The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America



Selected Texts Compiled by
Monique R. Balbuena

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Cover Art: Lasar Segall. *Caboclas Montadas*

Thinking About Diaspora: Latin American Jewish Writers & Filmmakers

Monday, November 13, 2000-3:45-4:45: Other Traditions

Selected Latin American Jewish Web Sites

Prepared by David Hirsch
Jewish and Middle Eastern Studies Bibliographer
Charles E. Young Research Library
UCLA
email: dhirsch@library.ucla.edu

General Latin American Jewish Sites

Bibliography of Recent Latin American Judaica at UCLA
http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/url/colls/judaica/lajs.htm

Latin American Jewish Fiction, Poetry, Theatre and Film: A Bibliography of Works Published from 1996-
http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/url/colls/judaica/fiction.htm

Internet Resources for Jewish Latin America and the Caribbean
http://www.fiu.edu/~library/internet/subjects/jewishsites.html

Congreso Judío Latinoamericano
http://www.counsnet.com/ojicjl/

Jainet
http://www.jainet.org/

Latin American Jewish Studies Association
http://www.lanic.utexas.edu/project/lajsa/index.html

Rishón: La web judía de Latinoamérica
http://www.rishon.com.ar/rishon/default.htm

HebreosNet
http://www.hebreos.net/

KehilaNet
http://www.kehilanet.com

Comunidad judia de Latinoamerica en Internet
http://shalomonline.com/

Country Specific Jewish Sites

Judíos en Argentina
http://www.virtualg.com/judaica/

Bait-Portal Judaico (Brazil)
http://www.bait.com.br

Pletz@le (Brazil)
http://pagina.de/judaismo

Eifo? (Brazil)
http://www.eifo.com.br/

Inform@sion (Chile)
http://www.informa-sion.cl

Comunidad Judía Guatemalteca
http://comunidadjudia.com/

Bet-el Chile
http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Andes/6998/

Tribuna Israelita
http://www.ort.org.mx/tribuna/

NetJudaica-Brazil
http://www.netjudaica.com.br/

Judaismo.com.br
http://www.judaismo.com.br/

Regional and Local Communities and Federations

Asociación Israelita de Cochabamba
http://www.shalomonline.com/cochabamba/index.htm

Federação Israelita do Parana
http://www.feip.org.br/

FISESP
http://www.fisesp.org.br/

Federação Israelita de Rio Grande do Sul
http://www.firgs.com.br

CIP – Congregação Israelita Paulista (São Paulo, Brazil)
http://www.cipsp.org.br/

Rabinato do Rio de Janeiro
http://home.openlink.com.br/rabinatorj/

Centro Hebraico Riograndense
http://www.centrohebraico.org.br/

FISEMG - Federação Israelita do Estado de Minas Gerais (Brazil)
http://www.fisemg.prointer.net/

Sociedade Beneficiente Israelita de Santa Maria - RS (Brazil)
http://www.kehilah-sm.org.br/index.htm

Ecuadorean Jewish Community (Currently not operational)
http://www.angelfire.com/il/PaulHeller/index3.html

Jews of Suriname
http://www.cq-link.sr/personal/debye/index.html

Freeport Hebrew Congregation (Bahamas)
http://www.uahcweb.org/congs/ot/ot031/

Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas
http://www.daia.org.ar/

Congregación B'nei Israel (San José, Costa Rica)
http://www.bnei-israel.org/

Comunidad Hebrea Hatikvah (Santiago de Cuba)
http://www.jewishcuba.org/hatikva/hatikva.html

Jewish Solidarity (Cuba)
http://www.jewish-solidarity.com/

Leatid – Hacia el Futuro (Argentina)
http://www.leatid.com/infole.htm

Tribuna Israelita (Mexico)
http://www.ort.edu.uy/

Union Israelita – Caracas, Venezuela
http://www.uic.org/

Congregação Judaica do Brasil- Rio de Janeiro
http://blue.marlin.com.br/~cjb/

Asociación Israelita de Venezuela
http://www.aiv.org

Jewish Museums

Museo Judio de Valparaiso
http://www.angelfire.com/vt/museojudio/

Museo Historico Comunal y de la Colonizacion Judia en la Argentina "Aaron Halevi Goldma
http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Opera/4576/

Museu Judaico do Rio de Janeiro
http://www.museujudaico.org.br/

Museo Historico Regional de la Colonia Judia de Villa Dominguez-Entre Rios
(Argentina) (Photgraphic Archive)
http://shalomonline.com/villa_dominguez/fotos.htm

Museo de la Shoa (Holocaust Museum) Buenos Aires
http://www.museodelashoa.org.ar/

Chabad

Beit Lubavitch Rio de Janeiro
http://www.BEITLUBAVITCH.org.br/index1.htm

Associação Beneficente Cultural Lubavitch
http://www.lubavitch.org.br/

Beit Jabad Perú
http://www.lp.edu.pe/jabad/

Jabad Lubavitch Argentina
http://www.jabad.org.ar/

Beit Chabad Morumbi-Brazil
http://www.chabadmorumbi.com.br/

Other Religious Sites

Tora.org.ar
http://www.tora.org.ar

Women's Organizations

Naamat Brazil (Women's Group)
www.naamat.com.br

WIZO Brazil
http://www.wizosp.org.br/flash4page.html

Organización Sionista Femenina Argentina (OSFA - WIZO)
http://www.wizo.osfa.org.ar

B'nai Brith

B'nai B'rith – Distrito XXIII
http://www.bnaibrith23.org.mx/Actividades/DistritoXXIII.html

B'nai Brith District 23 (Northern South America, Central America, Caribbean and Mexico)
http://www.bnaibrith23.org.mx/

B'nai Brith Brazil
http://www.bnai-brith.org.br/

Jewish Sports Clubs

Associação Brasileira "A Hebraica" de São Paulo
http://www.hebraica.org.br/

Sociedad Hebraica Argentina
http://www.hebraica.org.ar/

Hebraica Venezuela
http://www.hebraica-online.com/

Macabi Centroamerica
http://www.macabi.centroamerica.com/

Centro Deportivo Israelita de Mexico
www.cdi.org.mx

FACCMA
http://www.faccma.org.ar/

Jewish Schools and Educational Organizations

Vaad Hajinuj (Board of Jewish Education in Argentina)
http://www.vaadhajinuj.org

Vaad Hachinuch (Board of Jewish Education in Brazil)
http://www.vaad-hachinuch.org.br/

Colegio Israelita Brasileira (Porto Alegre)
http://www.tche.br/israelita/

Instituto Alberto Einstein-PANAMA
http://www.iae.edu/

Leon Pinelo: the Jewish School in Peru
http://www.lp.edu.pe/

La Universidad Hebraica (Mexico)
http://www.hebraica.edu.mx/hebraica/index.html

Colegio Tarbut.-Buenos Aires
http://tarbut.esc.edu.ar/

Instituto Martín Buber (Argentina)
http://buber.esc.edu.ar/

Colegio Hebreo "Janusz Korczak" (Chile)
http://members.tripod.com/~januzk/

Instituto Argentino Hebreo "Marc Chagall"
http://www.marcchagall.com.ar/

Colegio Israelita de Mexico
http://www.idishe.com/

Escuela Integral Hebreo Uruguaya (Montevideo)
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5944/

Escuela Israelita Dr. Max Nordau
http://www.mnordau.com.ar/

Escuela Hebrea J. N. Bialik (La Plata, Argentina)
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/1767/

Sociedade Hebraico Brasileiro Renascença
http://www.renascenca.br/index.htm

ORT Argentina
http://www.ort.edu.ar/

ORT Brasil
http://www.ort.org.br/

ORT Chile
http://www.ort.cl/

ORT Uruguay Instituto de Educación Superior
http://www.ort.edu.uy/

ORT Mexico
http://www.ort.org.mx/

Publishers and Booksellers

Sefer
http://www.sefer.com.br/

Kehot Lubavitch Sudamerica
http://www.kehot-lubavitch.com.ar/

Libreria Sigal
http://www.reis.com.ar/SIGAL/

Libreria Cultural Maimonides
http://www.libreriamaimonides.com/

Online Publications and Newspapers

Kesher (Mexico)
http://kesher.org.mx/

Alef (Brazil)
http://www.jornalalef.com.br/

Judaismo & Cultura (Brazil)
http://www.editorial.com.br/judaismoecultura/index.htm

Palabra Israelita (Chile)
http://www.cis.cl/lapalabra/index.html

Jadashot Online-Monterrey, Mexico
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/7166/

La Luz: La Revista Judia Independente
http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1286/

O Hebreu
www.comunidadejudaica.com.br/ohebreu

Der Ruf=El Llamado
http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/4672/

Yiddish in Latin America

IWO- Instituto Científico Judío
http://www.iwo.org.ar/

Sephardic Organizations

Centro de Investigación y Difusión de la Cultura Sefardí (CIDICSEF)
http://www.cidicsef.org.ar

Instituciones Sefaradíes de Chile
http://members.tripod.com/sefard/bib.html

Historical Archives

Arquivo Histórico Judaico Brasileiro
http://www.ceveh.com.br/ahjb/

Centro de Documentacion e Informacion sobre Judaismo Argentino "Marc Turkow"
http://www.kehilanet.com/instituciones/mturkow/

Mongui Maduro Stichting (Curacao)
http://www.madurolibrary.org/index.htm

Jewish Youth Groups

Macabi Hatzair-Mexico
http://www.cem.itesm.mx/spanish/alumnos/444828/Macabi_Mexico.html

Habonim-Brazil
http://www.habonim.netpoint.com.br

Hashomer Hatzair Chile
http://cipres.cec.uchile.cl/~jheiss/

Maccabi Hatzair Viña del Mar (Chile)
http://www.fortunecity.com/marina/borabora/498/

Tzeirei-Ami Online
http://www.tzeirei.cl/cons.html

Chazit Hanoar São Paulo
http://www.dialdata.com.br/judaismo/chazit/

Binyan Olam
http://www.binyanolam.org.br/index2.html

Movimento Juvenil Sionista Betar São Paulo
http://www.betarsp.cjb.net

Habonim Dror -Curitiba
http://www.sul.com.br/~cip/dror/

Hanoar Hatzioni Peru
http://www.lp.edu.pe/hanoar/

Bnei Akiva-Mexico
http://www.bneiakiva.org.mx/

Hanoar Uruguay
http://members.nbci.com/_XMCM/hanoaru/index.htm

Jewish Senior Citizen Organizations/Residences

Hogar Adolfo HIrsch-Centro Para Adultos Mayores de la Comunidad Judia (Argentina)
http://www.a-f-i.com/

Lar Golda Meir
www.largoldameir.com.br

Jewish Radio Stations/Programs

FM-Jai
http://www.radiojai.com.ar/root/index.asp

Programa Eretz
www.eretz.com.br

Programa Shalom Israel
http://www.18multimidia.com/shalomisrael/

Jewish Genealogical Societies

Asociación de Genealogía Judía de Argentina
http://www.marben.com.ar/agja/

Sociedade Genealogica Judaica do Brasil
http://www.netjudaica.com.br/sgjb/

Miscellaneous

Keren Kayemet (Peru)
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/4717/kklperu.html

A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN AMERICA

HOWARD M. SACHAR



NEW YORK ALFRED A. KNOPF

1992

CHAPTER I

A FOOTHOLD IN THE EARLY AMERICAS

A Transplanted Sephardic Heritage

"THE SPANISH LEVEL of appearance is high," observed V. S. Pritchett in his volume *The Spanish Temper.* "Indeed, a certain regularity of feature, boldness of nose, and brilliance appear to have been standardized. The amount of Jewish blood is, one would think, high." It is more than high. In the sixteenth century, the quarter-million Jews among Spain's four million inhabitants could not have avoided a "deep racial infiltration" (in Pritchett's words). Consciousness of that osmosis, possibly as much as the growing animosity of the "native" urban middle class, persuaded King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella that this infidel minority was expendable. Initially, the Jews had been driven only from Andalusia. In 1492, the edict of their banishment was extended to the entire Spanish realm.

In earlier years, to escape persecution and intimidation, Jews had undergone baptism by the thousands. Yet it was precisely from the ranks of these *conversos* that men of Jewish birth later ascended to the most exalted echelons of state and church. Not a few became patrons of Christopher Columbus. Among them were Bishop Diego de Deza; Juan Cabrero, King Ferdinand's chamberlain; Alfonso de la Caballeria, vice-chancellor of Aragon, whose brother and sister had been burned at the stake as *marranos,* or secretly professing Jews; and Luis de Santangel, grandson of a converso and member of a leading merchant banking family. It was Santangel, keeper of the privy purse and comptroller general of Aragon, who induced Isabella to give the Italian explorer his chance. Folklore notwithstanding, the queen hardly was obliged to pawn her jewels to finance the expedition. Santangel saw to that. In anticipation of a swift payoff for Spanish rule in the Indies, the comptroller general advanced Columbus a substantial part of the initial capital. There were yet additional sources of Jewish funds. It was on April 20, 1492, the day Columbus received authorization to equip his fleet, that King Ferdinand publicly announced the expulsion of the Jews and confiscation of their remaining property.

Only a fraction of the booty could be assessed or collected before Columbus departed. By the time of his second journey, however, in 1493, the government had appropriated and auctioned off for the royal treasury important quantities of Jewish real estate and chattels, gold and silver utensils and jewels, Torah mantles and silk table covers. The loot exceeded 6 million maravedis. This time Columbus departed in style.

Among the ninety-odd men who sailed in the first expedition were several probable marranos, among them Alfonso de la Calle, the second mate; Maestro Bernal, the physician; Rodrigo Sanchez, the comptroller; Luis de Torres, the interpreter. Torres actually remained in the New World. Settling in Cuba, where he believed himself safe from the Inquisition, he set a precedent for other baptized Jews. Among those who followed were at least a hundred who almost certainly observed their ancestral religion in secret. Indeed, the emigration of Jewish converts did not go unremarked, or unsuspected. In 1518, the Crown forbade converso settlement in the Spanish colonies altogether. A year later it authorized the Church to transplant the Inquisition to overseas territories. Yet by then the ban worked only fitfully. With the Spanish "temper" rather too thoroughly Judaized, thousands of additional Sephardim—Jews of Iberian ancestry—continued to make their way to the New World. Many earned their livelihoods as they had in Europe, as merchants and artisans, importers and exporters, physicians and engineers, even as high officials in the colonial administration.

Moreover, with immigration to New Spain quickening in the latter sixteenth century, the largest numbers of Sephardim no longer came directly from the homeland. In the aftermath of the 1492 expulsion decree, Portugal became the initial sanctuary for some one hundred fifty thousand of the Jewish exiles. Five years later, the Portuguese monarch ordered them out, except for those who would accept conversion. Perhaps thirty or forty thousand remained, ostensibly as baptized Christians. The departing majority joined other thousands of Jews who earlier had fled Spain for refuge elsewhere in Europe and the Middle East. Even the converts who stayed on lived under a cloud, distrusted as marranos. The suspicion was justified. Thousands of Portuguese New Christians almost certainly were secretly professing Jews. Among these, too, many were desperate to achieve a fresh lease on life in the New World. On Pedro Alvares Cabral's expedition of discovery to Brazil in 1500, the converso Gaspar de Gama served as interpreter. The converso Fernão de Noronha became Brazil's first governor, in 1502. He was joined by other conversos in such numbers that commercial enterprise in Brazil remained extensively in Sephardic hands for the ensuing two decades.

Thus, by the mid-seventeenth century, it was essentially Sephardim in the provinces of Bahía and Pernambuco who owned and operated the largest numbers of Brazil's sugar refineries. Even then, however, for all their dynamism and financial success, the quality of their lives was less than enviable. As New Christians, they were under continual surveillance. Each year twenty or thirty of them were arrested as suspected marranos and deported to Lisbon for trial by the Inquisition. Their children were dispatched to exile in disease-ridden African islands. "Oh, it is indeed time that the Lord would right the wrongs of Israel," lamented Solomon ben Verga in chronicling these episodes, "[for this] persecution was one of the most barbarous and fiendish our people has ever endured." Whatever their opportunity for economic gain, the Sephardim of Latin America were a timorous community, never certain when they might be denounced and stripped of their property, their freedom, their children—their lives. Their hope for a renewed future in the New World would always remain precarious under the rule of hairshirt Catholic monarchies.

By this time, however, other alternatives existed. The Netherlands was preeminent among them. Since winning their independence from Spain in 1561, the Protestant Dutch had opened their borders to refugees from Catholic oppression. In 1593, the first shipload of Portuguese marranos was allowed refuge in Amsterdam, and by the end of the seventeenth century a solid Jewish community was established there. If the Jewish newcomers were not initially awarded full civil equality, they were permitted at least to reside in physical security, and to practice their religion in their own synagogues. Whatever their own Reformed Church's Calvinist intolerance, the Dutch were first and foremost mercantilists. They sensed the potential usefulness of Jewish traders and financiers. By 1612 there were ten "Jew brokers" among the three hundred members of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange. Accordingly, by 1621 a handful of Sephardim became organizers and important shareholders of the Dutch West India Company. Undergirded in economic security, Holland's Sephardic Jewry within fifty years developed into the principal focus of European Jewish intellectual and spiritual life, a "Dutch Jerusalem" that functioned as mentor for Sephardic Jews, professing or secret, in Western Europe and the New World alike.

That influence overseas followed in the wake of the Dutch West India Company. Established as early as 1620, the great shipping and trading corporation soon had its vessels preying on Spanish and Portuguese commerce, occupying Caribbean islands, claiming a share of Brazil's sugar and redwood traffic. In 1630, finally, the Dutch laid siege to Recife, capital of the Brazilian province of Pernambuco and the world's single largest source of refined sugar. To weaken resistance,

they pledged civil equality for all of Pernambuco's inhabitants, "whether they be Roman Catholics or Jews." Recife's crypto-Jews were listening. Eagerly they welcomed and heartily many cooperated with the triumphant Dutch expeditionary force. Indeed, the prospect of better times under the Netherlands flag not only lured Recife's marranos out of hiding but attracted Jews from Amsterdam itself, from England, from the Ottoman Balkans, from Central and Eastern Europe. Together in Recife, they proceeded to organize the first openly proclaimed Jewish congregation in the New World, to bring over an Amsterdam rabbi, to construct a synagogue and a kosher abattoir, to open Hebrew schools for their children. By mid-century, Jews, numbering perhaps fifteen hundred souls, a third of Recife's white population, enjoyed fuller rights in Dutch Brazil than they did in Holland itself.

The idyll did not last. As early as 1645, Portugal launched a reconquest expedition, and for nearly a decade Recife endured a crisis of siege and hunger. In January 1654, the colony surrendered. General Francisco Barreto de Menenzes, the Portuguese commander, was an enlightened man. His surprisingly generous terms included a full pardon to all who had engaged in "rebellion" against the Crown of Portugal, including the Jews, with an assurance of respectful treatment if they stayed on. But the promise was meaningless for the Sephardim. Many had been marranos, and General Barreto was under orders to introduce the Inquisition in Pernambuco. "In matters subject to the Holy Inquisition I cannot interfere," he regretfully informed Recife's Sephardim. Within three months of the Portuguese reconquest, the entirety of Recife's Jewish population departed. Fourteen of their sixteen refugee vessels sailed for the Netherlands.

For the remaining two shiploads, the Dutch West Indies appeared a useful alternative. Sephardic families already had made their appearance in the Windward Islands and in the Leeward Islands of Saint Eustatius, Saba, and Saint Martin, in Aruba and Curaçao. Indeed, Curaçao, a substantial naval base and commercial entrepôt, soon became the hub of Jewish settlement in the Netherlands Antilles. By 1715 its Jewish population of importers, plantation owners, and slave traders numbered perhaps two thousand, a third of Curaçao's white population and the single largest identified Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere. Enjoying the solicitude of the powerful mother congregation in Amsterdam, Curaçao's Sephardim eventually would help nurture yet another fledgling Jewish settlement in the Dutch New World.

A Precarious North American Beachhead

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1654, a month after the Portuguese reconquest, the Dutch schooner *Valck*, one of the two remaining vessels carrying Brazilian Jewish refugees, sailed out of Recife. Its intended first port of call was the French island of Martinique. En route, however, the *Valck* was intercepted by a Spanish privateer and compelled to drop anchor in Jamaica, then under Spanish rule. The passengers were despoiled of all possessions except their clothes and furniture. Several baptized Sephardim among them were incarcerated by the local Inquisition. The rest, twenty-three professing Jews, were allowed to depart with the Gentile majority. These included four men, six women (married and widowed), and thirteen children. Most were Dutch or Italian Sephardim, but a few probably were Ashkenazim—Jews of Central European ancestry. The little group's next anchorage was Cape St. Anthony, on the western tip of Cuba. Here they anticipated securing passage for New Amsterdam, the West India Company's outpost on mainland North America. Thus, at the Cape, they negotiated a contract with the captain of the French barque *Ste. Catherine* (later mistakenly identified as the *St. Charles*), who agreed to transport them for the exorbitant fee of twenty-five hundred guilders, nine hundred to be paid in advance. In mid-summer, then, the *Ste. Catherine* headed north, and in early September 1654 it sailed into the mouth of the Hudson River, on the western tip of Manhattan Island, where it dropped anchor at the little fortress-town of New Amsterdam, "capital" of the New Netherlands.

