In The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa, Milton Shain remarks in an endnote: “The term Peruvian is probably an acronym for Polish and Russian Union—a Jewish club established in Kimberley in the early days. It has also been suggested that the term refers to those immigrants who had sojourned in Argentina under Baron de Hirsch’s settlement scheme before coming to South Africa. If that is the origin of the term, the lack of a geographical distinction between Argentina and Peru needs to be explained. . . . Another theory is that the term is derived from “Peruvia,” a mistaken reference to the ancient Latin term for Poland” (163-64). That the etymology and derivation of the term Peruvian itself may be theoretically and geographically problematic is less important than its indisputably hostile and derogatory application, in practice, to a single, identifiable target: Jews.

4. “Under the leadership of the African National Congress, whose founding dated back to 1912, nonviolent opposition swelled to unprecedented proportions. The 1952 Defiance Campaign openly violated apartheid laws, with the protesters allowing themselves to be arrested. A second wave of protest led to a ‘Congress of the People’ in 1955, and a third wave to the famous Sharpeville demonstration of March 1960, in which the police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 people and wounding 180” (Shimoni 11).


6. “The plot is drawn from an historical incident, the encampment of a group of black religious zealots, the Israelites, at Bulhoek in the Cape Province in order to celebrate the Passover
year in 1920-1921, and the government’s violent destruction of the camp” (Leveson 79).

7. The relation between Jew and Black and the parallels between them in South Africa is a theme explored by Gillian Slovo (1952-) in her 1989 novel, Ties of Blood. Gillian and her parents, the famous Jewish South African Communists—Joe Slovo and Ruth First were forced into exile 1964, settling in London, England, where she still lives. Ruth First was killed by a letter bomb. Ties of Blood is an encyclopedic, anti-apartheid genealogical saga counterpointing the lives of several generations of two South African families, one Jewish and one Black.

8. Sarah Gertrude Millin’s The Coming of the Lord (1928), discussed earlier, uses the same historical incident. See endnote 6 above.


10. The Keep is the first text of a proposed trilogy, the second novel of which was The Union (1971). The Virgins (1976), however, does not appear to be the anticipated third novel of the proposed trio. The antipathy towards Jews displayed in her first novel does not appear in Becker’s subsequent fiction.


11. Sher’s second novel, The Indoor Boy (1991), reprises both his personal obsessions and the apartheid of antisemitic self-erasure present in Middlepost.

12. Other fiction thematizing a Jewish family saga and published by Jewish South African writers during the 1980s includes Lynn Freed’s novel Home Ground (1986) and Denis Hirson’s novel The House Next Door to Africa (1986).
Notes for Chapter 4: Jewish Canadian Fiction

1. According to John Robert Colombo's reference book, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations* (1974), the first use of the word “mosaic” in its Canadian cultural and sociological context occurred in 1922. The term had been in existence and in use then for some decades before Porter made it vertical.

2. Both Irving Abella, in *A Coat of Many Colours* (1-2), and Sheldon and Judith Godfrey, in *Search Out the Land* (35-36), attest to the veracity of the Esther Brandeau story. However, in *Taking Root*, Gerald Tulchinsky dismisses it as “probably apocryphal” (14).

3. “Marianne Periou, a Jewess and native of the Xaintes region north of Bordeaux, was found in Louisbourg in July 1749 by the French forces when Île Royale (as Cape Breton Island was known) was returned to French control by the English as a result of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Two weeks later, on 14 August, Marianne Periou, now renamed ‘Marie,’ was baptized ‘after being instructed in the Roman Catholic faith.’ She signed her name with a crossed mark (‘X’) on her baptismal certificate, either because she was illiterate or as a gesture of defiance as in ‘crossing one’s fingers’” (Godfrey 36). She is not mentioned in Gerald Tulchinsky’s *Taking Root*.

4. Both Abella (*Coat* 13, 23), and Godfrey (97, 284) correctly record his name as Lazarus David (1734-1776).

5. With the proclamation of Act 1, William IV, chapter 57, “An Act to Declare Persons Professing the Jewish Religion Entitled to All the Rights and Privileges of the Other Subjects of His Majesty in this Province” (Brown 198), Lower Canada emancipated its approximately one hundred Jews, becoming the first colony in the British Empire to do so (“[w]ith the possible exception of Jamaica”), and predating Britain itself in such legislation by some twenty-five years (Abella, *Coat* 30). The Jewish Relief Act was passed in Britain in 1858, thus allowing England’s first Jewish member of the House of Commons, Baron Lionel de Rothschild, to take the seat he had won eleven years previously (Godfrey 226). Previously, The Jewish Disabilities Removal Act of 1845 had excused Jews elected to municipal office from having to make their declaration (formerly, their oath of office) “upon the true faith of a Christian,” thus permitting David Salomons to take office as an alderman of the City of London, England, after being elected in 1847. Although he had been elected alderman twice before, in 1835 and 1844, he had been unable to subscribe to the standard declaration and was consequently disqualified. In 1885, he was elected mayor of the City of London, England (Godfrey 226).