In fact, the twenty-three hapless refugees on the *Ste. Catherine* were not the first Jews to set foot in this ramshackle village. Occasional Jewish traders from Dutch Brazil and the West Indies had passed through in earlier years. One of these, Jacob Barsimson, a young Central European Ashkenazi, had arrived directly from Holland only three weeks before the Recife passengers. Conceivably he was among the group of onlookers who witnessed the landing of the *Ste. Catherine.* It could not have been a happy sight. When the Jewish refugees failed to produce the balance of their passage money, the irate captain immediately sought and obtained a court order to attach their furniture. And when a public auction did not cover the debt, two of the Jews were promptly clapped in the stockade. There they remained until October, when kinsmen in Amsterdam finally dispatched the needed funds.

The ordeal of the Recife immigrants had only begun. Thus far they had subsisted on handouts provided by Jacob Barsimson and by

one Solomon Pietersen, who may also have been a Jew. But winter was coming and the newcomers would require shelter and hot meals. At the last moment, Dominie Johannes Megapolensis and his colleagues of the local Dutch Reformed Church provided a few hundred guilders, for the "Jews have come weeping and bemoaning their misery." The churchmen were influenced less by Christian charity, as it happened, than by expectation that the newcomers soon would be gone. New Amsterdam's governor, Pieter Stuyvesant, was known to be hostile to Jews. Earlier, as governor of Curaçao, he had been exasperated by the local Jewry's aversion to farming, by their incorrigible preference for commerce. Stuyvesant had not presumed to exile them from Curaçao, for the West India Company favored toleration as a mercantilist principle. Nor would he act on his own now in expelling the Recife fugitives. Yet, writing to the Dutch West India Company board in Amsterdam, he warned that the Jews were notorious for "their usury and deceitful trading with the Christians." They should be ordered out.

Before a reply could arrive, still another contingent of Jews arrived in New Amsterdam, in March 1655. The newcomers—five families and three unmarried males—had sailed direct from Holland. They were not indigent. Neither were they obsequious. Rather, they made clear their intention of organizing a congregation and conducting Hebrew religious services. The prospect was altogether too much for Johannes Megapolensis. Adding his appeal to Stuyvesant's, the dominie warned, in his letter to the Church classis in Amsterdam, and through them to the company, that

> as we have here Papists, Mennonites and Lutherans among the Dutch, also many Puritans or Independents, and many Atheists and various other servants of Baal among the English under this Government, who conceal themselves under the name of Christians, it would create still greater confusion if the obstinate and immovable Jews came to settle here.

As it happened, the "obstinate and immovable Jews" were not without contacts of their own. Among these were several important Jewish stockholders in the West India Company. They in turn reminded the board that the original Recife fugitives had "risked their possessions and their blood in defense of the lost [Brazilian] Dutch colony," that Jews had brought only economic benefit wherever in the Dutch Empire they had settled. The argument registered. In its response, the board instructed Stuyvesant to allow the Jews to settle, worship, and trade in New Netherlands, provided "the poor among them shall not become a burden to the Deaconry or the Company, but be supported by their own nation." When Stuyvesant ventured a second protest, suggesting that "giving them liberty, we cannot refuse the Lutherans and Papists," the board had an answer for that, too. It was for the Jews to conduct their religious activities in private, to refrain from building a public house of worship.

The newcomers meanwhile set about earning their livelihoods. They subsisted as butchers, metalworkers, importers, peddlers. Renting their lodgings, securing access to their own burial ground, they also managed somehow to provide for their indigent and orphaned. The feat was accomplished in the face of Stuyvesant's endless harassment. Evading the Company's injunction at every opportunity, the governor forbade Jews to trade with the Indians, to buy homes or business premises, to open shops for retail trade, to vote (as by then they could in the Netherlands itself), to hold office or serve in the militia. It does not appear that Stuyvesant was animated by bigotry alone. In their financial desperation and wary demeanor, the Jews seemingly confirmed his charge that they were "very repellent . . . to the people." Early court records suggest that their ordeal had stripped them of the civilities common even to a frontier society. Asser Levy van Swellem (a man possibly of Ashkenazic origin), one of the *Ste. Catherine* twenty-three, sued a Jewish butcher who had accused him of consorting with thieves. Mrs. Abraham de Lucena called one of her fellow Jews a rogue. He called her a whore. Jacob Barsimson and Isaac Israel exchanged blows in Abraham de Lucena's storehouse. Moses de Lucena was caught in a fistfight with a Dutch burgher. Elias Silva was arrested for carnal intimacy with a Negro woman, another man's slave, and thereupon departed New Amsterdam. Among the Dutch settlers, the very word "Jew" became a term of reproach. Gisbert van Imbrough brought suit against Altjen Syrnats when Syrnats, in the heat of quarrel, called van Imbrough a Jew.

Despite all constraint and public contumely, the early Jewish settlers gradually circumvented their restrictions. They were still white people, after all, subjects of the Dutch Crown in an outpost vulnerable to economic shortages, marauding Indians, and covetous British neighbors. Bit by bit, they won their way into the fur and retail trades. The energetic Asser Levy soon was marching with local militiamen against the Algonquin Indians. As early as 1656, a second Company directive allowed Jews to own real estate, to trade freely, to be spared discriminatory taxes. Numbering perhaps sixty at the end of the decade, the Jews had extended their foothold. They were openly conducting religious services, albeit in a rented house. When Jacob Barsimson refused to appear before a magistrate in a civil case on the Jewish Sabbath, he was not held in default. It was all the more ironic, therefore, that, even as it stood on the threshold of civil parity, the tiny

Jewish enclave suddenly began to atrophy. In common with not a few Gentiles, they discerned a precarious future in an outpost flanked north and south by much larger British colonies. Once London passed the Acts of Trade and Navigation in the early 1660s, it appeared to be only a matter of time before the little Dutch frontier station would fall into English hands. In these years, then, most of New Amsterdam's Jews sailed off. A few traveled direct to the Netherlands, others to Curaçao and Surinam, still others to Barbados. In 1663 the last departing group carried its Torah scroll back to Holland. Of the pioneer Jewish settlers, only Asser Levy remained.

New Horizons in Sephardic Studies

EDITED BY
Yedida K. Stillman
and
George K. Zucker

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS
1993

EIGHT

The Periodization of the History of the New Christians and Crypto-Jews in Spanish America

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INTRODUCTION

The presence of New Christians and Crypto-Jews has been felt on the fourth continent since the preparations for Christopher Columbus's first voyage. The admiral had constant relations with Jews, converts, and New Christians who supported him economically and scientifically. For this and other reasons, some historians began to doubt that the sailor was a native of Genoa, Italy, and started looking for his origins in several places in Spain, especially on the island of Mallorca.

The charts and some of the sailing instruments that Columbus used on his first voyage were, in part, furnished to him by Abraham Zacuto, who applied astronomy to navigation and occasionally taught at the University of Salamanca, and by his disciple Yoseph Vecinho, physician and astronomer of King João II of Portugal. In the Spanish Court, Columbus was supported by the New Christians Diego de Deza and Juan Cabrero.[1] Finally, the man who convinced Isabella of the sailor's undertaking was Luis de Santángel, senior accountant of the kingdom of Aragon, who loaned sixteen thousand ducats to the Queen to finance Columbus's first voyage.

Luis de Santángel was a grandson of Noe Chinillo, whose five sons were driven to Christianity in 1415. The conversion opened to them the doors to the highest positions of the kingdom but at once made them vulnerable to the persecutions of the Holy Office. Indeed, the senior accountant had the

opportunity to save his cousin's son from being burned at the stake in 1491, when he was imprisoned by the Inquisition for Judaizing. The father of this young man (both of them were named Luis, a common name among the Santángels) was beheaded, quartered, and thrown into the flames for his participation on the night of October 17, 1485, along with other New Christians, in the murder of Pedro de Arbués, the recently appointed Inquisitor for Aragon. The mastermind of the assassination was Juan de Pedro Sánchez, brother of Gabriel Sánchez, treasurer of the kingdom of Aragon, who was also involved in the conspiracy. It is worthy of mention that the treasurer was married to Albutmunta Gilbert, the only daughter of the beheaded Luis de Santángel.[2] Juan de Pedro saved his life by fleeing to Italy, and Gabriel was helped out of that critical situation by the Catholic king. Fernando, though he expelled the Jews from Spain, was ever willing to avail himself of Hebrews useful to the kingdom.

The Sánchez brothers were connected with the enterprise of Christopher Columbus. The admiral sent the first news from the recently discovered lands to his sponsor, Luis de Santángel, and to the treasurer Gabriel Sánchez. The two letters are of the same tenor. The latter was translated into Latin by the New Christian Leonardo Coscón, whose uncle was also involved in the aforementioned conspiracy. This first description of the New World was published in 1493 in Rome and, with the hekp of Juan de Pedro Sánchez, by then a rich merchant in Vencie, saw nine editions before the end of that century.[3]

THE NEW CHRISTIANS OF SPANISH ORIGIN

This period was divided into four phases. The first one is that of the 'discovery' and dates from the days of the preparation of Columbus's first voyage to the year of 1501.

Several New Christians were present in this historical crossing. Among them was Rodrigo Sánchez de Segovia, a nephew of the treasurer Gabriel Sánchez, who embarked as the fiscal Inspector or *Veedor* of the expedition.[4] The recently baptized Luis de Torres, native of Murcia, who knew Hebrew, Chaldean, and Arabic, was also on board one of the three ships. He and Rodrigo de Jerez were the first Europeans to explore the island of Cuba.[5] Torres first addressed the natives that they met in Hebrew and then in other languages, considering them the ten lost tribes of Israel. There was also the apothecary Maestre Bernal, punished in 1490 for Judaizing.[6] (Master Bernal also accompanied Columbus on his fourth voyage.[7]) Also of Jewish descent were Master Marco, the physician of the fleet, Alonso de la Calle, and Rodrigo de Triana, who was the first to sight the new continent.

Converted Jews and their descendents were also to be found in the admiral's subsequent expeditions. Pedro de las Casas (father of the famous protector of the American Indians, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas) sailed with Columbus on the second voyage.[8] Fray Bartolomé embarked for the Indies for the first time in 1501 with the governor Frey[9] Nicolás de Ovando.

The second phase is that of the 'favorites.' In 1501, the Catholic king excluded New Christians from the American enterprise by means of a decree that no son or grandson of any person punished on charges of heresy could be a Royal Counselor; *Oidor* judge; *Alcalde* magistrate; *Alguacil* officer of justice; *Mayordomo* administrator of royal, ecclesiastic, or civil property; treasurer; or hold any public office or honorable position. They were also prohibited from embarking for the Indies. Finally, the Holy Office forbade them from wearing silk or any fine clothing, adorning themselves with gold and receiving academic degrees.[10] However, the king never applied these sanctions to his favorites. For example, he appointed Juan Sánchez, one of the nephews of Gabriel and Juan de Pedro, as the agent of the treasury of Aragon in Seville. In 1502, King Fernando granted to Juan Sánchez and Alonso Bravo an exclusive contract to be the suppliers of the island Hispaniola, from which the monarch received some forty percent of the profits.[11] Later, Juan was heavily involved in commerce with the pearl island of Cubagua.[12]

The third phase is the legal one, because the Catholic king secularized the sanctions of the law in 1501. In other words, the status of the *inhábiles* or disenfranchised New Christians were compound means of obtaining large sums of money. This was very good business for the crown because the 'reenfranchisement' was done in stages. For example, in 1508 Fernando extracted from the victims in the province of Seville twenty thousand ducats for just the return of their property, confiscated by the Holy Office during their trials. The following year in the same area, he collected eighty thousand ducats. Thanks to these enormous amounts of money, persons who were reconciled by the Inquisition were enabled to hold public offices, except those which included criminal jurisdiction. They were also allowed to traffic with the Indies.[13]

The reenfranchisement of 1509 legalized the residency of those New Christians who already lived in America and at the same time induced many others to enlist in discovery, colonization, administration, and—mainly—trade. As a result, between 1509 and 1518, New Christians took an active part in emerging American life.

Many of the names that appear in the "Padrón" 'tax list' are found in the catalogue of passengers to the Indies,[14] and figure in the Geobiographical Index of forty thousand Spanish settlers in sixteenth-century America[15] and on other lists. Several merchants whom Enrique Otte considers most important in the Caribbean pearl trade between 1517 and 1550 are also mentioned in the "Padrón."[16] One of them, registered under number 286, is Juan de Córdoba, who held important posts in the municipal life of Seville and, in 1519, lent Hernando Cortés a large sum of money which the captain general used for the conquest of the Aztec Empire.[17]

New Christians also took an active part in the administration of the recently discovered territories. We will mention only the most important ones, such as Miguel Pérez de Almazán, the King's secretary[18] and Lope de Conchillos, secretary of the Council of Castile. Both were rewarded for the services with a grant of Indian forced labor which they employed in agriculture, mining, or construction. This grant was first called *repartimiento*, and later *encomienda*. The *encomendero* was obliged to strive for the evangelization of his Indians.

Miguel de Pasamonte, who embraced Christianity a few years before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, served as clerk for the king's secretary. Later, Miguel Pérez de Almazán posted him as treasurer of the Indies. In 1509, Miguel de Pasamonte was named keeper of Fort Concepción in the gold-bearing area and transferred the treasury to Estaban de Pasamonte, his nephew. The Pasamontes also enjoyed a good *encomienda* and when these resources were depleted they entered the sugar industry.[19]

The Cuban historian Fernando Ortiz points out that the New Christians were the first to capitalize on the sugar in Cuba. The convert Gonzalo de Vellosa initiated this process by constructing the first sugar mill on the island, which was transformed by 1515 into a factory. Finally, another convert, Miguel de Ballester, who came with Columbus on his second voyage, was the first to export this merchandise to Europe.[20]

A large number of New Christians arrived in America in 1514 with the expedition of Pedro Arias de Avila (commonly called Pedrarias Dávila), posted by the king as governor of Castilla de Oro. His grandparents has been baptized in the first half of the fifteenth century. Diego Arias, when he was still a Jew, administered the Royal incomes and, after his conversion, in the last years of the reign of Juan II, became the *Contador Mayor* or Chancellor of the Exchequer of Castile. During the reign of Enrique IV, he carried out a fiscal reform.

Several New Christians who came with Pedrarias enlisted later in other expeditions, as did Gil González de Benavides de Avila, brother of Alonso de Avila, the first procurator of New Spain. Both were nephews of Gil González Benavides de Avila, the royal accountant in Santo Domingo between 1509 and 1511, who was in turn the brother or a cousin of Alonso de Avila, one of Isabella's convert secretaries.[21] Another nephew, and namesake of the Catholic queen's secretary, is registered under number 70 in the previously mentioned "Padrón."

In 1511, the royal accountant transferred his post on Hispaniola to his nephew, Alonso de Avila. In 1514, Fernando dubbed him knight of Santiago and permitted him to outfit an expedition. In 1519, Gil González de Avila set out eagerly in search of a strait between the two oceans and, while he was at it, conquered Costa Rica and Nicaragua. When he arrived at contemporary Honduras in 1524, he clashed with Hernando Cortés's captains, who claimed that region for themselves.

The two brothers, Alonso de Avila and Gil Gonzalez de Benavides, embarked for Mexico with Juan de Grijalbo's fleet in 1517, the first as royal accountant

and the second as captain of one of the ships. In 1519, Alonso enrolled himself in Hernando Cortés's expedition as accountant and bookkeeper. In 1520, the conquerer named him *alcalde* or magistrate of the recently founded town of Veracruz and sent him later to Santo Domingo in the capacity of procurator of New Spain. In 1522, Cortés dispatched him to Spain with Motecuhzoma's treasury as his private procurator. In 1527, Alonso de Avila returned to New Spain as one of Francisco de Montejo's captains and took part in the conquest of Yucatan.[22]

In 1537, Friar Juan de Zumárraga, New Spain's first bishop and apostolic Inquisitor, ordered the apprehension of Gonzalo Gómez, *encomendero, alcalde*, and businessmen in Michoacán, for "evil words" and for Judaizing. Alonso de Avila found out and immediately warned him. Gómez soon appeared at the home of his friend who, besides giving him some legal advice, entrusted him with the names of the denunciators. A few months later, Alonso himself had to meet with the bishop, since Zumárraga accused him of stepping on a crucifix that he supposedly had under his desk for that reason.[23] At first this appears to be Zumárraga's way of punishing Avila for his indiscretion in the affairs of the Holy Office. In any case, Zumárraga had good reason to be suspicious of the procurator because no Old Christian would help a person questioned in a matter of faith. Indeed, Avila and Gómez together committed great irreverences to the visible symbols of the Church, such as sleeping with their mistresses in a chapel that the *encomendero* had turned into an inn.[24] Both had a certain eclectic approach to religious matters, common among some New Christians, which Alonso's brother, Gil González de Benavides, shared. Gil came to Pánuco in 1522 with Francisco de Garay's expedition. In 1527, he was named *alcalde* of Mexico City, and some few months later he was punished by Friar Domingo de Betanzos for blasphemy,[25] along with other conquistadores and settlers. A good number of them had Jewish ancestors.[26]

The fourth stage of the Spanish period began in 1518, the year when Charles of Habsburg became king of Spain. We call this phase that of the 'forbidden ones,' because the future Emperor changed the Crown's policy toward New Christians. On September 24, 1518, Charles ordered the officers of the *Casa de Contratación* in Seville, who controlled all the traffic to the Indies, to prohibit any person once punished by the Holy Office from embarking for the Crown's overseas domains. The New Christians protested, alleging that free passage to America was a paid-for privilege. The King ordered an investigation into the matter, wishing to know, more than anything else, if all of them had paid their debt to the Crown. While the inquiry lasted, the way to the Indies remained open.[27]

The expansion of Spanish domains in Central and South America, territories inhabited by advanced civilizations, deepened the apostolic zeal of the mendicant orders who felt that the presence of individuals punished by the Holy Office could hinder a genuine evangelization of the Indians. Indeed, the consideration

that not only the persons who were reconciled by the Inquisition, but all New Christians, were potential heretics, became a point of view that many Spaniards shared at that time. For this reason, from September 25, 1552, all people of Hebrew origin were forbidden from crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Subsequent dispositions ratified this pragmatic sanction and even broadened it and extended the prohibition to grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of any Jew.

From the beginning, many disobeyed the prohibitory laws, among others, for two main reasons: first, because the captains feared provocation of quarrels and discord in their armies and did not publish the royal bans,[28] and second, a substantial number of captains themselves had Jewish ancestors. Furthermore, many New Christians who had gained access to American life before 1518 had managed to conceal their origins by changing their profession and personality. They made every effort to appear to their neighbors as Old Christians. Many succeeded, but others did not.

A good number were harassed, and several even paid for their ascendancy with their lives. This was the case of the Alonsos, Hernando and Martín, natives of the province of Huelva—the first from the village of Niebla and the second from Palos. Both embarked in the year 1518 for Cuba. Hernando, a blacksmith by trade, worked under the orders of the famous carpenter, Martín López, in building the brigantines which played so important a role in the conquest of Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Mexican empire. Later, he took part in the pacification of Pánuco. For all these services, he was granted the signory of Actopan as an *encomienda*. From then on, he devoted himself to cattle-raising and mining, and between the years 1524–1528 he managed to be the principal meat supplier for Mexico City. In early autumn of 1528, he was accused of having celebrated Passover in the company of some Crypto-Jews in Cuba, having rebaptized or washed out the holy water poured on the head of a mestizo son that he had and, finally, for forbidding his wife to go to church during her period. In this case, Hernando Alonso confused the synagogue with the church to which he attributed a biblical ordinance. (This was very common among the Crypto-Jews, who were obliged to live a Christian life and, within their consciences, desired to keep Jewish commandments.) Weeks later, he was burned in the first public Auto de Fe celebrated in Mexico City.[29]

His relative, Martín Alonso Alemán, engaged in pearl fishing and trade in the Caribbean and soon amassed a large fortune. In 1527, he was named *regidor* (mayor) of Cubagua, a post that provoked the envy of some Basque fellows who denounced him as being one of those prohibited from living in the Indies. Although he managed to demonstrate that the accusation was false, some inhabitants of the town insisted on reminding him of his ancestors. In December of 1528, he was assassinated by Pedro de Barrionuevo, native of Soria, who was convinced that stabbing to death a descendent of a Jew was not a sin. The Old Christian was never punished for the crime.[30]

In the aforementioned Auto de Fe, Gonzalo de Morales, shopkeeper, was also burned at the stake. His sister has been sacrificed in the same way a few years earlier in Santo Domingo. Their brother Diego also appeared on the stand, chained and with a *mordaza* (gag), a sign that he was punished for blaspheming. Indeed, this was his second charge for this transgression; in the first one, his judges were civil authorities. Nevertheless, he was reconciled together with the aged notary Diego de Ocaña,[31] a relative of Pedro de Ocaña who had been a tailor in Seville[32] but in Santo Domingo went into trade. Another notary, Juan Fernández del Castillo, who boasted of the title of Excellency in Santo Domingo and from 1525 held the same office in Mexico City, was reconciled some few days before in a private Auto de Fe.[33] Juan Fernández, who was imprisoned once again in 1536 due to his skepticism in religious matters,[34] was the son of Alonso del Castillo, mirror trader in Seville, registered under number 73 in the "Padrón."

In fact, it was easier to change faith than to assimilate to the *modus vivendi* of the Old Christians which, in itself, was a form developed over centuries. It was not only a question of faith but a cultural behavior in daily life manifested in the form of greeting, eating, praying, and so on. One could be suspected of having Jewish origins because one did not invoke Christ, the Virgin, or the Saints; because one avoided pork; or because one changed his shirt often or washed his hands many times a day. The life of Diego de Morales, who was arrested and punished by the Inquisition six times between 1525–1560, illustrates more than anything the tragedy of compelled assimilation. This unadaptable man, though he managed to survive, could never escape his destiny. During fifty-eight years of life in Christian garb (he was born into a family that continued to practice Judaism after their conversion) he refused to consume any bacon and affirmed many times that God did not have a son. He was recognized and ostracized wherever he went. In 1558, the Dominican friar Juan de Cárdenas charged him once again with all that he had already been punished for in previous trials. He was the talk of all of Guatemala City, and people pointed him out as a defamed man.[35]

Many others, though they stuffed themselves with pork, were not able to hide their ancestry and, therefore, they considered that the only way to escape the shades of their origins was to become noble. One of the conquerors of Peru, Captain Rodrigo Orgoñoz, chose this way. The son of a poor Jewish cobbler who embraced Christianity on the eve of the expulsion, he appropriated to himself the name of the gentleman Juan de Orgoñoz and enlisted in the Italian wars. Rodrigo showed great bravery and, along with some few Spaniards, captured King Francis I at Pavia in 1525. Years later, he embarked with his brother, Diego Méndez, for the Indies and soon became the right-hand man to Diego Almagro the Elder.

In his actions in America—in Honduras, Peru (where he took part in the conquest of the Imperial City of Cuzco), and in Chile—he amassed a large fortune. For all his deeds, he desired to be distinguished with the knighthood of the Order

of Santiago, the patron saint of Spain. To reach this goal, he needed to prove not only Old Christian ancestry, but that nobody in his family had been punished by the Inquisition. In fact, his mother had been. To erase his origins, he begged Juan de Orgoñoz to adopt him as his son, offering him in exchange all his gold.[36] Some nobles used to sell this kind of favor, but Juan de Orgoñoz rejected Rodrigo, who, three years later in 1538, was killed in the battle at Salinas.

The famous protector of the American Indian, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, appropriated to himself the name of a French noble family from the Canary Islands and signed his name as Casaus. They protested, but the Dominican ignored them.[37] According to Américo Castro, the bishop of Chiapas was "trying out capes."[38] This subterfuge was used by many New Christians who desired to divert the attention of curious and gossipy persons who used to check the names attached to the *sambenitos*[39] on display in cathedrals and churches of the entire Spanish empire.

It happened that an indiscreet man discovered the Jewish ancestors of Cristóbal de Miranda, first dean of the cathedral in Mérida, Yucatan. In fact, the doctor of theology got this post only after having given the Inquisition proof of his "purity of blood." In other words, he demonstrated that, at least over three generations, all his ancestors were Old Christians. Nevertheless, years later, he was recognized as the grandson of Diego López, merchant, and Leonor Rodríguez, both punished by the Holy Office in the port of Santa María near Seville. In the same town, his maternal great-grandparents, Diego Donaire, blanket weaver, and his wife, Isabel García, were burned at the stake. Both were considered by their judges to be the "biggest Judaizers" of that district.[40] After it was known publicly that Miranda descended from Jews and had cheated the Inquisition, the Franciscan, Diego de Landa, bishop of Yucatan, persecuted him dreadfully.

At the same time in Cuzco, Peru, no one bothered Father Joseph de Acosta, the brilliant author of *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, who was a grandson of a converted family of merchants from Medina del Campo. This Jesuit breathed more freely in American than he did in Spain, where he was harrassed by Father Claudio Aquaviva, the first anti-Semitic General of the Order, who introduced the Statutes of Purity of Blood into the Society in the last decades of the sixteenth century.[41] (The three former Generals had not only rejected the Statutes, but the successor to Ignacio de Loyola, Father Diego Laínez, was even proud of his Hebrew ancestors.)

From the cases analyzed, it can be inferred that the majority of the converts' descendents wanted to become assimilated into the lifestyle of the Old Christians. This was not an easy task for all the reasons previously mentioned, and mainly because the society that should have absorbed them rejected them. Although some of them went unnoticed and climbed to high positions in Spanish society, many other lives and careers were destroyed.

THE PORTUGUESE ERA

The second period, which we call that of the doubly prohibited because foreigners were generally forbidden to go to the Indies, started around 1560 and ended some hundred and sixty years later. Nevertheless, several Portuguese, among them a few New Christians, got to the Spanish overseas domains before that date, though in official documents they are mentioned mainly from about 1560 on. Their presence provoked the zeal of many Spaniards and especially of the royal officers who continually reported to the Crown about the damages caused by Portugese navigators who arrived in the Caribbean with slaves and other merchandise that they smuggled in.[42] In fact, many ships bound for Brazil stopped in Santo Domingo, although most of them came legally under the commercial contracts between the Iberian Crowns. Among the administrators of the ships were several New Christians, including Miguel Núñez, the Portuguese king's slave agent in Santo Domingo. His daughter, Guiomar, married Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva, the future governor of the New Kingdom of León. Carvajal spent, in his youth, seven years in Cabo Verde. His maternal uncle, Francisco de Andrada, also served as a public officer in Guinea. Years later, he arrived in Mexico, changed his life, and became an Augustinian monk.[43] Nevertheless, the majority of New Christians of Portuguese origin rejected assimilation and desired to survive, given the circumstances, as Jews in Christian garb. From here on, we shall call them Crypto-Jews.

The doubly forbidden, or Portuguese era, is divided into three periods. We have called the years from 1560 to 1580 the formative phase, because throughout those years small New Christian communities were set up in Spanish America. As we said, many of the people were Crypto-Jews who came to the fourth continent hoping to evade the tribunals of the Inquisition on the Peninsula. Others were attracted by the discovery of rich silver deposits in New Spain and the region of Potosí, which offered good opportunities to entrepreneurs and merchants. Furthermore, the conquest of the Philippines opened a new route to the East and that meant a wide sphere of action for adventurers. Besides, some New Christians had relatives and friends who were in the service of the Portuguese crown or went on trade to the Lusitanian domains in Southeast Asia.

The Portuguese presence and the abundance of pirates, generally of English origin, who had been harassing the coasts of Spanish America since the middle of the sixteenth century and occasionally got inland, bothered the Crown exceedingly. Complaints sent to the king about the Lusitanians who were suspected in matters of faith and of pirates, heretics, and enemies of everything Catholic, were added to the voices of friars who wrote about the dissolution of morality among the Spanish Americans, including the clergy. Felipe II, who kept watch on both the religious purity and the morality of his subjects, decided to act. He abolished the Primitive or Apostolic Inquisition made up of friars and bishops, which had been on the decline since the fifties, and established,

on January 18, 1569, the Holy Office in America. The first Tribunal was introduced in 1570 in Lima, Peru, and the second was set up in 1571 in Mexico City with jurisdiction over the Philippines. In 1610, a third tribunal was formed in the port city of Cartagena de Indias.

The inquisitors set right to work. The publication of the first Edict of Faith in all the churches, through which everyone was exhorted to denounce all the offenders of Catholic norms of life and behavior, resulted in copious accusations and attestations against blasphemers, bigamists, libertine friars, supporters of heretical schemes, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Judaizers. For example, a number of persons were denounced at the tribunal of Lima "for taking the sinew out of lambs' legs" and for other transgressions. Though some of them alleged that they did it so that "the meat would roast better and not as a ceremony of the Law of Moses,"[44] they did not escape punishment. However, the large *Autos de Fe* against Judaizers were carried out in the following phase of the Portuguese period.

The Lusitanians became subjects of the Spanish Crown in 1580, the year when Felipe II became king of Portugal. They did not regain their autonomy until 1640. During the period between 1580 and 1640, which we call the era of the United Crown, the Portuguese abounded in Spain and also in its overseas domains. It is necessary to underscore that the majority of them were not only New Christians, but Crypto-Jews. Several of them had settled temporarily in Jewish quarters in Italy or other places, and from there they went to Spain to seek their fortunes. For example, Juan Rodríguez de Silva had lived in France, Italy, and the Turkish Empire. He married in Salonica, where he left his wife, and traveled once again to Italy, and from there to Spain, where he embarked for the Indies. He escaped from New Spain when the officers of the Inquisition were looking for him. Because of that, he was burned in effigy, as all absent persons were, in the *Auto de Fe* celebrated in Mexico City in 1596. Jorge de Almeyda, Silva's friend, lived in Ferrara until the 1570s, and when life became difficult in the Duchy due to one of the economic crises caused by the wars with the Turks, he left with his family for New Spain. His cousin, Blanca Lorenza, settled in Seville and opened an inn where many Crypto-Jews stopped on their way to and from the Indies; for them, kosher food was served. Almeyda, who fled from Mexico in 1590 after the Holy Office apprehended his wife, niece of the aforementioned governor of the New Kingdom of Leon, had good lawyers and defenders in Madrid who helped him to negotiate the absolution of the penitential garments of the Caravajals. Thanks to his contacts, he even obtained a passport for Ruy Díaz, a Portuguese Jew living in Italy, and his son, Diego Díaz Nieto, born in Ferrara.[45]

Many Crypto-Jews, after having lived in Portugal as Christians and benefiting from maritime and other trade, found it difficult to adjust to the austerity and poverty of the Jewish quarters and ghettos. The bold ones, therefore, with the hope of amassing a true fortune and one day being able to return to Italy, Holland,

or another place where they were permitted to freely profess their faith, put themselves in danger since in the Spanish domains the Holy Office lay in wait for them. The religious coercion in Portugal forced them to live as Christians, while in the ghettos they behaved as Jews.

This ability to jump back and forth between societies permitted some of them, occasionally, to amass some wealth. For example, Diego Pérez de Alburquerque, born in Bordeaux and raised in Rouen, France, arrived in New Spain in 1618. He lived in Puebla, Mexico City, and finally settled in the mining center of Zacatecas.[46] Alvaro Méndez, arrested in 1531 in Lima, formerly lived in France and sent money to his relatives in Amsterdam from Peru.[47] Julian Alvarez came to Mexico from Holland. He was tried by the Holy Office in his absence, as he had been lucky enough to escape just at the right time.[48] Luis Franco Rodríguez, resident in Cartagena de Indias, had brothers in Holland, and throughout his whole life he yearned for a comfortable economic situation that would permit him to live with them freely as a Jew.[49] Isabel Núñez, who lived with her husband in Mexico, was a native of France.[50] Her brother, Enrique Núñez Espinosa, resided with his spouse, Doña Mencia de Luna, in Lima; she died after being brutally tortured by the Inquisition in Lima without denouncing anyone.[51]

Several Crypto-Jews lost the ability to put down roots anywhere and wandered from one place to another. This was the case of Baltazar de Araujo, descendent of Abraham Seneor or Senior, *Rabbi Mayor* or Chief Rabbi of Castile, supplier of the armies that conquered Granada and one of Isabella's most loyal advisors. For this reason, after signing the Expulsion Edict on March 31, 1492, the Catholic queen did everything possible to keep her ancient servant. The only way to do it was to compel him to a baptismal font. At the christening, Senior and his family took the surname of Coronel.

When the Inquisitors asked Baltazar in Cartagena de Indias what his name was, he responded that "here he was called Araujo but his surname was Coronel, of the Coronels of Galicia. . ."[52] He also said that he was a native of Bayona. Indeed, one part of the Chief Rabbi's family took refuge in Portugal,[53] and from there some of them, fearing a fall into the hands of the Lusitanian Holy Office, returned to Spain and settled in Galicia. In this kingdom, the tribunal of the Inquisition was not formally introduced until 1562 and only began to function in 1574.[54] The persecution of Judaizers began in the very last years of the sixteenth century.[55] At about that time, Araujo-Coronel's mother embarked with her eight children and other relatives from Flanders. From there she moved to Venice, where she had her sons circumcised and gave them Hebrew names. Baltazar was called Abraham Senior after his illustrious ancestor. They began immediately to study Judaism, a study which they continued in Salonica and Constantinople. Later, Abraham Senior went to live with his brother in Cairo and then moved to Alexandria. Some time later, he desired to visit his native land and returned to Bayona, but out of fear of the Holy Office he returned to his mother's home in Constantinople. Nevertheless, Araujo-Coronel "felt the desire to see the world"

and crossed the Balkans one more time, traveled through Italy and Spain, and embarked for America.

Travelers like Coronel-Senior infused new life into the small Crypto-Jewish communities and kept them in constant communication with the intellectual centers of Judaism. Occasionally these men, such as Juan Pacheco de León, who came to Mexico in 1639 from Leghorn, Italy, became the spiritual guides for some groups of their coreligionists.[56] Moreover, all these Jews carried books printed in Ferrara, Venice, or some other cultural center, which found their way together with them to the most remote corners of the Spanish Empire. Manuel de Paz, age thirty-four, imprisoned in Lima in 1634, had one of these Bibles.[57] In 1637, Simón Váez Sevilla was denounced by his 'godfather,' Pedro de Navia, for displaying a Bible on his desk.[58] Many others were charged with the same crime.

One of the main characteristics of the period of the United Crowns was that the majority of the Crypto-Jews tried to fulfill the commandments of the Torah. All of them observed the Sabbath, though the men went to their business places so that they would not be noticed. For the women, it was easier to pretend that they were sewing or embroidering without doing anything. A substantial number of them abstained from eating prohibited foods, although they served bacon and ham when they had visitors. To the extent that circumstances permitted, they celebrated the three major annual holidays, namely *Pesah*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot*. They strictly fasted on the *Great Day of the Lord* or *Yom Hakippurim* and at *Taanit Esther* (The Fast of Esther). Due to the religious oppression in which they lived, Queen Esther was considered as one of the greatest Hebrew heroines because she saved her nation from destruction. Many of them fasted Mondays and Thursdays, days when the Torah is read in the synagogues. On the eves and ends of the fasts, they dined only on Lenten dishes such as vegetables, fruit, fish, eggs, and cheese. On the occasion of these banquets, a small group of friends would gather to discuss the Law of Moses. At *Yom Hakippurim*, after supper they would usually pray all night long. The following day, some would go to the country so that they would not be noticed. At dusk, they would return to their homes to break the fast in the company of family and friends. During these gatherings, it was reiterated that the Law of Moses was the only true faith by which man could be saved. On these occasions, those who had once lived in some Jewish quarter in Europe related their religious experiences of bygone days.

The subject of the Messiah came up in all these meetings, since everyone yearned for a quick redemption of Israel. Some even predicted the date of his arrival. Manuel Díaz, sacrificed at the *Auto de Fe* of the Green Cross, celebrated in Mexico City in December 1596, calculated that the Messiah would appear by the year 1600. During his imprisonment, Manuel dreamed that the Annointed One of the House of David had opened the doors of the Inquisition's secret jails. Seeing himself outside and free, he said to some acquaintances: "Look, God took up His cause. . ."[59] Others believed that the Savior would be born into a Crypto-Jewish family. In 1620, when Juana Enríquez was pregnant with her son Gaspar,

it was believed that she would give birth to the Redeemer because she strictly observed the *Mitzvoth* and because Simón Váez, her husband, was descended from the tribe of Levy. When Gaspar did not turn out to be the Messiah, other virtuous women were considered as possible mothers of the Savior. Indeed, every irregular and strange happening was seen as a sign of his impending arrival. Simple as well as educated men believed with all their hearts that God had not forgotten his people. Thanks to this deep faith that is at the same time a futuristic ideology, the suriviors of the *Autos de Fe* of this period, in which family and friends were burned at the stake, had the strength and energy to educate their children in their ancestral creed.

For fear of being discovered, the Crypto-Jews educated their children as Christians from the beginning. They revealed their identity to them and initiated them into Judaism at the age of twelve or thirteen. They generally began the teaching a few weeks before the fast of *Yom Hakippurim*. In this way, the *Bath Mitzvah* or the *Bar Mitzvah*, after fasting for the first time, became members of their small communities. It goes without saying that all this was done in complete secrecy, since the Crypto-Jews were not safe even in the privacy of their own homes because their servants, neighbors, 'godfathers,' and friends spied on them. The periodic readings of the Edicts of Faith exalted the religious feelings of the people in general. They believed that their obligation as Catholics was to denounce everything that smelled of heresy. Consequently, the price that the Crypto-Jews paid for differing from the majority and keeping their being and identity alive was the secret jails, torture, confiscation of property, and other procedures that transformed rich and powerful into poor and helpless, all this if they were not converted into ashes in one of the *Autos de Fe*.

The intense activity of the Holy Office and the *Autos de Fe* that the tribunal celebrated between the years 1585 and 1606 in the viceroyalities of Peru and New Spain almost removed from the American map the small Crypto-Jewish communities that had been settled in the second half of the sixteenth century. A large number were eliminated physically, and many more were sent to the galleys for periods of five to ten years. This meant certain death, since none survived being shackled in their own excrement, eating and drinking the leftovers of the sailors, for more than two years. Those who were saved by some miracle had to start all over again, because all their property had been confiscated.

The destiny of the Crypto-Jews who settled in Spanish America in the first three decades of the seventeenth century was similar to that of their brethren in the sixteenth century. The difference was that, in spite of the economic depression that the Spanish domains suffered in the seventeenth century, a good number of New Christians managed to get rich. Their Lusitanian origin as well as their fortunes provoked envy and jealousy among the royal officials. The governor of Panama, Francisco Valverde Mercado, expressed the feelings of many when he wrote to King Felipe III that "today the traders of the Indies are the Portuguese because they have the contract for supplying slaves. . . and the dispatch

of the fleets and squadrons on the good journey of which all trade depends... and...of this nation there have been many Jewish merchants around here who live within their Law and they, upon getting rich, go to other kingdoms before they fall into the hands of the Inquisition..." One month later, he advised the king: "I have knowledge...that many of them have gone to Rome, Venice, Ferrara, and other places..."[60]

Without doubt, many of those who came did leave, but others remained, and their fortunes did not wind up in distant kingdoms but in the coffers of the Holy Office. Among these it is fitting to mention the Peruvian Manuel Bautista Pérez, miner and merchant and, at the same time, a man of deep intellectual restlessness who became the spiritual leader of the Crypto-Jews in Lima. The great and powerful, like the merchant Simón Váez Sevilla,[61] supported their poor and weak brethren morally and economically.

The third phase of the Portuguese era in the Spanish overseas domains began more or less in the year 1635. This phase, which lasted fifteen years, we call the period of the collapse because, from 1635 on, denouncements against Judaizers were very frequent. They began in Peru through the carelessness of a twenty-five-year-old fellow recently from Spain, called Antonio de Cordero. He was arrested in 1634 and during his trial suffered terrible torture. The inquisitors forced the names of two other coreligionists out of him. The persecutions that followed exterminated, in a few years, almost all the Peruvian Crypto-Jews. Manuel Bautista Pérez, in spite of being a great benefactor of the University of San Marcos in Lima and of several convents, was burned as the "captain of the Jews" in the *Auto de Fe* celebrated in 1639 in that city.[62]

In Cartagena de Indias, the Mulatto Diego López took it upon himself to spy on the Crypto-Jews for years. In 1634, he was arrested as a sorcerer and, in the process of confessing, denounced all of Blas Pinto's friends and many others.[63] As a consequence, some of the persons detained in Cartagena de Indias and Peru testified against their acquaintances in New Spain. Thus, in a private *Auto de Fe* held in 1635, two men were absolved of the heresy of Judaism, twelve were reconciled in person and the beggar Domingo Flores in effigy, as he was tried after his death.[64] The effigies of six other people whose reputation and memory were condemned were sent to be burned. Those punished in this *Auto de Fe* were mainly small merchants in mining towns and centers like Pachuca.[65]

The destruction of the Crypto-Jewish community of New Spain began in 1641 when Gaspar de Robles, member of the large López-Méndez-Enríquez family, presented himself in the Holy Office with the purpose of discharging his conscience. Gaspar resented his uncles and he had on occasions threatened them with the Inquisition. In the tribunal he confessed that, advised by his relatives, he had observed the dead Law of Moses from the age of thirteen until he became fatally ill in his early twenties; he changed his religion after he had been cured miraculously. He said that he was profoundly penitent and manifested his desire to live and to die as a Catholic Christian. To demonstrate the sincerity of his

conversion, he accepted the inquisitorial proposition of becoming an informer and spying on his relatives and former coreligionists.[66]

During the course of the year 1642, the secret jails swelled with Judaizers. Nevertheless, the first cases were not decided until 1646. In the *Auto* celebrated on April 16, thirty-eight observers of the Law of Moses were reconciled in person and one, Clara Rivera, a twenty-two-year-old woman, in effigy, because, before expiring in prison, she showed signs of repentance.