6. “In October 1978, as a result of development in the area, [Moses] David’s remains were exhumed and removed to Windsor’s Shaar Hashomayim Cemetery” (Godfrey 318).
7. Sheldon and Judith Godfrey record his name as Simon Solomon (1767-1839), “a watchmaker of Jewish origin,” who was the colony’s first postmaster, “located at St John’s” (170, 323).

8. Congregation Emanu-El is the oldest surviving synagogue—in continuous use as a synagogue since its construction and in its original location—both in Canada and on the West Coast of North America. In 1948, the synagogue was “modernized,” and its former character destroyed. The exterior brick and virtually all the windows were completely covered with stucco; the huge wooden central doors were removed; a false ceiling was installed in the main sanctuary, thus demolishing the second-storey women’s gallery; and the magnificent, seven-foot skylight was removed from the cupola of the vaulted ceiling and the resulting hole boarded over. In 1978, a committee chaired by Martin Levin was convened to plan the restoration of the synagogue. The Heritage Conservation Branch of the British Columbia Provincial Government was consulted, and fund raising for the project began in 1979. The B.C. Heritage Trust Fund contributed $82,000.00 to the project. The restoration was officially launched by (then) Premier William Bennett in April 1980. The completion of the beautifully and fully restored synagogue in June 1982 was celebrated by the entire city of Victoria in a re-enactment of the events of June 1863. The renovated house of worship was identical in all aspects to the original structure designed by architect John Wright. The original building site had been purchased for $730.00 in 1862, and the original edifice constructed at a cost of $9195.00. The cost for the total renovation was $367,000.00, and the refurbished synagogue—designated a National Historic Site in June 1983, on the 120th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone—still serves as the place of worship for Victoria’s Jewish community.

9. “In October 1856, George Benjamin was elected to the parliament of Canada representing North Hastings [Canada West]. When he took his oath of office in February 1857, he became the first Jew seated in a legislature in British North America” (Godfrey 226).

10. Reverend Abraham de Sola (1825-1882), having arrived from England in January 1847 to become the spiritual leader of the Congregation of Portuguese Jews of Montreal, a position he held for thirty-five years, refused to accept the repeated invitations—and even the entreaties of a delegation with whom he met—to attend the dedication of Shaar Hashomayim in 1859. Relations between the two congregations remained strained for years. Upon his death, Abraham de Sola was succeeded by his son, Meldola de Sola, who led the congregation from 1882 until 1918.

11. It was not until Samuel Bronfman, son of immigrant parents who had settled in the Wapella, Saskatchewan, Jewish farm colony, took over as president of the C.J.C. in 1938 that the organization achieved the stability and clout it had formerly lacked. The Bronfman family fortune was made through their Seagram’s Distillery. From 1979-1981, Edgar Bronfman, Samuel’s son, was Acting President of the World Jewish Congress (New York). From 1981 until the present, Edgar Bronfman has been President of the W.J.C.

12. The first published Jewish writer in British North America was Adolphus Mordecai Hart (1813-1879)—son of Ezekiel Hart and grandson of Aaron Hart of Trois Rivières—who

13. There is an exception. Edelstein was not overlooked by V. B. Rhodenizer when, in 1954, he revised and enlarged the important 1922 anthology *Our Canadian Literature: Representative Verse, English and French*, which had originally been compiled by Bliss Carman and Lorne Pierce, and retitled it *Canadian Poetry in English*. Interestingly, however, of the three Edelstein poems included in the new anthology—"Last Mathematician," "Palimpsest," and "Indian Night Tableau"—not one displays or celebrates the overt Jewish sensibility, consciousness, and identification present in many of his stronger poems.


15. During the approximately two years of its existence (1936-1937), the *New Frontier* published Ted Allan’s first short story, plus several other non-fiction prose articles he wrote for it. Among these non-fictional pieces are: “Guilty! Mr. Croll: A Story of Hawkesbury,” reportage about the living conditions of the unemployed poor in Hawkesbury (Ontario), constructed as a story and published in January 1937 (Cf. Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* [1860-61]); and “An Interview with Ernest Hemingway,” an article from Spain published in July-August 1937.