On January 17 of the following year, twenty-one Judaizers were exhibited on a stand in the Cathedral of Mexico. In 1648, two *Autos* were carried out, one right after the other. The first was public and was celebrated on March 29 in the patio of the Franciscan monastery. The second was private and was held the next day in a church of the Company of Jesus called *Casa Profesa*. In the first one, seventeen observers of the Law of Moses abjured their errors and were reconciled to the Church. Diego Fernández de Elvas, who died in jail without repenting, was burned in effigy. For the same reason, Simón Rodríguez Núñez was reduced to ashes in person. The next day, twenty-two Judaizers abjured and were reconciled after being punished for heresy with the total confiscation of their properties. A large number were given one to two hundred lashes, in public, in the most important streets of the city. Their crimes were announced by a ban. Men and women were sentenced to be whipped for communicating in the secret jails or for anything that could be understood as disrespect to the officials of the Inquisition and for any transgressions that could be interpreted as social dissolution. Most of the men were sentenced to serve in the galleys, rowing without pay, for five to ten years.[67] In other words, they were condemned to a slow death. While at sea, the galley slaves were spared wearing the *sambenito*, which the condemned were always obliged to wear over their garments.

The last and largest of the *Autos* of this phase took place on April 11, 1649. In this terrible fiesta, between the living and the dead, one hundred and nine Jews were exhibited on the stand. Of those, twenty-two men and seven women abjured and were reconciled in person into the Church; two more were reconciled in effigy. The living were condemned to wear the *sambenito* until death redeemed them from that terrible distinction. They were also sentenced to total or partial confiscation of their property. Some, among them Juana Enríquez, wife of Simón Váez Sevilla, got two hundred lashes in the public streets. Most were condemned to permanent exile from the Indies, the city of Seville, and the town of Madrid, residence of His Majesty's royal court.

Thirteen Jews were sent to be burned at the stake in person. One of them, Tomás Treviño de Sobremonte, who manifested his wish to die as a Jew and refused to take a cross in his hands while being tied to the wooden stake, was consumed alive by the fire. Indeed, if those sentenced to death manifested some signs of repentance, such as confessing (which always meant testifying against other persons) and took a cross in their hands during the celebration of the *Auto* and on their way to the *quemadero* or burning place, the Holy Office was merciful

with them: the hangman, before setting fire to the wood they were standing on, strangled them.

Eight fugitives were burned in effity; one of them, Jorge de Montoya, who escaped to the Philippines in 1642 and from there moved to Macao, was arrested and burned at the request of New Spain's Holy Office, by the Inquisition of Goa, in India.[68] Fifty-seven people who had died, ten of them in the secret jails, were burned in effigy along with boxes with their bones exhumed from the different churchs and cemeteries of the city.[69]

The collapse of the Crypto-Jewish communities coincided with serious political crises in Spain. To wit, the rebellion of Catalonia broke out in June 1640, and in November of the same year Portugal's war of independence started. These events caused the fall of Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares, chancellor of Felipe IV, whose policy was favorable to the New Christians. The Count-Duke wished to liberate Spain from the oppressive monopoly of the Genoese bankers, and he put competitors up against them in the form of Portuguese financiers, the majority of whom were New Christians and suspect in matters of faith. Don Gaspar also wanted to dispel the Purity of Blood psychosis that prevailed in those times in Spain, and he struggled to overthrow the discriminatory statutes that kept the New Christians from any public dignity.

Such a modern attitude fostered the animadversion of various civil and ecclesiastical groups, including the Inquisition, against Olivares. In fact, this antagonism, together with the happenings in Catalonia and Portugal, caused the fall of the Count-Duke. At the beginning of 1643, Felipe IV dismissed his favorite. This act signified a turning point in the internal and external policies of the kingdom. Felipe IV began to mistrust the Lusitanian businessmen, many of whom had been tried by the Inquisition or belonged to families punished by the Tribunal, although he was still unable to dispense with their services. All of these circumstances added to popular scorn and encouraged harassment and persecution of the New Christians.

The *Autos* celebrated in the viceroyalities also had disastrous economic consequences for many Old Christians. The seizure and confiscation of property carried out in Peru during the years 1639–1640 ruined a large number of businessmen in Lima and other merchants in the vast viceroyalty. Consequently, trade was paralyzed and many were driven to bankruptcy.[70] In New Spain, the confiscations froze out the capital of a good number of Sevillian brokers and, therefore, caused their ruin.[71] The seized property was partially sold at public auction. It should be underscored that the officers of the Inquisition and their families were the first to purchase the most valuable goods much below their real worth. The money was used for current necessities of the Holy Office, including the restoration of buildings. The rest was invested in state bonds on the public debt, called *juros*, which paid their holders an annual revenue of seven percent.

In conclusion, the confiscations on the one hand impeded transactions between the mother country and her colonies and, on the other, changed active capital into passive in Spain and her overseas domains. Finally, the confiscations caused mistrust among the big financiers and entrepreneurs, several of whom fled with their capital to the Low Countries and England, kingdoms that were enemies of Spain.

THE ERA OF DECLINE

This period is divided into two phases. The first includes the second half of the seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth. We call it the 'period of the Epigons of Crypto-Judaism.' The second stage extends from approximately 1710 to the victory of liberal ideas in Spanish America, and we have named it the 'phase of the myths.'

The time of the epigons of Crypto-Judaism began after the expulsion and exile of the majority of those reconciled in the aforementioned *Autos*. For many, it was not easy to abandon the land in which they had lived, both as honorable and prosperous subjects of the Crown and as poor and degraded pariahs. Many had been born on this continent and wished to stay in their country of origin. Others, though they wanted to leave the place of their sufferings, lacked the means necessary to do so. They left the secret jails of the Inquisition with only the ragged clothes on their backs, covered with the *sambenito*. All of them had to beg or seek loans to pay passage to Spain. At the same time, the captains and sailors rejected them and refused to allow them on their ships, believing that having heretics with them could cause some misfortune to befall them on the high seas. But the Holy Office was implacable. On the one hand, it hastened the departure of the hesitant; on the other, it forced the owners of the vessels to obey their orders under penalty of two hundred ducats' fine and excommunication.[72]

Nevertheless, a small group of Crypto-Jews found ways of remaining in these parts of the world. Terrible was their fate if, through misfortune, they were to fall once again into the grasp of the Holy Office. This happened to some of them, including Diego Díaz and Francisco Botello. The first was sentenced in 1643 to permanent exile from the Indies. His wife, Ana Gómez, was burned in the *Auto* carried out in 1649, and he wandered from place to place, both to avoid being discovered and because he had no other place to go. He was arrested for the second time in February 1652, at the age of seventy, and condemned as a relapsed Judaizer.

Francisco Botello also remained behind. He was imprisoned for the first time in 1642. In the year 1648, he was tortured. And in 1649, he was reconciled to the church and sentenced to the total confiscation of his property, two hundred lashes, and permanent exile from the Indies. In 1651, he was apprehended for the second time and condemned—as "a heretic Judaizer. . .wanton, wicked and obstinate in the observance of the dead Law of Moses"—to be burned at the stake.

In the *Auto* celebrated in 1659 in Mexico City, Díaz and Botello walked together to the *quemadero*. While being tied to the stakes, Diego Díaz made signs to Botello exhorting him to face his death with courage. A friar, who tried to convert them to Christianity at the last moment, reprimanded him for doing it. Diego Díaz, who refused to take a cross in his hands, answered him: "Well, father, is it not good that we encourage each other to die for God?"[73]

and believed that the Law of Moses was the correct one and that only by it could man be saved. Their mother, Sebastiana de Alvarado, though she had some Jewish blood, was a descendent of Inca nobility and of one of the the Alvarados who had conquered Peru. She knew about their Jewish leanings, but educated them also as good Christians. Indeed, they had four sisters who were nuns and lived in a monastery in Popayán, and brothers in the Company of Jesus.

At the beginning of 1681, Diego Muñoz de Alvarado sent the huge sum of

Portuguese financiers who, as has been noted, were in their majority New Christians. Medina-Gómez arrived in Mexico in 1687 and, in 1691, four years later, he was arrested by the Holy Office. He was a practicing Jew and kept the *mitzvoth* even during the eight long years of his imprisonment. Due to that fact, he was burned alive in a private *Auto de Fe* celebrated on June 14, 1699 in Mexico City.[79] Two other Judaizers were reconciled in the same act.[80]

Pedro Gutiérrez, a traveling merchant, twenty-two years old and a resident of Trujillo, had a better fate. In the year 1700, he was reconciled by the Tribunal of Lima and sentenced to the confiscation of his property and exiled from the Indies. While he was being embarked for Seville, in Portobelo, Panama, he escaped and was picked up by an English ship that took him to Jamaica.[81] It should be noted that Gutiérrez was not the only one to succeed in fleeing from the Spanish domains and going to the islands that were English possessions.[82]

In the phase of the myths, the New Christians were, in general, already assimilated into the life of the Old Christians. Even the term 'New Christian' fell into disuse in the Spanish colonies. Spanish-America became almost free of Jews. The inhabitants, who had never seen a living sample, but attended the religious theatre and walked in the solemn processions during Holy Week, considered the Jew to be a mythical being who personified the concept of evil in history. Indeed, the Jew was identified with the devil and was believed to have a tail and horns. Hence, any manifestation that indicated signs of Judaism was severely reprimanded. For example, in 1788, Josefa de Astudillo, a resident of the port city of Veracruz, was seen with a fan that had the story of Queen Esther painted on it. Her husband, after learning the significance of the design, broke it in pieces and threw it in the garbage. Word came to the local commissary of the Holy Office, which immediately ordered a search of the city's garbage dump and, when some pieces of the fan were found, they were taken in a solemn procession to the patio of the main church and, in a small *Auto de Fe*, thrown into the fire.[83]

Different superstitions were confused with Judaism. For example, in 1799, Esteban de Zerecedo, a resident of Tlacolula, Oaxaca, was suspected of being a Judaizer because of having his body painted.[84] (The accusers did not know that the act of tattooing is prohibited by the Law of Moses.[85]) Manuel Vázquez, *alcalde mayor* of Tampico, was also accused of Judaizing for having a book by Voltaire and for daring to say on one occasion that "in Rome the Pope takes care of the public harlots and supports them himself. . .he also defends the Jews so. . .that they might not be prevented from observing their Law and ceremonies. . ."[86] Men who sympathized with different sects and contemporary ideologies, some of which were totally opposed to the Law of Moses, such as the Molinists, Jansenists, Deists, Atheists, and other *ists* of that time, were also accused of Judaism.

Nevertheless, even in the last decades of the eighteenth century, a vestige of Crypto-Judaism manifested itself in the Franciscan Rafael Gil Rodríguez since, according to the physicians of the Holy Office, the friar had obvious signs of having been circumcised as a youngster. He was condemned as a Judaizer, though from his trial it can be inferred that he had inclinations toward the enlightened ideas of his epoch. He was reconciled in a private *Auto* after spending seven long years in prison.[87]

A few eclectics judged in that period descended from New Christians and the Holy Office made them remember their origin. One of them was Pedro Bazán, Spaniard, accused of "believing in only one God, creator of Heaven and Earth. . ." Bazán used to scoff at Mary's virginity and said on occasions that "the Jews had crucified a man called Jesus. . ." but he was "a hopeless drunk and in no way a son of God. . .and. . .we men are like animals and we are not resurrected."[88] Another eclectic, accused of similar charges, was the French merchant Francisco Moyen, who traded in the Brazil and Río de la Plata region.[89]

A few Jews were found in the troops that the Bourbons sent to America. Among them was José Bruzal, French, first musician of the Crown's Regiment,[90] and others, including physicians, some of whom came to Spain from England and enlisted in the military.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, some Jews arrived from time to time, and even temporarily settled in the Spanish overseas dominions, as did José Salomón, physician, who used to slaughter chickens in a Jewish manner and rigorously supervised his cook's preparations. He boarded a ship that was sailing to the Caribbean islands just a few days before the *acalde* of the Holy Office came to arrest him.[91] Indeed, some Jews who lived in the Dutch and English possessions in the Caribbean, where Jewish communities had existed since the second half of the seventeenth century,[92] had business relations with the Spanish dominions.

Finally, we would like to mention the famous pirates, brothers Jean and Pierre Lafitte, natives of Santo Domingo, stationed on Barataria Island in Louisiana Bay, from where they attacked Spanish ships and territory "to avenge the tortures inflicted on their Jewish ancestors," as Jean wrote in his diary.[93]

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of New Christians in Spanish America can be divided into three large eras: the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the Decline. Each one of these epochs has its own characteristics.

In the first period, the majority of the protagonists were assimilated into Spanish culture. Others were in the process of voluntary or obligatory acculturation. Those who refused to abandon the religion of their ancestors and its customs and traditions were cruelly punished. The Spain of the Catholic monarchs, which transformed religion into the 'reason of state,' did not tolerate dissidents in matters of faith.

The Spanish period was divided into the following four phases: the discovery, the favorites, the legal, and the forbidden. Throughout these four phases, New Christians of Spanish origin participated in the American undertaking as financiers, royal officers, conquerors, and settlers. Relatively few of them were punished by the primitive Inquisition, formed by friars and bishops, though some were relaxed to the secular arm, which meant that they were condemned to be burned at the stake. The Holy Office, as a religious institution, left execution for the civil authorities. It should be underscored that many escaped the rigors of the Holy Office in early colonial times because the friars and first bishops were busy with evangelization of the millions of American Indians and with the foundation of the new Church on the recently discovered fourth continent and had little time left for all the Spanish heretics.

The second epoch, the Portuguese one, was divided into three phases: the formative, the united Crown, and the collapse. The principal characteristic of this era is that nearly the absolute majority of New Christians were practicing Jews because they were driven against their will to the baptismal fonts in the year 1497 by King Manuel of Portugal. The coerced conversion did not make them Christians, but rather Crypto-Jews. They were compelled to change their religion as an organized group along with their rabbis, leaders, and intellectuals. Due to these circumstances and the importance of the family in Jewish society, the baptismal waters did not destroy their spiritual convictions. At the same time, the society that should have absorbed them segregated them and through the centuries they were called 'New Christians of the Hebrew nation' or just 'of the nation.' Indeed, they were hated and discriminated against as Jews, and they were disliked and persecuted as New Christians. For this and other reasons, almost two centuries after being compelled to Christianity, they remained faithful to the religion of their ancestors and considered Judaism their national religion. Their belief, their burning faith in the coming of the Messiah—for whom they waited throughout their lifetime and whose arrival they expected every day in their time—and their religious practices were alive thanks to family education and due to the permanent contacts that they maintained with different intellectual centers of Judaism, such as Ferrara, Venice, Leghorn, Amsterdam, and even Salonica.

The large *Autos de Fe* carried out between 1635 and 1650 almost erased the presence of Crypto-Jews in the Spanish domains. Those who survived the persecutions were expelled from the fourth continent and their properties ended up in the coffers of the Holy Office.

The last era, that of decline, witnessed the epigons of Crypto-Judaism. Indeed, during its first phase, the remnants of the New Christians in America were exterminated. Those who persevered in their faith were burned, and the others became assimilated. A significant number scattered across the immense American spaces and were lost to both Judaism and the Inquisition. Some escaped to the Caribbean islands under Dutch and English rule. In the last phase of this epoch,

in the period of the myths, the Holy Office stopped using the term 'New Christians' in Spanish America. The people who were suspected of Judaism throughout the eighteenth century were also accused of other *isms* of their time.

On the popular level, the Jew was considered to symbolize evil, to be the personification of Satan himself. It is worth mentioning that these concepts also prevailed in the first decades of the era of independence, until liberal ideas gained ground and different states issued laws of religious tolerance. The Inquisition formed and manipulated public opinion through the periodic publication of the Edicts of Faith, which were read even in the smallest churches in the vast Spanish domains, and by this means transformed not only the Jews but also the English, Dutch, and other non-Catholics into devils.

Nevertheless, the antagonism of the Holy Office was directed mostly against the English due to their presence in North America and the Caribbean. From the very late seventeenth century, some people from these colonies entered the Spanish dominions. Other Englishmen, mostly physicians among whom there were some Jews, came with the Bourbon regiments in the 1760s. It was with these in mind, in the year 1770, that the Mexican inquisitors wrote to the monarch asking him to prohibit foreigners from going to the Indies. The Holy Tribunal feared that their presence would "undetectably dispel among the majority of the natives the horror and abomination that they have against that nation only because of the idea that they are heretics and enemies of the religion and the Church."[94]

Fortunately, the Holy Office was unable to stop the course of history. Indeed, several Jews collaborated with the insurgents and freedom fighters in their struggle for American independence; some enlisted as soldiers, especially in the countries of South America, and others aided the cause with money, guns, and other equipment.

NOTES

1. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965) Vol. I, p. 156, and Vol. II, p. 325; José Amador de los Ríos, *Historia Social, Política y Religiosa de los Judíos en España y Portugal* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1960) p. 573, Note 3, and p. 756; Manuel Giménez Fernández, "Los restos de Colón en Sevilla," in *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* (1953) X, p. 15; Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *Los judeoconversos en España y en América* (Madrid: Istmo, 1971) pp. 49–50.

2. "Linage de Santángel" and "Linage del Tesorero Garbiel Sánchez," in the *Libro Verde de Aragón*, in Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *Orígenes de la dominación española en América* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1918) pp. 494–506, and "Sumaria y Memoria de los judíos conversos, habitadores de la ciudad de Zaragoza, que fueron quemados en persona o en estatua o penitenciados por la Inquisición desde 1483–1504," in Amador de los Ríos, op. cit., pp. 1010–1022.

3. "Carta de Cristóbal Colón a Luis de Santángel" and "Carta de Cristóbal Colón al Magnífico señor Gabriel Sánchez, Tesorero de los Serenísimos monarcas...," in Martín Fernández de Naverrete, *Colección de los Viajes y Descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los Españoles*.... Vol. I, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1954), pp. 166–181.

4. Bartolomé de las Casas, op. cit., Vol, I, p. 201.

5. Ibid., pp. 226–227.

6. Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, op. Cit., p. 129.

7. De las Casas, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 314.

8. Claudio Guillén "Un padrón de conversos sevillanos," in *Bulletin Hispanique* 65 (1963), pp. 79–80; Américo Castro, "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas o Casaus," in *Cervantes y los casticismos españoles* (Madrid: Alfaragua, 1974), pp. 190–254.

9. *Frey*: a professing member of one of the Spanish military orders.

10. Domínguez Ortiz, op. cit., p. 50.

11. "Real carta permitiendo al aragonés Juan de Sánchez...llevar mercaderías a la isla Española...," in Fernandez de Navarrete, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 308.

12. Enrique Otte, *Las perlas del Caribe: Nueva Cádiz de Cubagua* (Caracas: Fundación John Boulton, 1977), pp. 72, 75, 403, 417, 422.

13. Claudio Guillén, op. cit., pp. 49–85.

14. Cristóbal Bermúdez Plata, *Catálogo de Pasajeros a Indias durante los siglos XVI, XVII, y XVIII* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1964), Vols, I and II.

15. Peter Boyd-Bowman, *Indice Geobiográfico de cuarenta mil pobladores españoles de América en el siglo XVI* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1964), 2 vols.

16. Otte, op. cit., p. 72, and others.

17. Ruth Pike, *Aristócratas y comerciantes, la sociedad sevillana en el siglo XVI* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978), p. 105; Claudio Guillen, "Un Padrón...," in op. cit., p. 71.

18. Miguel Pérez Almazán's cousin was also deeply involved with the assassination of the Inquisitor Arbués and, therefore, burned alive in 1487 in Zaragoza. Amador de los Ríos, op. cit., pp. 681–683, and "Sumaria y Memoria de los judíos conversos...," ibid.

19. Castro, op. cit., Note 15, pp. 280–281; Otte, op. cit., pp. 211–213, 312; Frank Moya Pons, *Historia Colonial de Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Universidad Católica, 1976), pp. 64, 72–73. And, by the same author, *La Española en el siglo XVI* (Santo Domingo: Universidad Católica, 1973), pp. 24–25.

20. Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (La Habana, 1963), p. 343; De las Casas, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 273–275.

21. Amador de los Ríos, op. cit., pp. 623–627.

22. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1960), vol. II, pp. 186–187.

23. "Averiguación hecha por el Santo Oficio en lo de Alonso de Avila, acusado de tener un crucifijo debajo de su escritorio y poner los pies encima, Mexico 1537," Archivo General Nacional, *Inq. Index*, Vol. I.

24. "Proceso de Gonzalo Gómez, vecino de Michoacán, por palabras malsonantes, Mexico 1536," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 2, exp. 2.

25. "Proceso contra Gil González de Benavides por blasfemo, Mexico 1527," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 1, exp. 9ff. 44–45.

26. Eva A. Uchmany, "De algunos cristianos nuevos en la conquista y colonización de la Nueva España," in *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* VIII (1985), pp. 265–318.

27. Claudio Guillen, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–65.

28. Bernal Díaz del Castillo. op. cit., Vol. II., p. 929.

29. "Diligencias sobre los sambenitos antiguos y la renovación de ellos y la postura de los que se han relaxado y requerido por este Santo Oficio, Mexico 1574," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 77, exp. 35.

30. Otte, *Cubagua*..., pp. 198–299.

31. "Diligencias sobre los sambenitos...," in op. cit.; Uchmany, op. cit., ibid.

32. Pedro de Ocaña appears in the "Padrón...," under number 214.

33. "Proceso contra Juan Fernández del Castillo por hacer idolatrar a los indios, Mexico 1528," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 40, exp. 3 bis A, 4 folios.

34. "Proceso contra Juan Fernández del Castillo por blasfemo, Mexico 1536," AGN *Inq.*, Vol. 14, exp. 14ff., 118–119.

35. "Proceso contra Diego de Morales por hereje, Guatemala 1558." AGN México, *Inq.*, Vol. 31, exp. 2.; Uchmany, op. cit., ibid.

36. John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (London: MacMillan, 1970), p. 579, note 231.

37. Guillén, "Un padrón de conversos...," in op. cit., p. 80.

38. Castro, op. cit., p. 197.

39. *Sambenito*: a sackcloth resembling a scapular of the Benedictine order. This garment was worn by penitents on being reconciled to the Church or condemned to the fire for their heresies. It was made of yellow cloth painted with red crosses for the first group and of white or black cloth with painted devils and flames for the condemned impenitent.

40. "Cartas, Testimonios e Informaciones" sobre el Doctor Cristóbal de Miranda, in AGN México 1577, *Inq.*, Vol. 79, exp. 10, Vol. 80, exp. 8, 9, 10, 11, and 21; Vol. 82, exp. 34; Vol. 83, exp. 4; and México 1579 AGN *Inq.*, Vol. 82, exp. 14.

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47. Medina, op. cit., Vol. II. p. 41.

48. "Proceso del Santo Oficio contra Julián de Alvarez Fugitivo, por judaizante, México 1634," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 431, exp. 3.

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52. 'Testificación de Baltazar de Araujo contra Luis Franco Rodríguez,' in the "Proceso contra Luis Franco Rodrígues," in Tejado Fernández, op. cit., pp. 323–324.

53. Maria José Pimenta Ferro Tavares, *Judeus em Portugal no século XV* (Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 1982–1984).

54. Jaime Contreras, *El Santo Oficio de la Inquisición de Galicia* (Madrid: Akal, 1982), pp. 39–65.

55. José Ramón Onega. *Los judíos en el reino de Galicia* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1982), pp. 491–494.

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57. Medina, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 93.

58. "Proceso criminal contra Simón Váez Sevilla por judaizante, México 1642–1649," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 398, exp. 1.

59. 'Denuncia de Gaspar de Villafranca en la audiencia del 2 de abril de 1595,' in the "Proceso criminal contra Manuel Díaz, mercader, por judaizante, México 1595–1596," Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Henry Charles Lea Collection, MS. Lea 25.

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62. Boleslao Lewin, *Los Judíos bajo la Inquisición en Hispanoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Dédalo, 1960), pp. 53–69.

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74. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

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77. "Carta a Pedro Muñoz de Alvarado" annexed to the "Proceso. . . contra Diego Muñoz de. . .," in Ibid.

78. Documents related to the property of Diego Muñoz de Alvarado can be found in AGN México, *Inq.*, Vol. 652, exp. 1, 2, 3; Vol. 653, exp. 1, 2, 3; all the documents in volumes 654, 655, 656, and 663.

79. "Proceso y causa criminal contra Fernando de Medina alias Moisés Gómez, francés, por judaizante, México 1691–1699," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 704, exp. 3.

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81. Medina, *La Inquisición de Lima. . .*, Vol. I, pp. 196–197.

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84. "El Santo oficio contra Esteban de Zerecedo por hechos suspersiticiosos y judaísmo, México 1776," AGN, *Inq.*, Vol. 1108, exp. 10.

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THE JEWS OF LATIN AMERICA

Revised Edition

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HM

HOLMES & MEIER
NEW YORK / LONDON
[1980] 1998

CHAPTER 9

Jews North and South

In moments of disenchantment, Jaime realized the difficulties inherent in going from any Jewish past to a Catholic present.

—Mario Szichman, *At 8:25 Evita Became Immortal*

JEWISH LIFE IN the United States, so intensively researched, offers the possibility of a useful comparison with Jewish life in Latin America. The contrast between the two communities points up differences that stem only in part from the immigrants (for they were roughly similar in their origins and part of the same migratory waves) but also from the nature of the host societies in which they settled.

Jews of the United States dwell within the boundaries of one of the world's largest territorial sovereignties, characterized by secular norms, pacific alternation of governments, and a social milieu created by the immigrants themselves. Jews of Latin America are scattered throughout twenty-one separate polities, characterized by hierarchical religious norms, volatile politics, and a social milieu that was created long before their arrival and to which they are expected to conform. Examining the social structures of the two realms, one is struck over and over again by the reluctance of Latin Americans to make the changes necessary to integrate immigrants into their national societies. Despite demands that immigrants assimilate, the latter's efforts to integrate themselves met with suspicion, if not outright rejection. Although it scarcely can be said that the United States was totally accommodating in this regard, comparison shows the far more limited flexibility of Latin American institutions and their resistance to the entry of Jews in particular into civic life.

The Jewish community of the United States came into existence within a society that had been spun off from Europe in the Age of Enlightenment. The Jewish communities of Latin America came into existence in societies that had been founded and still were grounded in the pre-Enlightenment past. Jews were emancipated by their arrival in the United States; Jews of the Latin American republics have not been fully emancipated yet from the hateful religious and political stigmata that followed them to the New World.

Spain in America was a fragment of medieval Europe that, once loosed from its European context, continued to evolve along the path determined by its heritage. Incorporating Indians and then blacks into the lower rungs of the corporate and patrimonial structure, Latin American societies took on an American coloration but retained their medieval orientation. In Louis Hartz's formulation, "the logic of feudal fragmentation" persisted, resulting in a "heart-breaking betrayal" of the Enlightenment.[1] The conquistadors were the last and the most successful of the crusaders, and if the latifundia that were settled upon their successors were not precisely feudal estates, clearly they owed more to the institution of feudalism than they did to either freehold tenure or industrial capitalism. Spanish and Portuguese statism, revived and strengthened by transplantation to virgin territory overseas, met no countervailing power strong enough to challenge it, and consequently life in the Indies quickly settled down on foundations long familiar to the peninsulars.

If Spain and Portugal were able, as they were, to resist the forces of Protestant and industrial revolutions, how much more resistant were the forces of tradition in these new nuclei of Iberia, whither only the orthodox could travel. Having destroyed the Amerindian civilizations, the conquerors grafted onto the ruins their own vision of the just society: Catholic, hierarchical, patrimonial. With certificates of clean blood they purchased posts in government and church, becoming the bureaucrats and managers of empire. The tone of Latin American society was set by royal pensioners and true believers, whose allegiance for the next three centuries was to remain immutably fixed to their royal master upon whom they depended for their wealth and status. They would never have left the kingdom had not the kingdom left them. When the French Revolution and Napoleon's invasion of Spain and Portugal cut the tie that bound, Enlightenment did not suddenly rush in. Rather, criollo elites took their nations out of the empire, generating "independence" revolutions that guaranteed that nothing would change. With the breath of liberty infused into them, medieval forms of life survived in Latin America long after their European originals had succumbed owing to their inadequacy in dealing with modernizing forces. These medieval forms included legal and social inhibitions upon Jews.

North America began receiving European settlers two hundred years later than South and Central America. During the intervening period, Europe exclusive of Iberia went through a great transformation. The Reformation and the wars of religion cracked forever the Catholic Church's pretensions to universality, paving the way for religious competition. A wave of rationalism began the rout of all religions, a process that was to bring to birth the Age of Enlightenment and lead eventually to the emancipation of the Jews from discriminatory laws and immurement in ghettoes. Industrial revolution transformed Europe's modes of production, while capitalism began to alter the relationship between employer and employed. By the eighteenth century, Europe was entering the modern age, and Jews were being freed of the age-old

restrictions on residence, occupation, and family life that had trammeled them for centuries.

As a result of the difference in timing, the people who settled North America differed in mentality from those who had conquered the South. The eighteenth-century efflux of settlers out of England and northern Europe generally were the unlicensed and the unemployed, dissenters from old religions and cast-offs of the new industrialism, looking for land and work to set their hands to. Devotees of eccentric cults, they had reason to fear state churches and came more and more to view religion as beyond the grasp of government. Catholics, Lutherans, and others who in Europe had belonged to state churches were now in a minority and in time would have to tailor their beliefs to the new American reality. The rational revolution was beginning to make its impact; many were prepared to believe that the world was subject to natural laws, or at least to the laws of nature's God, and that an individual's relationship to this God was a purely personal affair.

In contrast to the image of the deicide, the devil, the usurer, the bawd, that confronted Jewish immigrants to Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking lands, Jewish immigrants to the English colonies found elements with which they could identify. South Carolina's charter had been drafted under the influence of John Locke, author of the first published appeal for emancipation of the Jews in the English-speaking world. The Puritans thought of themselves as Hebrews, "children of the covenant," who had been brought to New England's promised land by divine providence. Emphasis by fundamentalist sects upon the reading of the Bible led to the teaching of Hebrew in order that God's word could be heard in the original. Ancient Hebrew prophecy was one source of nourishment for the Enlightenment, and thus the climate of the colonies owed much to the Old Testament. Jews coming into colonies that honored the same tradition they did found a friendlier welcome than those who came to lands whose heritage—never fully repudiated—included the use of state power to eradicate it.

The nonconforming and dissenting colonists of the North rebelled against royal authority on very slight pretext, when it seemed as though Parliament was abandoning its laissez-faire manner of government. Placing power in the hands of the people, the colonists devised a constitution that limited the power that either government or church could wield over the citizen, by forbidding them to buttress one another. The anticlerical thrust of the Enlightenment made inevitable the separation of church and state, without the need to fight a war of religion on American soil. Emancipation of the Jews was thus achieved in the United States without bloodshed and without reference to Jews, for there were almost none in the country at the time. From the moment the republic was launched, Jews enjoyed civil, religious, and political equality. There were to be no religious tests for office, no bar to the marriage or burial of Jews, no limitations on place of residence or occupation. Furthermore, the terms of revolution from the mother country offered the promise that American society would continue to open outward, rather than collapse in upon itself as

had happened so quickly in Spanish and Portuguese realms. The break with Europe allowed Jews to feel that they, too, had broken with the desolate past, that the United States would be a different kind of diaspora, one where Jews could live on equal terms with Gentiles because their values sprang from the same sources and were compatible with one another. This compatibility explains both the magnetism that the United States exerted for Jews and the commonplace Latin American perception of the United States as entirely Jewish.

Lacking an established church, the United States attracted immigrants of every religious persuasion and of none. The diverse flow of peoples in turn confirmed the heterogeneous nature of American life. Immigrants arrived in such masses, into territory so nearly depopulated, that they created their own social norms, establishing as the national ideal the actuality of their own existence: the plural society. No one would deny that it was the dominant white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon male who set the standards, but this dominance was not monolithic and did not totally exclude Jews. There was room for the Jewish as for the non-Jewish immigrant; a variety of identities could coexist. The social norm of cultural pluralism that developed in response to the immigrant experience was never completely accepted; curiously, it flourished side by side with the WASP ideal.

As a direct consequence, participation by Jews in the life of the United States has regularly been welcomed as a sign that they were becoming Americanized. This process went so far that by the mid-twentieth century, Judaism was being accorded status as the third major religion in the country, despite the fact that Jews never accounted for more than 3.7 percent of the population and are today an even smaller proportion.

In total contrast, the Jews of Latin America have had great difficulty overcoming the perception of themselves as foreigners, unwelcome and illegitimate intruders into national life, and even as corrupters of the national spirit. Jewish immigrants to Latin America came to a continent already preempted by two powerful cultural traditions that either ignored or were hostile to them. The first of these, the autochthonous one, was not attractive to Jews. The vestiges of defeated Maya, Guaraní, or Inca civilizations seemed to have little to offer either Ashkenazi or Sephardi; nor did Jews have a place in the indigenous world, save in the role of devil to which the missionaries had consigned them.[2] Entry into their new societies had to depend on identification with the Spanish or the Portuguese.

The same was true for all immigrants: their common meeting ground was the church. But the church, which compassionately absorbed Indian and black, Italian and Pole, found Jews indigestible. The Jews were the one people whom the church had failed historically either to absorb or to destroy. In the unreconstructed atmosphere of Latin Catholicism, where the line between church and state was blurred and overlapping jurisdiction persisted, Jews continued to be viewed as unassimilable. If they were outside the church, were they not also outside the state?

Until the present, national allegiances have continued to be filtered through

Catholic sensibilities. Most Latin American constitutions require that the president of the nation profess Roman Catholicism, a stipulation abandoned by Argentina only in 1994. The ubiquitous Christ figures displayed on mountaintops are a continual reminder of the Jews' inherited status as deicides. The more compassionate Catholic rendering of history, which reminds the faithful that Christ himself was a Jew, invites masochistic submission. The child in the classroom is daily asked to identify with either the crucified or the crucifiers. The choice of either role requires continual dissimulation and suppression. Jewish children must either pretend to be that which they are not or pretend not to be that which they are. Either choice results in utilizing only half their identity and the expenditure of considerable energy in suppressing the other half.

There are, of course, ecumenical efforts within the Latin American church, which wax and wane with the appointment of hierarchs with differing orientations. The number and influence of clerics working in the spirit of Vatican II varies by country. But the end toward which they strive—the reception of Jews into a common humanity formerly restricted to Christians—represents a difficult break with the past. This break, the all-important emancipation, occurred in the United States before the drafting of the Constitution.

On the part of the Jews, every attempt to identify with the majority culture brought them up against its essentially Catholic core, the centrality of the Inquisition mentality (displayed with such sadistic cruelty during the proceso), and their own role as victims. Despite the lapse of centuries and the historical discontinuity between Spain and the Spanish-speaking republics, echoes of the Expulsion reverberated in immigrant ears. The principal park of Mexico City, the Alameda, where children play and Diego Rivera painted, was known to Jews as the site of the auto-da-fé, where New Christian pioneers were reduced to ashes by their Old Christian compatriots. One of the main streets of Lima was still known as Matajudíos, Kill-the-Jews; Havana boasted streets named Inquisador and Picoto (gibbet). In colonial times, Jews had been pariahs. In modern times, omnipresent Catholic symbolism confirmed their status as outsiders, limited their access to education and to politics, and impeded their social acceptability.

We have seen that many Jewish immigrants to Latin America were alienated from religion and thus available for recruitment for life in lands where the survival of Judaism was not at all assured. Jewish immigrants who gave up their identity were free to intermarry, assimilate, and disappear as Jews, and that is even more true for their university-educated children and grandchildren. For those who wish to remain Jewish, life is more complex. Had the Latin American republics broken with the past, developing secular and modernizing national symbols, the way would have been paved for the acceptance of Jews into national life on the basis of equality. Hopeful immigrants at the turn of the century believed this was a possibility. There is a world of difference between merging with a secular population on equal terms and accepting a subordinate position on a Catholic standard. To the degree that the Latin

republics choose to remain loyal to their Catholic core, Jews are closed out of dominant social institutions. Where no neutral ground appears between antagonistic Iberian and Jewish traditions, emergence of a Latin American Jewish identity is frustrated.

Pressure for conformity was felt by all immigrants, but a Jew had harder choices to make. One had to choose between continuing to feel a part of the Jewish people (which implied distance from one's fellow Bolivians or Argentinians) or starting anew as part (but not an integral part) of the Bolivian or Argentinian nation. The adjustment required was more demanding than that required of Catholic Italians and Spaniards. The terms in which the choice was presented were more urgent than the terms offered by societies that accept cultural diversity. Those Jews who continued to identify primarily as Jews ended by constructing for themselves their own private societies, within which everyone was known to everyone else and responsible for one another's behavior. This core society was then attacked: the building of AMIA, the Buenos Aires kehillah, was destroyed by bombs in 1994 (see pp. 265–68).

In the United States, numerous institutions evolved that took as their task the Americanization of the immigrant. Foremost among these was the universal, tax-supported public school. Notoriously, children were taught the pledge of allegiance to the flag before the alphabet. The primary interest of the state was in Americanizing the child; reading and writing could come later. A close adjunct to this process was the free night school for immigrants. It is not irrelevant that the prototype of such schools was opened in Baltimore in 1889 by Henrietta Szold, daughter of an immigrant Hungarian rabbi. Its first students were Russian Jews, and the subjects taught were American history and the English language. The assumption of responsibility for this school by the city of Baltimore represented a clear acceptance of the obligation to teach the newcomers English and prepare them for citizenship. Subsequently, the system of adult night school education became a permanent part of the American educational scene.

Universal military conscription into the citizen army of the United States during World War I was another homogenizing experience for immigrants. Work in the industrial plant, where labor, like machines, was viewed as interchangeable, though experienced at the time as dehumanizing, obliterated distinctions between white ethnic groups, whether immigrant or Yankee. Jews who flocked to the factories and sweatshops became subject to the homogenizing pressures of the industrial plant and, in the course of a generation and in the company of other immigrants, became "Americanized." Standardization of behavior patterns was speeded by the continent-wide network of transportation and communication, which made it possible for immigrants to blend to a national, rather than a merely regional, standard.

None of these nationalizing forces had free play in the Latin American republics. Burdened with some of the most difficult terrain in the world, Latin American communications and transportation responded to regional, not continental, exigencies. Industrialization did not really get under way until

World War I; abstention from that conflict meant that citizen armies—the great democratizing force ever since the French Revolution—never came into being. To the contrary, in the anomie that followed independence, soldiering degenerated into banditry. As for public education, it was the victim of the most profound apathy and prejudice on the part of legislators.

In the absence of nationalizing institutions, immigrants to Latin America were left largely on their own when it came to restructuring their lives to suit the conditions of their new homes. Inevitably, they tended to perpetuate the pattern of life of the old country, since it was the only one they knew. This process operated on all nationality groups and marginalized them from the political process. Its impact on Jewish immigrants was particularly severe because Jews were themselves divided into numerous ethnic groups characterized by differences in language, custom, and religious practice. In their search for mutually supportive relationships, Jews reproduced the varied institutions of their countries of origin. In the process, they unintentionally walled themselves off from one another as well as from the larger society. The result was that welter of interethnic rivalries which for many years incapacitated the communities for concerted action.

Since Jewish immigrants to the United States originated in roughly similar migrations, the same potential for divisiveness existed among them. Indeed, at the close of the colonial period, rivalry did develop between "aristocratic" Sephardim and "parvenu" Germans. Later, the aloof attitude of German Jews was to afflict the impoverished East Europeans. But despite episodes of conflict, these interethnic feuds did not become institutionalized as they did in Latin America. The representative and philanthropic bodies of active American Jewish life embrace Jews of every ethnic origin. In acculturating to a United States standard, Jews acculturated to one another.

The Americanization of immigrants was undertaken in religiously neutral terms. Development of secular public life in the United States and the consignment of religious belief to the private sphere enabled Jews to identify with the nation and to adopt its symbols and heroes without reservation. The religious affiliation of American presidents is not regarded as relevant in public school textbooks. Old Glory, Mount Rushmore, and Monticello are national, not religious, symbols. No schoolchild is required to learn what church, if any, Davy Crockett attended. Even the religious sensibilities of a Lincoln are transmuted into a nonsectarian faith that is as acceptable to Jewish as to Christian citizens. To be "religious" is a sufficient value in itself.

It is a truism of Jewish history that the elements wherein Jewish communities differ from one another are elements that have been taken over from their host societies. We have seen that the rigidities of Latin American Catholicism were early replicated within the Jewish communities of that continent. Monopoly over the cemetery gave the kehillah the same leverage as that exerted by the church. Rabbinical resistance to reform paralleled the opposition of Latin American prelates to the innovations of Vatican II. In the United States, Jewish congregations cast themselves in the Protestant mold, refashioning Jewish

tradition and offering to the American Jew a variety of religious styles that parallels the range offered to Protestants. The Reform movement made a particularly swift and drastic adaptation to American life, reflecting the emancipation psychology of the movement's German founders. Conservatism threw a bridge between Reform and Orthodoxy, providing a way by which the East European migrants could grow into the role of "third major religion" America was offering. Later, Reconstructionism opened the way to continually changing interpretations of Judaism to keep it in touch with the evolution of American life. Eclectic religious practice in the United States contrasts strongly with the monopoly maintained until recently by the Catholic Church and by Orthodox Judaism in Latin America. The result is that third-generation American Jews are free to embrace their Jewish identification while assimilating to American life. There is no unbridgeable fracture between Protestantism and Judaism and ample meeting ground for the two traditions.