16. The frequently anthologized “Lies My Father Told Me” has appeared in several other incarnations: as a one-hour radio drama on the C.B.C.; as a film from Dublin, Ireland, directed by Emmett Dalton with the Abbey Theatre Players; as an Academy Award-nominated feature film for which Allan wrote the screenplay (1974); as a novel, written by Norman Allan, based on Ted Allan’s screenplay (1975); and as a play with music (1984).


20. Another chronicler of Jewish life on the Canadian prairies is Fredelle Bruser Maynard (1922-1989), born in Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, whose autobiographical stories are
collected in *Raisins and Almonds* (1972) and *The Tree of Life* (1988).

21. With the publication of *The Suicide Murders* in 1980, his first detective novel, Howard Engel introduced Benny Cooperman, a Jewish Canadian gumshoe based in Grantham, Ontario, a fictionalized St. Catharines. The Benny Cooperman Mysteries, now numbering more than eight titles, have become extremely popular. Rabbi Martin S. Cohen, spiritual leader of Beth Tikvah Synagogue in Richmond, B.C., has also published a mystery *cum* detective novel: *The Truth about Marvin Kalish: A Mystery* (1992).


23. *Beautiful Losers* is a novel about canonization, and it has been canonized as one of raunchiest, rawest, and most sexually explicit (pornographic, some would argue) texts in Canadian Literature. However, it does not foreground Jewish themes or characters and is thus not germane to this study.

24. About the initial puzzled critical response to *The Spanish Doctor*, Matt Cohen comments: "Finally I came to understand that *The Spanish Doctor* had come as such a shock to so many of my readers, especially the critics, because of their sense that I had betrayed my Canadianess by writing about being Jewish. It tells you something uncomfortable about people's conception of what it means to be a Canadian. Even after *Nadine* was published people would say to me: 'Are you going to write about Canada again?' I would reply that most of *Nadine* takes place in Canada, and that her being Jewish does not mean she is not Canadian. Then they would be offended, as if I had made a hostile remark" (Interview 175).

25. Three such anthologies of Jewish Canadian writing have been published: *The Spice Box: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Writing* (1981), compiled by Gerri Sinclair and Morris Wolfe; *Mirror of a People: Canadian Jewish Experience in Poetry and Prose* (1985), compiled by Sheldon Oberman and Elaine Newton; and *Canadian Jewish Short Stories* (1990), compiled by Miriam Waddington.

Notes for Chapter 5: Epilogue

1. Steve Jacobs (1955- ) is a Jewish South African member of this next generation. However, his fiction contains minimal Jewish content.
2. For a Jewish Canadian writer's autobiographical account of his trips to Israel and his tourist's analysis/interpretation/construction of the political, cultural, and social situation there, see *This Year in Jerusalem* (1994) by Mordecai Richler.

3. For the articulation of a point of view diametrically opposed to Roiphe's, see S. Lillian Kremer's 1993 article "Post-alienation: Recent Directions in Jewish-American Literature."

4. Because this critical commentary focusses on post-*Shoah* Jewish fiction written in English, the three Jewish Canadian authors who write and publish in French—Monique Bosco (1927- ), Nairn Kattan (1928- ), and Régine Robin (1939- )—have not been included. Their contribution to both Canadian Literature and Jewish Literature, however, is considerable.

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PART B
JEWISH FICTION WRITERS OF
AUSTRALIA, CANADA, AND
SOUTH AFRICA:
AN ENUMERATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF PRIMARY MATERIALS
FOREWORD

This bibliography is an original, numbered, and indexed compilation of the works of prose fiction written by Jewish authors of Australia, Canada, and South Africa. In order that the bibliography be as inclusive as possible, the entries have not been restricted to a specific range of dates. Therefore, citations from the nineteenth century to 1996 are listed. Those Jewish authors who write only poetry, drama, or non-fictional prose have not been included. However, since many of the Jewish fiction writers whose work is enumerated here write in more than one literary genre, the compiler thought it appropriate to include all their titles.

Although Jewish works of fiction written in Yiddish are beyond the parameters of this compilation, if a Yiddish text has been translated into English, it has been included. In addition, the work of Monique Bosco, Naim Kattan, and Régine Robin—three Jewish Canadian authors whose fiction is written in French—has also been included.

An alphabetical author index, arranged by country, precedes the bibliography. When known, author’s dates have been given. A blank space follows the names of authors whose dates remain as yet unascertained.
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