But it is in the area of economics that comparison of the Jewish situation in the North and in the South is most illuminating. The Jewish mode of entry into the North American economy included the same reliance on peddling that has been noted for Latin America. Following an initial period of itinerancy and forced savings, many peddlers moved into either fixed commerce or manufacturing (principally in textiles and the clothing industry). The immigrants' behavior patterns were similar, but the receptive molds of the two societies were distinctly different. Since industrialization began considerably earlier in the North, purchasing power was more widely diffused throughout the population. There was little of that contempt for commerce which was so notable a feature of the Latin South. Moneymaking, striving to get ahead, and competition for status were all qualities approved by the culture; indeed, success at these activities was widely regarded as a sign of grace. Although the individual Jewish entrepreneur may have been as disliked by his non-Jewish competitor as was his coreligionist in the South by his, nevertheless northern culture, suffused by the Protestant work ethic, supported his efforts to get ahead. Uncle Sam himself had been a merchant. He provided quite a different role model than did the plundering *hidalgo* of Iberian mythology. There existed in the United States no counterpart to the obloquy that Hispanic culture had heaped upon the entrepreneur since the thirteenth century, unless it were contempt for the man who depended on inherited wealth for status. Individuals with ingenuity and brains enough to turn potential into reality were admired—even if they were Jewish. With the recognition of entrepreneurial skills widespread through the population, there was nothing mysterious about the process of making money, and no legend of a Jewish conspiracy was needed to explain the financial success of individual Jews. Nor was it necessary to compose fictitious Jewish genealogies for non-Jews who showed business acumen.

Very few of the Latin American Jewish communities ever achieved the buoyancy that characterizes Jewish life in the United States. One might name Curaçao under Dutch rule, Panama during the building of the canal, Chile during World War I, contemporary Brazil (whose national motto is "Order and Progress"). The factor common to each was the existence of an expanding free enterprise economy. Jews have attained status in societies that measured them by their achievements, and they have been kept in a subordinate position where status was ascribed by birth.

In addition to the petty merchants and craftsmen, there were Jewish proletarians in both migratory streams. The reciprocal nature of immigrant acculturation and structural assimilation emerges clearly in the field of labor organization. Jews were prime movers in the initiation of labor unions in the United States. Workers with their roots in the Bund organized unions that set standards for the entire labor movement with respect to collective bargaining, the forty-hour week, medical insurance, workers' pensions, and the arbitration of grievances. In fact, it could be said that during their time in the factory, Jewish workers revolutionized the condition of the American working man and woman.

Along with their fellow activists, Jewish labor leaders suffered police repression at the start, not because they were Jews but because they were labor leaders. But the most forceful among them—people like Sidney Hillman, Morris Hillquit, Alex Rose, Rose Schneiderman, David Dubinsky—ultimately came to wield considerable influence in state and national politics. Merely to name them confirms the salience of Jewish labor leaders and their emergence from a parochial to a national stage. Their daily activities as they struggled to earn a living in decent conditions opened up key institutions in American society.

Not so in Latin America. Early union activity by Jews was met not only by police repression but by goon squad action against Jewish neighborhoods and homes. The strike at Vasena ironworks in Buenos Aires in 1919 ended in a pogrom in the Jewish district of Once. Over the course of a generation, as it became clear that a Jewish contribution to national political life was not acceptable, the ideals of the Bund were compressed into the hothouse atmosphere of the kehillah, where they could have no practical effect save for casting votes in favor of a socialist version of Zionism. Jewish labor leaders never gained national acceptability for their ideas, a failure shared by their non-Jewish colleagues. Failure of the Radical party of Irigoyen in Argentina to act upon its principles is notorious. Socialism influenced the Latin American labor movement, but did not permeate the culture. In Argentina, socialism was swamped by *peronismo*, a personalist movement that manipulated the loyalties of workers while reducing their unions to dependency on the chief executive. Egalitarian ideologies found no resonance in society as a whole. In this hierarchical setting, Jews, as a subordinated minority, were permitted to occupy a well-defined niche in society, circumscribed in terms of commercial and financial services rendered. While Jewish individuals might be elected or appointed to public office, legitimacy was not accorded to any political interest of the Jewish collectivity.

In contrast to the political neutralization of Jews in Latin American politics, Jewish immigrants to the United States plunged into local politics as soon as they had mastered the English language. By the turn of the century, there

were Jewish ward heelers, poll watchers, ballot clerks, and campaign orators in East Coast cities. Jews were admitted to Tammany councils and nominated to municipal office. They were appointed corporation counsels and assistant district attorneys; they sought election as assemblymen and aldermen, and many went on to judicial appointments. The "Jewish vote" was being sought in New York by 1905, and candidates campaigned vigorously in wards populated by Jews.[3] Political activism among Jews depended not only on their own proclivities (presumably shared by their cousins in Buenos Aires and Bogotá) but on what has been called the democratic mold. The political culture offered access at entry level to any group that could bring together sufficient votes to force attention to their needs.

The pluralist society of the United States incorporated immigrant Jews politically, as Latin American societies did not. The process was crucial not just for immigrants, or only for Jews, but for the entire working class, which was enabled to use the engines of major political parties to bring about vast improvements in living conditions and to achieve political status sufficient to guarantee that these gains would be permanent.

The level of political activity among American Jews has regularly been measured at higher levels than among American non-Jews. This involvement can be documented at every level from the college campus up to and including national elections. American Jews wield influence beyond the weight of their numbers in many areas related to politics, as journalists, party organizers, volunteers, and consultants. For long, the number of Jewish officeholders did not reflect the degree of their political activism; residual bars reduced the appeal of Jewish candidates. A 1974 study found that in the history of the United States, 108 Jews had been elected to high office—governor, senator, or congressman. Six-tenths of 1 percent of all senators elected to that date were Jewish. By that year, however, Jews were represented proportionately in high office: two were governors, three senators, twelve congressmen, or 2.9 percent of all the high elected officials in the nation.[4] The 103rd Congress, elected in 1992, included 33 Jewish representatives and 10 senators,[5] a demonstration of the growing acceptability of Jewish candidates over the intervening years.

Jewish individuals have not been permitted to play a commensurate political role in the Spanish-speaking republics. The few Jews who hold office are extremely susceptible to displacement by shifts in the balance of power between major contenders—as happened dramatically in Chile in the sixties and seventies. Both President Salvador Allende and General Augusto Pinochet, who overthrew his government, appointed Jews to high office. Their forced resignations mirror the departure of all officials from administrations that lose power; however, in the case of Jews, such a development leaves this minority totally unrepresented in government. Political access is never quite good enough. Political activity itself has come to be feared as exacting disproportionate penalties from the community as a whole, as it did in Chile. The electoral process, which has not functioned satisfactorily for the general population, has been even less satisfactory for Jews in terms of either representation or integration.

While American Jews can participate in elections and then sit back to watch their outcome with equanimity for their fate *as Jews*, Latin American Jews must constantly gauge the level of anti-Semitism among their governors. Jews are insufficient numerically to affect the outcome of elections, even if they were to vote as a unit (there is no evidence that they do) and even if elections were to be decided by a count of the ballots, which frequently they are not. There has been one notable effort to elicit Jewish support on the part of those whose duty it is to arrange elections. In 1943, in the face of anti-Semitic demonstrations and the fear that Argentina would be perceived as the last refuge of fascism, General Juan Perón created the Organización Israelita Argentina. This Argentine Jewish Organization was intended as a means of enrolling Jews in the peronista party, but the mainstream community was too suspicious of Perón to take advantage of this opening. The OIA never achieved the numbers or the political weight to challenge the DAIA, and eventually faded away.[6]

Inability to compete in local and national politics leaves Latin American Jews peculiarly vulnerable to shifting political ground in volatile polities whose legal norms do not provide for their entry into society on equal terms. Jewish vulnerability derives only in part from official ideology. Jews qua Jews fared well under the reactionary Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and the radical Fidel Castro of Cuba. The military junta of Argentina licensed the most revolting anti-Semitic acts; at the same time, the equally authoritarian military junta in neighboring Chile went to considerable lengths to reassure its Jewish community. The common element is expedience. It may suit one government or another to accommodate Jewish interests or to squeeze them; nowhere do legal and social norms provide for their treatment solely on the basis of their citizenship. The anti-Jewish stance of medieval Catholicism is available for recycling by *nacionalista* political parties with a paranoid vision of Jewish conspiracies or by Third World party-liners parroting anti-Israel slogans. Latin American Jews are dependent on the goodwill of the powers that be, rather than on legal norms and ingrained habits of toleration. In this situation, it is probably irrelevant whether a government is of the Right or of the Left—anti-Semitism is a weapon available to either, and the Jewish communities make what arrangements they can to safeguard their security.

The absorption of immigrants is a reciprocal process: immigrants must learn new forms of behavior, adopting the cultural patterns of their host society; and the host society must be willing to move over and accommodate the immigrants. Seven variables of the assimilation process have been identified, each subject to an infinite number of variations: acculturation, meaning that immigrants have changed their cultural patterns to those of the host society; structural assimilation, implying admission into cliques, clubs, and elite institutions; acceptability as marriage partners; a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society; the existence of prejudice; overt discrimination; and

civic assimilation, marked by agreement on values and the distribution of power.[7] If we attempt to fit Latin American Jewry into this schema, we find that Jewish immigrants to Latin America acculturated rapidly, translating themselves from Yiddish, Ladino, Arabic, and a host of other languages into Spanish or Portuguese in the course of a single generation. To a far greater degree than in the North, however, structural assimilation has been slow to occur. Societies have been reluctant to grant Jews access to important sectors of their national societies.

On the other hand, Latin American Jews enjoy greater acceptability as marital partners in the South than in the North. The revelation by demographers in 1974 that half the projected Argentine Jewish population simply did not exist testifies to the willingness of Jews to assimilate and the ease with which they may do so if they cease to regard themselves as Jews. Magnus Mörner long ago pointed out that Latin Americans tend to interpret acculturation in biological terms.[8] An astonishing variety of peoples have been digested through intermarriage and miscegenation, and Latin absorptive capacity includes Jews.

The rate of Jewish intermarriage is high not only in areas such as Argentina that are populated by Europeans, but likewise in countries such as Cuba and Brazil, whose populations are exotic to most Jews. "We fell in love with our children and married their mothers," as one early chronicler put it. The trend toward intermarriage accelerated as more Jews entered the universities and went on to the free professions. Modern urban lifestyles support abandonment of religious affiliation, and increasing numbers of intellectuals of Jewish descent stopped identifying with the Jewish people. This trend reached the point where increasing numbers of marriages between Jews take place by civil contract, in order to avoid any contact with religion. Since the offspring of such marriages are not Jews, there is a possibility that the East Europeans, on the surface the least digestible of Jewish immigrants to Latin America, will go the way of the Portuguese nation of Curaçao, the Alsatians of Mexico, and the Sephardim of the Amazon. The dissolution of the Jewish people would prepare the way for full-scale participation by the descendants of Jews in the peoplehood of each of the republics, the fourth stage of the schematic representation of the assimilatory process referred to above. For this to happen, social and political structures would have to open further, because of residual prejudice against the *descendants* of Jews.

The philo-Semite (and there are many in Latin America, even discounting the superstitious who wear a Star of David as a good luck charm) tries to destroy prejudice by naming heroes he wrongly believes to have been Jewish: Christopher Columbus; Bartolomé de Las Casas, apostle to the Indians; the poet-philosopher Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; Antonio José Sucre, Liberator of Ecuador; Ferdinand the Catholic; Francisco Madera, revolutionary president of Mexico; not to mention all the inhabitants of Antioquia. It might be said that these claims and disclaimers muddy the waters even more, for they foster the myth of the hidden Jew. The reality of Jewish life on the continent is

contained in the daily existence of Jews. The myth of the Jew is manifest in persistent "accusations" of Jewish ancestry against heroes and politicians; rumored plots by Jewish bankers to take over entire countries in cahoots with Jewish communists; newspaper reports of the imminent arrival of Israeli parachutists on their way to invade Patagonia; and the omnipresent Christs whose vivid sufferings ordain, if not the punishment of the Jews, at least their subjugation. Among surface manifestations, one may note that anti-Semitic tracts such as the notoriously fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are widely sold on Latin street corners, along with those other escapist fantasies of the disinherited, lottery tickets. Folk anti-Semitism feeds the jealousies and hatreds of people condemned to poverty by their own elites.



Henry Ford's scurrilous *International Jew* is among the anti-Semitic pamphlets widely sold at newspaper kiosks throughout Latin America.

Adherence to such a value system ordained the near total exclusion of Jews from civic life. Five hundred years ago, Jews—and even Christians descended from Jews—were barred from settling in the New World. With the advent of independence, Jews were admitted to the republics but continued to suffer legal disabilities. School systems were based on philosophical tenets that Jews rejected and that rejected Jews. By the end of the nineteenth century, most legal prohibitions had been removed and a more promising environment created for

non-Latin immigrants. But major social and political institutions continued to rebuff Jews. This is amply demonstrated by the paucity of Jewish officeholders; the vulnerability of Jews in public life to anti-Semitic libels; the absence of Jews from high ranks in the military; and the continued acceptability of anti-Semitic graffiti and gross caricatures of Jews in the media.

The blockage of the entry of Jews into the core of national life represents, in a way, the compromise between proimmigration and anti–immigration forces: Jews were admitted to the Latin republics, but they were not granted the boon of civic assimilation. The process, which is so far advanced in the United States, has made a beginning in Brazil but is just getting under way in the Spanish-speaking republics. Jewish efforts to enter into the full responsibilities and rights of citizenship have consistently been blocked and their influence circumscribed, thus limiting the impact Jews individually or as a group can make upon society in any dimension other than the economic. Clearly, the chief limitation to the total assimilation of Latin American Jewry is the reluctance of society to admit Jews to membership.

If there was one area of the world where Sephardic immigrants would seem to have had an advantage over Ashkenazim, it was in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking American nations. In fact, at the turn of the century, it was proposed by Gerchunoff and others that the re-encounter among Jewish and Christian inheritors of the Iberian tradition would produce a Sephardic cultural renaissance. The exact form that this *neosefardismo* might assume was left quite vague: would it merely involve renewed interest in Sephardic poetry and cuisine, a refurbishing of the legends of the Golden Age of Spain? or would something new, something gloriously unforeseen, emerge synergistically out of the twentieth-century re-encounter between the winners and losers of 1492?

The prospects for *neosefardismo* were based on the return of Spanish-speaking Jews to a Spanish-speaking milieu. Sephardim had compacted their historic experience into their home language (known variously as Ladino, Judezmo, or Heketia) which, even after the lapse of centuries, remained mutually intelligible with Castilian Spanish. Once returned to a Spanish environment, might not the bright flame of Sephardic genius be reignited?[9]

But the most cursory comparison between the conditions under which Sephardim flourished in Iberia, and the conditions under which *neosefardismo* was anticipated to flourish in Latin America, shows decisive differences. Jews lived in Iberia from the third century of the Christian era until 1492 and were integral to the peninsula's history. Sephardim arrived in Latin America already stigmatized by the Expulsion of 1492, which stamped them as undesirable foreigners. Sephardic culture flourished in Iberia largely under the Muslims, who assigned a subordinate status to Jews but treated them as one of the "peoples of the book" whose religious sensibilities were superior to those of pagans. In the Spanish domains in the New World the Catholic Church anathematized both Muslims and Jews as heretics, to the point of accusing them as cannibals and idolators, accusations that could not have prevailed in

Spain itself, where Jews and Muslims were well known by their neighbors. Moreover, among the immigrants to Latin America who were known as Sephardim (under the broad definition customarily used by Ashkenazim), only a minority were actual inheritors of the Spanish legacy. Most were speakers of Arabic who had received the Sephardic tradition at the hands of the Spanish exiles centuries before. In combination with the hardship of the migratory process, these factors were enough to thwart, at least for now, the hopes for a neo-Sephardic renaissance.

Neosefardismo did find a home in Latin America, but not among its Jewish legatees. Its best-known exponent was the criollo Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), whose interest in kabalah animates his best-known works. The revival of this aspect of Sephardic tradition has passed on to a new generation of authors, some Jewish and some not. But Jewish authors working in a neo-Sephardic mode live in Spain, not Latin America.

Latin America Jews are orphans of history, balanced between brutal rejection and tentative acceptance, cultural marginalization and biologic absorption. They seem poised between permanence—vide their integration into cultural life—and dissolution, as marked most vividly by their high rate of emigration and declining population totals.

In the eyes of nacionalistas for whom hispanicism and Catholicism are the very core of nationality, Jews will never be able to overcome their image as conspirators against religion, state, and family. In the liberal mind, choice really lies with the Jews: to become wholly naturalized by dropping their Jewishness or perversely to continue marginalizing themselves behind the walls of their synagogues and sports clubs.

United States Jews passed through this existential identity crisis during the immigrant generation and have since succeeded in integrating themselves as Jews into the American psyche. Being Jewish and being American are not regarded as incompatible states. Skepticism concerning the permanence of this happy resolution is at the core of the Zionist thesis.

Jerusalem, 1987, Table 5. Cited in Goldberg and Rozen, *Los latinoamericanos en Israel*, p. 250.

61. *Statistical Abstract of Israel 1996.*

62. DellaPergola, "Demographic Trends," pp. 120–21.

Chapter 9

1. Louis D. Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies*, p. 28.

2. Denunciations of Jews as idolators and cannibals beyond the saving grace of God animate sermons delivered to Native American congregations in Peru and Mexico in the sixteenth century. See Elkin, "Imagining Idolatry: Missionaries, Indians, and Jews."

3. Charles S. Bernheimer, *The Russian Jew in the United States*, pp. 256–61.

4. Stephen D. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, p. 11.

5. *American Jewish Year Book* 94:117.

6. Leonardo Senkman, "Los usos políticos del antisemitismo bajo el peronismo, 1974–75," 1:105–6.

7. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, pp. 71–76.

8. Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America*, p. 5.

9. Elkin, "Centaur on the Roof: Can a Neo-Sephardic Culture Emerge in Latin America?"

THE JEWS OF LATIN AMERICA

Revised Edition

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HM

HOLMES & MEIER
NEW YORK / LONDON
[1980] 1998

CHAPTER 11

Jews and Non-Jews

"Buenos Aires, shtot mein liebe, Ich bin farlibt in dein tsebliter yugnt . . ."
(Buenos Aires, beloved city, I'm in love with your flowering youth . . .)

—Yiddish version of a Carlos Gardel tango

FOR MANY LATIN Americans, the reality of Jewish life is obscured by mythology. Only the dissipation of myth allows the reality of Jews and Judaism to appear. Apparently, this happens more readily at the personal than at the societal level. The acceptability of Jews as marriage partners is widespread, causing Jewish leaders to express more concern about assimilation than about anti-Semitism. Yet happy exogamous marriages exist side by side with murderous manifestations of race hatred.

Within Jewish spaces, behind the symbolic walls of the kehillah, highly organized Jewish communities regulate the behavior of their members by excluding the intermarried, the criminal, and the politically radical. The politically correct clubs and synagogues and beneficent societies that result present to non-Jews the appearance of a people unified in character and goals. But the suave facade of country club life masks the abandonment of Judaism by those who do not find ethnic allegiance compelling, as well as the emigration of others who desire to live a less circumscribed life as Jews. The number of Argentines who identify themselves as Jews has dropped by one-third in the past thirty years; across the continent, total numbers have decreased in this period from 550,000 to 377,000.

In public spaces, Latino Jewish entrepreneurs, academics, artists, and literati have experienced increasing success. As third and fourth generations acculturate, the social acceptability of Jews increases. In recent years, this has translated into wider acceptance of political participation by Jewish individuals. But acculturation has not diminished the hostility directed at Jews by sectors of the military and the church, which emerges in extreme forms when these sectors attain political dominance.

No wonder then that the texture of relations between Jews and non-Jews

in Latin America continues to puzzle observers. Dichotomies of attraction and repulsion, marginalization and integration, assimilation and particularism, anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism animate the literature on Latin American Jewry. Conclusions that may be valid for one country may rightly be challenged if applied to another. Argentina is not Brazil is not Nicaragua. This chapter attempts to interpret the nature of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Latin America. Because the largest Jewish population is to be found in Argentina and this community has been the most intensively studied, attention is first focused there.

Argentina: Attraction and Repulsion

The most obdurate anti-Semitism is that which derives from the conviction that Judaism is a worldwide conspiracy aimed at destroying Christianity and subjecting the world to domination by Jews.[1] This belief is central to Argentine *nacionalismo*, and it is practically impervious to reality-based evidence. At most, nationalists may harbor a difference of opinion as to whether the propensity to subversion is diluted by distance from the Jewish people and Judaism through intermarriage and assimilation. For *populistas*, assimilation renders Jews acceptable. For *integralistas*, however, once a Jew, always a Jew, even if formal conversion has taken place. Both brands of nationalists reject the liberal philosophy that brought non-Catholics and non-Latins to Argentine shores, and both reject the multicultural society that is emerging from the immigration period. Their ideal is an organic society overseen by a corporate state, and Jews, the ultimate nonconformists, are the special target of their hostility.[2] Despite the persistence of extreme anti-Semitic beliefs, it has been said that Argentina as a nation never adopted an anti-Semitic policy.

> It is clear that, with the exception of laws and policies concerning immigration, there has not been a systematic legislative effort to discriminate against Jews in Argentina. But it is also worth noting that there was often room in the interstices of legislation for the administrative expression of anti-Semitism. For much of the period discussed [1930–83] Jews were effectively excluded from certain areas of official life. For example, there was not a single Jew in the middle or upper officer ranks, although both Chile and Brazil had Jewish generals. The foreign service was also essentially closed to Jews. During the tenure of the military regime of 1943, many Jewish teachers were dismissed from their jobs. Under the military governments of 1966 and 1976 a great many Jews were removed from the civil service posts and university positions they had acquired when the [democratically elected] Radicals were in power.[3]

Avni argues that the closest Argentina has come to adoption of an anti-Semitic policy was when it refused to admit Jewish refugees from Nazism. Catholic religious instruction in the public schools has been another sensitive area; while not explicitly anti-Semitic, it has allowed for the transmission of anti-Semitic ideas. Local legislation outlawing kosher slaughter or restricting the public use of the Yiddish language also shaped the Argentine Jewish experience, although some of these measures were transitory.[4]

It may be that discrimination, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Perhaps Argentine Jews, like Mao Zedong's allegorical fish who do not know what water is, are so acclimated to high levels of free-floating anti-Semitism that they accept it as the natural order of things. As individuals and as a group, they accept limitations and discriminations that appear outrageous to North Americans as the cost of living in a Catholic society that partially excludes them, yet exerts a sweet charm over them. The romanticized story of the agricultural colonies has rooted them in the very earth of Argentina. Those who came to the city were mostly able to attain a satisfactory way of life. Criollo ways—the close-knit family ties, the intense intellectual life of cafés and bookstores, the streets and restaurants filled with throngs of people until well past midnight—contrast delightfully with dark memories of the old country or more recent impressions of chilly northern climes. There seemed to be no reason why life should not continue to unfold pleasantly into the indefinite future.

This dream began to crumble in the fifties and sixties during the administrations of two democratically elected presidents. It is part of the Argentine paradox that the viability of Jewish life in that country was brought seriously into question during the constitutional administrations of Presidents Arturo Frondizi (1958–62) and Arturo Illía (1963–66).[5] Within the context of an ongoing economic crisis and tension between civilian and military forces, anti-Semitic verbal and physical attacks escalated. Anti-Jewish graffiti appeared on city walls and attacks on Jewish businesses and institutions were carried out by right-wing groups, without eliciting a police response or even official acknowledgment of the incidents. Out of a long catalogue of anti-Semitic actions, Senkman lists some examples from the period 1959–62.

Beginning in 1959, propaganda fliers and anti-Semitic graffiti scrawled on the walls of Jewish institutions in Buenos Aires encouraged violent attacks on Jews. In March, students at Colegio del Salvador, while protesting a change in the national constitution, incidentally took up an anti-Semitic chant. In April, the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina was violently attacked. In May, a gang confronted Jewish children in Villa Devoto on their way to a Zionist festival. Synagogues in the city of La Plata and the province of Córdoba were attacked. In July, a bomb exploded in front of Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina in the center of Buenos Aires. In August, armed men entered the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires and destroyed stands that had been put up for an exhibition by Hebrew University. In August and September, additional attacks occurred against Jewish institutions: October witnessed attacks against Jewish youth centers in Córdoba, Paraná, and La Plata; and in December the patios of the Faculty of Economics at UBA were painted with swastikas and anti-Jewish slogans. Throughout

December and the following January, anti-Jewish inscriptions appeared all over the country, cemeteries were desecrated, and Jewish businesses were painted with swastikas, especially in La Plata and Córdoba. Threatening phone calls to members of the Jewish community heightened the tension. When school resumed, there were more attacks against Jewish students at Colegio Nacional Sarmiento.

In this atmosphere, the abduction of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann by Israeli agents triggered an organized campaign of attacks on Argentine Jews by the political faction Union Cívica Nacionalista and the neo-Nazi group Tacuara, on the pretext that national sovereignty was in danger. The pot boiled over with the national debate over the reintroduction of Catholic instruction in the schools. In this debate, the priest Julio Meinvielle found his metier, reissuing his anti-Semitic book, *El judío en el misterio de la historia* (The Jew in the Mystery of History). An uninterrupted fusillade of anti-Semitic attacks by UCN and Tacuara in anticipation of elections culminated in June 1962 with the kidnapping of a young Jewish woman, who was forcibly tatooed with a swastika on her breast. Neo-Nazis disrupted colleges and universities all over the country upon Israel's execution of Eichmann.[6]

Attacks on Jewish individuals and institutions met with no official objection and were carried out with impunity. In some instances, police refused to accept victims' complaints and denied to the press that any attack had taken place. Anti-Semitic acts were dismissed as staged events for the purpose of covering up "Jewish economic crimes." The DAIA, which made representations to the police and to presidential aides, was accused of falsifying incidents in order to foment a communist plot.

Meanwhile, the army, which held the civilian government in checkmate, "obsessed with radical or leftist conspiracies," confused working-class action, such as union-based or peronista politics, with its chief enemy, communism.[7] Senkman's explanation for the failure of these transitional democratic regimes to act (they were bracketed and displaced by military coups) is that both Frondizi and Illía were primarily interested in neutralizing social and political unrest. Because neo-Nazis and right-wing goons were battling the threat from the left, they chose to ignore their attacks on Jews. At the same time, these democratically elected presidents failed to assess the damage being done to the social fabric by the license being allowed to the right wing to carry out criminal acts against the civil population; the intensive focus of government and military on stopping the advance of peronism and communism conditioned them to excuse the "excesses" of gangs who included anti-Semitism in their anti-communist arsenal.[8] The strident propaganda pouring out of a variety of presses at this time, and the closing of Jewish leftist institutions while groups inspired by Nazi ideology continued to operate freely, prepared the public to believe in the existence of a "Jewish communist plot." Strong feelings of insecurity permeated the Jewish community, most of whose members had voted for the Radical party that now was presiding over their deteriorating position.

The leaders of DAIA nevertheless continued to support democratic forces.

They reasoned that anti-Semitism was being used as a political weapon by reactionary forces seeking to destabilize democracy in the interest of a return to authoritarian government, and that both Frondizi and Illía failed to see the danger because they shared the attackers' goals: to block the ascent of the left to power.[9] On the basis of this analysis, and knowing that a demonstration on behalf of Jewish rights would get nowhere, DAIA called for a protest strike by democratic sectors at all levels of society against terrorism by "Nazis" (meaning Nazi-influenced nativists). The theme was: "They'll begin with the Jews and end with democracy." The work stoppage, carried out on 28 June 1962 following the attack on Graciela Sirota, was a success, attracting considerable numbers of non-Jewish as well as Jewish participants. For their constituents, DAIA offered a defense of personal dignity as Jews and as Argentine citizens whose rights were being infringed.

The chaotic democracy that engulfed Argentina in the 1960s was brought to an end by General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966–70), who ousted Illía and initiated the destruction of Argentine intellectual life by pillaging the universities. Libraries burned books, plays were proscribed, intellectual and artistic life virtually shut down throughout the country, in a period argentinos describe as *mccartismo,* but which went a great deal further than McCarthyism in the United States. Repression of faculty and students and the closing of universities during this regime led to the flight into exile of a large number of Argentine intellectuals and artists, and came close to destroying the country's intellectual and artistic life. Not surprisingly, with nacionalistas in power, anti-Semitism became another instrument of policy. Under Onganía, all Jewish officials were removed from government posts, and assassinations and acts of hooliganism against Jews went unpunished.

At the same time, numerous fascist organizations were operating in Argentina, fueled by ideas scavenged from the wreckage of the Third Reich. It is not necessary to imagine sophisticated Nazis seducing naive Argentines into adopting their agenda: their message resonated sufficiently within local culture to make itself at home in criollo terms. Thirty years after the collapse of Nazism in Europe, its ideology was alive and thriving in Argentina, Peru, and Chile. In the latter country, Dignidad, an enclosed community of neo-Nazis, survived intact. Extreme right-wing newspapers and magazines such as *El Fortín, Cabildo, Restauración,* and *Patria Peronista* were peddling anti-Semitism with articles such as one that declaimed, "We confirm that the white slave trade and drug traffic are two instruments utilized by Zionist imperialism to corrupt our youth. This should be investigated as a conspiracy against our nation." Organizations such as Tacuara, Falange de Fe (Córdoba), Centuria Universitaria Nacionalista, Falange Restaurador Nacionalista, Centuria Nacionalista, Agrupación Nacionalista Argentina, and Partido Acción Nacionalista, all were propagating a line based on hatred of Jews as cosmopolitans who imported foreign ideas—communism and capitalism—that corrupt the body politic. In support of the charge of a Jewish plot to subjugate Argentines to "international bankers," a government-controlled television station broadcast in February 1975 a dramati-

zation of *La Bolsa* (The Stock Exchange), the hoary anti-Semitic libel that newspapers had serialized three generations earlier. The "Andinia Plan," fabricated by the professional anti-Semite Walter Beveraggi Allende, popularized the paranoid delusion that there existed an international conspiracy to create a second Jewish state in the south of Argentina.

While coping with the threat from the right, Jews also came under attack from the left. Radical groups aligned with Middle Eastern guerrilla factions became overtly anti-Semitic in the seventies, drawing on racial prejudice to bolster their anti-Zionist agenda, not only in Argentina but all across Latin America. Revolutionary groups established contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, working toward an alliance of Third World revolutionaries whose principal target rapidly became Israel, and by extension, Jews anywhere in the world. In neighboring Brazil, the combination of dependence on Arab oil, a rapid transition from dictatorship to democracy, and agitation by professional anti-Semites among left-wing supporters of the Palestine Liberation Organization triggered vituperative attacks against Jews. Jews were attacked for having links with Israel, and Israel for having links with imperialist powers (the United States, Great Britain, the International Monetary Fund) that allegedly held the continent in a position of economic dependency.[10]

These radical groupings attracted Jewish as well as non-Jewish students. In the 1960s and 1970s, multitudes of university-educated Jewish youth were becoming as alienated from the Jewish establishment as non-Jewish youth were from the criollo establishment. By 1976, fewer than 10 percent of Buenos Aires Jewish youth (estimated at a total 90,000) belonged to any Jewish community institution. Among university students, the proportion of the affiliated was just 5.8 percent.[11] The revolutionary movements sweeping South and Central America caught up these unaffiliated Jewish youths. There were Jewish Montoneros in Argentina and Tupamaros in Uruguay, Jewish Cubans in the ranks of the revolutionaries of 1959, and Jewish Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the seventies. In the process of joining the revolution, they distanced themselves from other Jews and from Judaism, either as a matter of principle or in order to establish their credentials with their comrades in arms. The hostility of left-wing groups toward Israel exerted pressure on these young Jews to prove their exclusively national loyalties by dropping their ties to Jews and Judaism.[12] Having adopted the stance of the militant left, these Jews viewed Israel as an imperialist power, allied with the oppressor class they were rebelling against.

A full-scale civil war broke out in Argentina in 1970, with left-wing guerrillas organized in the Revolutionary Popular Army (ERP by its Spanish initials) and Montoneros (an offshoot of peronism) in armed rebellion against a series of corrupt and inefficient governments. Right-wing gangs, organized as the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance, or Triple A, began kidnapping and murdering leftists, apparently with the connivance of the police. Among other violent

acts, attacks on Jewish institutions and individuals escalated. Buenos Aires became a center for the publication of anti-Semitic literature, handed out freely to pedestrians on La Florida and other shopping streets, some of which went so far as to incite pogroms ("save the fatherland—kill a Jew" ran one slogan). The administration of President Isabel Martínez de Perón, under the dominance of her adviser, the spiritualist José López Rega (who may have been the sponsor of the AAA), was using anti-Semitism as an instrument of terror. Given Argentina's history of oscillation between ungovernable democracy and brutal authoritarian rule, by 1976 many middle-class Argentines viewed a military junta pledged to restoring constitutional norms as the lesser among several evils. This judgment was concurred in by the organized Jewish community, as represented through the DAIA.

Dirty War

The military junta that took power in 1976 terminated the threat from the Left by means of a "Dirty War" aimed at physically exterminating subversion. Many Jews, like other middle class citizens, anticipated relief from the harassments, kidnappings, and politically motivated murders that had characterized the Left's assault on organized society. Unfortunately, in practice, the military were more violent than the guerrillas, better armed and organized, more anti-Semitic, and able to utilize the figleaf of legitimacy to act on their murderous ideology. As the then Chief of Buenos Aires Police, Colonel Ramón Camps, said at the time: "First, we will kill the guerrillas. Then we will kill the guerrillas' families. Then we will kill the friends of their families, and the friends of their friends, so that there will be no one left to remember who the guerrillas were."

The junta, organized as the Process of National Reorganization (called the proceso), acted on this premise by killing an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 civilians, many with no record of political activity of any kind. (The Commission appointed later to investigate the matter was able to document 8,800 cases, but many families were too frightened to come forward to report their losses.) As planned, disappearances occurred in chain reaction.

> Aída Leonora Bruschtein was a single woman of twenty-four who taught literacy in the slums of Monte Chingolo, greater Buenos Aires. She was maltreated and shot, before witnesses, by uniformed personnel of Battalion 601 (Intelligence) of the Argentine army. She was identified through fingerprints taken from her hands, which were sent to her family in a jar. The Bruschtein family initiated a lawsuit against the army for homicide. While the matter was *sub judice*, a group of armed men, dressed in civilian clothes and backed by twenty carloads of soldiers, invaded the home of her parents in the center of the city in broad daylight. Aída Leonora's father, sixty years old and a biochemist, was in bed convalescing from a heart attack. The intruders, shouting, "How dare you charge the Argentine army with homicide, Jew son-of-a-bitch," dragged the invalid from his bed and carried him away with great

brutality. The act was never acknowledged officially, and his body was never found.

Adrian Sidon, fiancé of Aída Leonora, was killed by the police on a public sidewalk. His body was never delivered to his father, a well-known lawyer and entrepreneur who demanded it persistently.

Patricia Villa, sister of a daughter-in-law of the Bruschteins, was detained while working in the office of Inter Press in Buenos Aires, before numerous witnesses. One week later, her family was notified by the navy that Patricia had died, but they did not indicate where she had been buried. The authorities demanded that the family keep the episode secret, or what had happened to other members of the family would happen to them also.

At six in the morning, in a joint operation of the federal police and the army, Irene Bruschtein de Ginsburg, sister of Aída Leonora, and her husband, Mario Ginsburg, were detained. She was an artist and he a master workman and student of architecture. Their children Victoria, not quite three years old, and Hugo Roberto, eighteen months, were abandoned at the door of the building where their parents were sequestered. They remain permanently disappeared.

One month earlier, Victor Rafael Bruschtein, seventeen, had been detained in the home where he resided with his mother, in Moron, province of Buenos Aires. He also disappeared.[13]

Edy Kaufman, a respected investigator of human rights abuses, estimates that Jews accounted for close to 10 percent of the disappeared, far exceeding the proportion of Jews in the population at large or even within those professions—university faculty, social workers, psychiatrists, union leaders, literacy teachers—that were specifically targeted.[14] Testimony of prisoners freed from some of the 304 detention centers maintained by the proceso confirms that Jewish prisoners were singled out for particularly abusive treatment, often to the accompaniment of verbal assaults that mimicked Nazi rhetoric. Of course, 90 percent of victims were Christian, mostly Catholic like their victimizers, and they included priests and nuns as well as lay religious leaders.

Strangely, it was difficult to discern immediately the orientation of the military junta toward Jews and the Jewish community. Mainline Jewish institutions were not attacked. Jewish parents were not slow to draw conclusions, enrolling their children in community schools, synagogues, and sports clubs where activities focused on strictly Jewish concerns (religion, Israel, Hebrew-centered education), soaking up the youngsters' time that might otherwise have been spent getting involved with suspect groups.

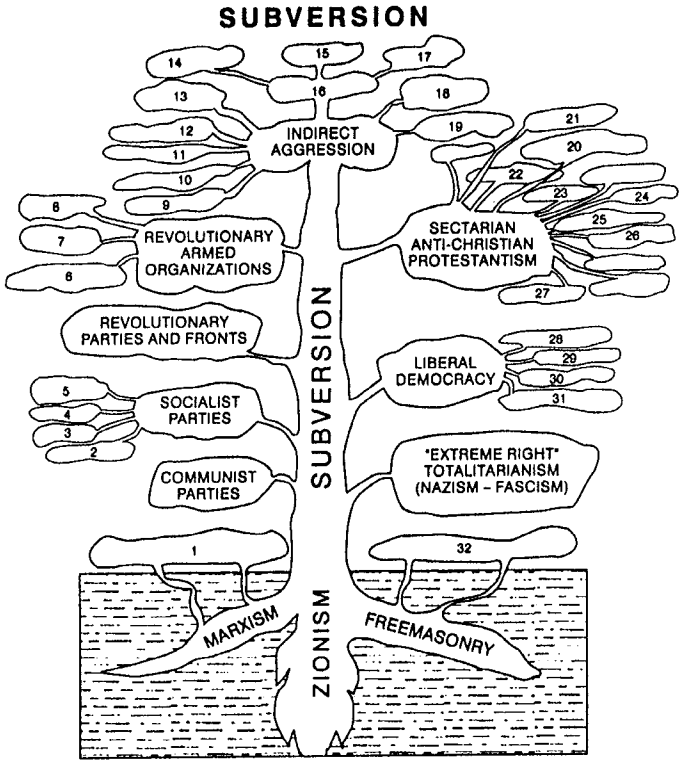
Censorship of the press, plus fear of speaking out, made it difficult to understand exactly what was going on, and some interviewees claimed that they were unaware of the repression until they made a trip abroad and were able to read about ongoing atrocities in the foreign press. The conflicting opinions of community leaders were reported by Israeli embassy officials and are just now being extracted from that government's archives.[15] On one side were those who believed the junta members themselves were not anti-Semitic;

they accepted the generals' statement that, in battling subversion, which threatened the very existence of the state, "excesses" (such as torture and summary execution of prisoners) could be expected to occur, that such acts were not sanctioned by the junta but were the work of gangs they were powerless to control. Those who believed the statements of the *moderados* (moderates) led by Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla concluded that the atrocities being committed against *detenidos* (those who were arrested and held in jail) and *desaparecidos* (those who had been snatched off the street or from their home and made to disappear without trace) occurred either because the victims had been involved in the subversion or because they were the unfortunate victims of unauthorized actions by militias operating independently of the junta. No doubt there were anti-Semites among the personnel who carried out these actions, but anti-Semitism was not a settled policy of the junta. People who accepted these assurances did so in part because they believed that behind the moderate faction waited the *duras*—hardliners who included in their ranks known anti-Semites whom the community had good reason to fear.

In May 1976, DAIA president Nehemias Resnitzky traveled to New York to press this point of view. He had been assured, he told representatives of North American Jewish organizations, that the junta would restore democracy after fixing the economy and that official anti-Semitism was out of the question because Argentina needed U.S. financial support. The extreme right of the Argentine political spectrum, however, was capable of using anti-Semitism to distract people from their real problems. He pleaded with U.S. organizations not to publicize crimes against Jews in order not to fall into what he described as a trap by leftist groups to discredit the junta with charges of anti-Semitism and thereby leave it vulnerable to a putsch by the *duras*.[16]

The other school of thought held that the scale of government repression far outweighed the danger posed initially by the ERP, Montoneros, and various Maoist groups. By May 1977 the armed subversion had been physically exterminated, but the repression ground on. Rumors of the existence of moderate and hardline factions were only a version of the "good cop, bad cop" routine familiar to every police interrogator. The specter of a putsch by hardliners was a ploy to get the gullible to go along with the junta, which really was in control of the actions of its "wild men" and was using state terror as an instrument of governance.

The sadistic behavior of camp guards and their commandants did not emerge from nowhere. The way had been prepared for it by years of racist articles and cartoons in literature and the press; sermons by Catholic priests whose anti-Semitism went unreprimanded by their bishops; rallies of nationalist organizations; anti-Semitic graffiti and vandalism at Jewish institutions; letters and telephone calls to community leaders threatening mayhem to themselves and their families; bombs placed in synagogues; kidnappings, and physical attacks on Jews.[17] Such actions, and popular as well as governmental acquiescence in them, laid the basis for the explosion of anti-Semitism that took place within the protected precincts of proceso prisons. Yet, as much as one year



In this diagram of the Argentine military mind, the tree of subversion grows out of the tap root of Zionism and its collatorals, Marxism and Freemasonry. From these roots grow (1) societies and leagues for defense of human rights, women's rights, pacifism, non-aggression, disarmament, "etc." Communist parties spring directly from the trunk of subversion. Socialist parties sprout (2) national, (3) Argentine, (4) vanguard, and (5) democratic branches. Revolutionary armed organizations include the (7) Montoneros, (8) FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces), and ERP (People's Revolutionary Army) in addition to the spectral (6) Other. Indirect aggression caps the tree of subversion, sprouting (9) union corruption, (10) secular education, (11) liberal economics, (12) liberal politics, (13) drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, and gambling, (14) the Third World, (15) posteonciliar modernism, (16) progressive Catholicism, (17) liberal Christianity, (18) hippie-ism, pornography, homosexuality, and divorce, and (19) the mass media, including art, the press, radio, TV, cinema, magazines, and books. Sectarian anti-Christian Protestantism subverts society through (20) "American noblemen of fire," (21) evangelism, (22) Anael Lodge, (23) Mormonism, (24) Jehovah's Witnesses, (25) Modern school New Acropolis, (26) Hare Krishna, and (27) Siolismo–Youth Power. Liberal Democracy spawns (28) Radicals, (29) Christian Democracy, (30) Social Democracy, (31) Populist Demagogy. Surprisingly, the extreme right branch of totalitarianism (Nazism–Fascism) appears to have no offshoots at all in Argentina; but Freemasonry leads directly to the threat of (32) Rotary Club, Lion's Club, and Junior Chamber. *(The original drawing, "La subversión," was obtained and translated by Edy Kaufman and is reproduced in "Jewish Victims of Repression in Argentina under Military Rule, 1976–1983.")*

after the coup, the Jewish community seemed unconcerned about anti-Semitic attacks by the junta. This may have occurred in part because they had grown inured to the level of free-floating anti-Semitism that had always surrounded them. But their apparent willful ignoring of reality also stemmed from the fact that the censored press misrepresented the deaths of prisoners who had been tortured and executed without trial as having resulted from armed confrontations between the armed forces and the guerrillas. This caused some observers to blame parents of the disappeared for not having brought up their children "correctly." It took years for many civilians to realize that the nacionalista forces had moved beyond random acts of terror to the systematic use of terror to cow them into submission. In coming to power, the military gained the capacity to activate its paranoid fantasies through the machinery of the state. The primitive notions of what or who a Jew might be were transcribed in dozens of prison interrogations and recorded in survivors' memoirs.[18] Their worldview is graphically displayed in the diagram "La Subversión" (see opposite page) included in a pamphlet found on the desk of the vice-director of the Escuela Superior de Guerra Aerea in 1980 and evidently intended for distribution to the officer cadets.[19] The barbarity of its conception is exceeded only by its lack of understanding of the real world.

The Dirty War was plainly directed against "subversives," but much depended on the definition of that term. For nacionalistas, activism on behalf of the poor *subverts* society, campaigns for women's rights *subvert* the family, and belief in a subconscious *subverts* Christianity. These were presented as specifically Jewish crimes, the culprits: Marx, Marcuse, and Freud (but not Jesus). Practitioners in these fields were especially targeted by the regime; and Jews were disproportionately numbered among them. Were they being disappeared and tortured for these suspect activities, or did being Jewish constitute a suspect category in itself?

Onganía's anti-intellectual campaign turned out to have been only a prelude to the large-scale winnowing of intellectuals and artists, community outreach workers, labor union leaders, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists undertaken by the generals of the Process of National Reorganization. Demonized as subverters of the social order and perverters of Christian family values, Jewish professionals fled to Mexico, Spain, Israel, and the United States. The extinction or exodus of the talented added a bitter epilogue to the history of immigration policy. Governments at the beginning of the twentieth century had preferred farmers to intellectuals. Two generations later, elites were still trying to prevent foreign ideas from contaminating criollo minds.

Argentina was not alone in adopting an authoritarian-bureaucratic style of governing in the 1970s. Contemporaneous Brazilian, Uruguayan, and Chilean dictatorships likewise targeted men and women they identified as communists and labor agitators, incidentally sending to their deaths numerous innocents who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Jews were among those killed by these governments, not for being Jews, but because they were suspected of subversive activity. Only in Argentina was there a distinct anti-Semitic

component to the repression. The Argentine military surpassed their colleagues in other countries by their untrammeled acting out of Nazi-style anti-Semitism.

> Many testimonies of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners document the fact that, from the moment of detention up until the decision to "transfer" and in many cases to execute the victims, there existed a tendency toward negative preferential treatment of Jews. This was manifest, in the first place, in plainly anti-Semitic oral expressions, including references of a religious-traditional type about the Jew as Antichrist; and in a vocabulary of clear Nazi derivation; also in the interrogations about the objectives of Zionism and its anti-Argentine activities. In the second place, the existence of Nazi inscriptions and emblems in the detention centers has been documented; and in the methods used to destroy the personality of the victim, an anti-Jewish dimension played a part in psychological torture as well as in accentuated brutality. Finally, it is possible to establish that, in the selection of victims for sacrifice by means of "transfer," priority was given to the Jewish disappeared.[20]

Moreover, the Argentine military brought the Church hierarchy along with them. A 1966 concordat with the Vatican, initiated by the democratic administration of Illía and confirmed by General Onganía, provided the basis for agreement (*convivencia*) between the army and the church, and identification of the military with Catholic dogma. Although the struggle for dominance by the one over the other never ceased, the posture of the Argentine church coincided more with the military regime of the proceso than with the Brazilian and Chilean church hierarchies that, in similar circumstances, confronted their own authoritarian regimes over issues of human rights.[21]

The actions of the junta have been scrutinized by foreign observers as well as by the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), and the Argentine courts. Appointed in 1983, CONADEP comprised individuals with national and international reputations as defenders of human rights; it included two Jewish human rights advocates, Professor Gregorio Klimovsky and Rabbi Marshall Meyer. Their report, as well as subsequent judicial proceedings against members of the junta, proved that thousands of people had been illegally deprived of their freedom, tortured and killed in secret prisons and concentration camps. Atrocities were the common practice, the normal method of daily operation that could not have occurred without the approval of top commanders. Moreover, the commission of the most heinous crimes against Jewish Argentines was licensed and condoned by the anti-Semitic ideology at the top of the military hierarchy.[22] The response of nacionalistas was to describe the published report as a Jewish conspiracy aimed at besmirching the honor of the Argentine military.

The role of the DAIA during the Dirty War quickly became, and has remained, a focus of bitter controversy. Accused of passivity in the face of anti-Semitic outrages, the kehillah leadership was able to point to the fact that the Catholic Church had not been able to protect its own people; and that the DAIA had at least protected its member institutions from physical invasion.

Without verbally expressing the distinction, DAIA may be said to have eschewed responsibility for Jewish Argentines who were not affiliated with the kehillah and who were thus (in the words of one kehilla president) "not even Jewish." Defined out of the community by proprietary criteria of membership and by their own choice, unaffiliated Jews fell victim in significant numbers to the military's paranoid delusions regarding Jewish proclivities toward subversion.

Falklands War

By 1982, the repression had succeeded in eliminating political dissent but Argentina's economy was a shambles. In a desperate gamble to regain public approval, the generals played the irredentist card, invading the islands that Argentines call the Malvinas. Under their English name, the Falklands had been ruled by the British for a century, but the Argentines had never given up their claim. Britain, the United States, and the European Community all froze arms shipments to Argentina when the invasion took place, and requested that other trading partners do the same. Israel, however, continued making deliveries of goods already contracted for.

The war held up a funhouse mirror to the political alignments of the day. Though Argentina had suppressed her own leftists, her chief military suppliers were the USSR and Cuba. Israeli arms deliveries established rapport with the most anti-Semitic elements in Argentina. Perhaps as a quid pro quo, the army for the first time permitted the appointment of Jewish army chaplains (no one of Jewish origin had been commissioned above the rank of captain in the Argentine army since 1934). In the atmosphere of chauvinist exhilaration that characterized the first days of the war, the kehillah became the first ethnic community officially to express loyalty to the junta. The DAIA was quick to pledge allegiance in a statement linking Argentina's drive to recover the Malvinas with the Jewish people's desire to recover the land of their ancestors.

Jews in Argentine Politics

In Argentina, the notion of Jews in public office is still viewed by nacionalistas as a betrayal of traditional values, a reversal of natural law. The idea of Jews exercising power over Christians has been taboo in Spanish culture since the fifteenth century. Nacionalistas who remain enthralled by the preconciliar past view the ascension of Jews to positions of public trust as prima facie evidence of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, beachheads for the advancement of foreign, subversive ideas. Thus the election or appointment of Jews to public office, and their retention there, tests the readiness of these sectors to break from the medieval past.

When President Frondizi assumed office in 1958, he appointed a number of Jews to his administration, including the country's first Jewish cabinet minister, David Blejer, as minister of labor. Santiago Nudelman, a physician, lawyer, and national deputy, was an important figure in the Unión Cívica Radical. Four Jewish delegates were elected to the Argentine House of Representatives in

the same election; two other Jews were elected governors that year, in Neuquén and Formosa. At the very same time, the anti-Semitic demonstrations described above were taking place without attracting Frondizi's attention or concern. More Jews were elected to national office in 1963, but officeholders were removed arbitrarily by the military coup of 1966.[23] No Jewish official survived the purges that took place under the presidency of Juan Carlos Onganía. The record shows that Jews attain official positions during democratic interludes but are removed by right-wing and military governments, as much for their Jewishness as for their politics.

In 1973, with the advent of the peronista government of Hector Campora, two Jews were appointed to top positions: one as undersecretary of interior, the other as finance minister. However, following the death of Perón, finance minister José Ber Gelbard, a former peddler and the second Jew to reach cabinet rank, became the focus of an anti-Semitic campaign launched by López Rega, adviser to President Isabel Perón. After being dismissed from his position, Gelbard was stripped of his citizenship and deported. Attacks on Gelbard also targeted the Jewish businessmen's association that he had headed. The anti-Semitism that surfaced at this time shook the confidence of the Jewish community that the excesses of the Onganía period had ended.

No Jew was elected or appointed to public office during the proceso. When the junta dissolved in disarray, the election of Raúl Alfonsín to the presidency in October 1983 marked a watershed in Argentine history. In that election, six Jews were elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Two years later, Jewish candidates won 11 of 254 seats, or 4.3 percent, higher than the proportion of Jews in the Argentine population. Increased acceptability of Jewish candidates was demonstrated by the fact that these deputies were elected from various provinces and from both the Radical and Justicialista (peronist) parties. Both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate chose Jews to serve among its leadership: César Jaroslavsky was elected majority leader of the Chamber, and Senator Adolfo Gass became chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Only two of fourteen competing political parties did not include Jews on their ballots, and Jewish identity did not become an issue during the campaign. "Overall, the Argentine electorate displayed a much more sophisticated and rational understanding of candidates and issues than in the past."[24]

President Alfonsín appointed a number of Jews to his administration, including Bernardo Grinspun as minister of finance and later as minister of planning; Leopoldo Portnoy as vice-president of the Central Bank, Mario Brodersohn as treasury secretary, Oscar Oszlak as undersecretary of research and administrative reform, and Roberto Schteingart as undersecretary of state for information and development. Adolfo Stubrin as minister of education, Manuel Sadosky as secretary of state for science and technology; Oscar Shuberoff as rector of the University of Buenos Aires, as well as the appointment of Jewish deans, and especially the appointment of Marcos Aguinis, a well-known Jewish psychoanalyst and writer, to the post of undersecretary of culture, signified recognition of the multicultural reality of the country but enraged the Catholic Church

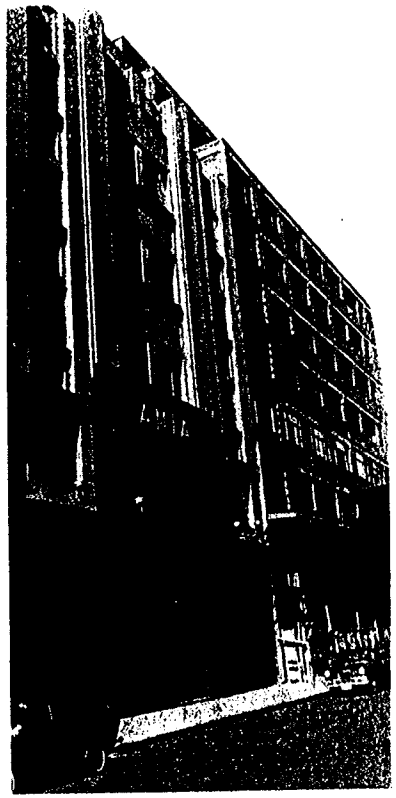
and its allies.[25] These appointments aroused a campaign to discredit the administration as "la sinagoga Radical" ("Radical" is the name of Alfonsín's centrist party; *sinagoga* is defined by Spanish-language dictionaries as "conspiracy") and Jewish officials were accused of infiltrating the government on behalf of "international Zionism." General Ramon Camps, the "hero" of the military repression in Buenos Aires responsible for gross human rights violations during the proceso, published a book in which he charged that Jewish banking interests were subverting the state and warning of Zionist infiltration. Nevertheless, these appointments held, and prepared the way for amendment of the constitution so as to eliminate the requirement that the president of the nation be a communicant of the Catholic Church.

Peronista Carlos Saúl Menem, a Catholic born into a Muslim family that originated in Syria, followed Alfonsín in the presidency. Menem showed sensitivity to Jewish issues, becoming the first Argentine president to send his foreign minister on a visit to Israel. He apparently utilized his special relationship to ask the government of Syria to look into the fate of missing Israeli prisoners of war. He is known to have close advisers who are Jews (such as Samuel Muzykanski and Moises Ikonicoff) and has appointed Jewish peronistas to important posts in his administration, including Carlos Vladimiro Corach as minister of interior and Deputy Justice Minister Elias Jassan.

Disintegration

It was in this democratic period that Argentine Jewry suffered its most devastating blow. On Monday morning, 18 July 1994, at a few moments before ten, a bomb destroyed the AMIA building in downtown Buenos Aires, bringing to an end a decade of hope that had begun with the elections of 1983. Eighty-six persons were killed, hundreds maimed, and the building itself was destroyed.[26] The terrorists who planned and carried out the attack—like those who had destroyed the embassy of Israel two years earlier—knew exactly what they were doing. They had struck at the functioning heart of the Jewish community.

The damage caused by destruction of the building and loss of life was compounded by a surge of hoaxes perpetrated against survivors and telephoned threats of "we'll get you next." Perhaps the unkindest cut came from sympathizers who regretted that "not just Jews but innocent people" had been killed. Thousands of citizens came out to demonstrate against race hatred and terror, but others responded by distancing themselves emotionally and geographically from the hazard they perceived as emanating from too close association with the victims. Jewish institutions now had difficulty renewing their leases, Jewish soccer teams found themselves canceled out of league competitions, and the erection of concrete barriers in front of Jewish schools created the atmosphere of a ghetto, something that had never existed in Argentina. To the suggestion that a motive for the attack may have been to destroy Nazi archives which President Menem had recently handed over to the DAIA for analysis, one



AMIA—Comunidad Judía de Buenos Aires—is the principal organization of Argentine Jewry. Its building at 633 Pasteur, in the heart of the old Jewish district of Once, housed a library, archives, social welfare agencies, a labor exchange, publishing and cultural activities.

researcher responded, "In Argentina, no one would be embarrassed to be publicly revealed as a Nazi."

To date, the perpetrators have not been apprehended, leading to the suspicion that they never will be. The perpetrators of the earlier attack on the Israeli Embassy, which left 30 dead and 250 injured, have never been caught. Suspicion in both cases focused on pro-Iranian Hezbullah, but this was never proved; in any event, terrorism experts believe the attacks could not have succeeded without local help, possibly from among disgruntled soldiers and police who believed themselves unjustly accused of criminal behavior for having followed orders to torture or assassinate prisoners during the Dirty War. Such persons likewise have never been identified or apprehended.

The long-run outcome of the bombing of AMIA has yet to unfold. The Jews of Argentina, who had had ample reason for discontent with their major institution, rallied to renovate and rebuild the AMIA. A process of communal self-evaluation got under way. Conceivably, public revulsion at the massacre of innocents may lead to a moderation of anti-Semitic rhetoric as the legacy of



On 18 July 1994, the AMIA building was destroyed by an explosive device. The perpetrators were never apprehended. Eighty-nine persons were killed and dozens more maimed. Most of the victims were Jews, but others, the radio reported, "were innocent."

relentless nacionalista propagandizing is held up for examination. President Menem, whose first reaction to the AMIA bombing was that the attack had been carried out to embarrass him, has displayed neither the capacity nor the will to solve the crime.

Jews in Politics: Beyond Argentina

The path by which Jewish Latinos might participate in national politics was never clearly marked. The electoral process functions only partially and intermittently in Latin America. Where it functions, it does so in a manner that does not necessarily enfranchise individuals or small interest groups; and Jews are nowhere numerous enough seriously to affect an electoral outcome. Powerful corporate bodies are usually the chief political actors: the armed forces, associations of urban or rural entrepreneurs, labor unions, the church. Each views its own interests as paramount; each defends its turf from "meddling" by the larger society, an attitude that has been called "the politics of anti-politics." The military is quite explicit about its mandate to interpret the "will of the people," regardless of what the constitution or the electorate may have to say about the matter, a view that is widespread in Latin America.[27] Political parties are forced to maneuver within extremely limited space. Jews, who are unrepresented in the church, landed oligarchy, army, labor unions, or peasant syndicates, wield no influence within these institutions.

Chile in the years of the Unidad Popular government (1970–73) tested the limits of acceptability of Jews in high public office. The Chileanization policies of Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens, which aimed at creating a socialist society through law, were in part designed by Senator Volodia Teitelboim, chief strategist of Chile's Communist party who as a youth had belonged to Hashomer Hatzair, the left wing of the Zionist movement. Allende appointed other Jews as well to key posts in his administration, including David Baytelman in Agrarian Reform, David Silberman in Copper Administration, Jaime Faivovich in the city government of Santiago, Jacobo Schaulsohn on the Constitutional Court, Enrique Kirberg at the Technical University, Enrique Testa at the Defense Ministry, and Luis Vega at the Ministry of Interior.[28] The policies they designed and implemented conformed both to the traditional Jewish demand for social justice and to the Chilean people's demand for social and economic equity, as reflected in the election of Allende to the presidency.[29] But their participation had the effect of intensifying attacks on the president as the pawn of Jewish Bolsheviks. The upsurge of anti-Semitism that accompanied the introduction of Allende's program took as its target not just those Jews who were members of his administration but the entire community, which was held responsible for the fact that some Jews are Marxists.

Given Chile's tradition of tolerance, the effort failed to arouse popular passions against Jews. But right-wing agitation was just one horn of the dilemma. The election of Allende on a Marxist platform had triggered mass abandonment of the country by middle-class entrepreneurs who feared expropriation of their property, as had happened ten years before in Cuba. Among those who departed were some 8,000 of Chile's 30,000 Jews. These were mainly the wealthy, property owners, and members of the communal establishment, and they left despite friendly overtures by the new administration. The flight of the wealthiest members of the Jewish community and the loss of their financial contributions damaged Jewish institutions, a blow the now smaller and poorer community had difficulty absorbing. This was one minor element in the whirlwind of chaos that overtook Chile. In September 1973, a military junta, encouraged by the United States government, overthrew Allende and set about reestablishing a reassuring climate for business.

Once the climate stabilized, many middle-class persons, Jews among them, returned to the country. They were encouraged by the tactics of General Augusto Pinochet, who explicitly rejected anti-Semitism and made a point of attending Rosh Hashanah services in a Santiago synagogue. But Jews were now more aware than ever of their dependence on the goodwill of the powers that be, and were apprehensive that they would pay the price of social experimentation. That a considerable cohort of Jewish individuals had worked for Allende, and that other Jews returned to Chile under Pinochet underscores the fact that Jews are influenced by the same ideologies as motivate non-Jews and that most Jews behave like other members of their economic class. Jews lived in Chile under violent swings of government from right to left and back again, but leaders of the organized community might well conclude that in circumstances that are likely to degenerate into civil war, a studied neutrality offers the best protection.

Jews are more diffused politically through the governing structures of Brazil than any other of the republics. The record shows far greater openness to Jewish political initiative than exists in the Spanish-speaking republics. Individuals from the important commercial families Lafer, Klabin, Moses, Bloch, and Levy have entered politics as ministers of state, bankers, and presidential advisers. There are Jews in numerous government posts and in significant military positions. By 1977, there were three Jews in the Chamber of Deputies, as well as several Jewish state legislators and councilmen. Two federal agencies—the National Housing Bank and the Brazilian Institute for Statistics and Geography—were headed by Jewish individuals. Curitiba, capital of the state of Paraná, has elected itself two Jewish mayors. The state secretary of transport for Rio de Janeiro, the state secretary of planning for São Paulo, and the state secretary of science, culture and technology are posts that have been held by Jews.[30] The administration of President Fernando Collor de Melo reversed the Brazilian position at the United Nations to cancel its acquiescence in Resolution 3379 equating Zionism with racism. The succeeding administration of Fernando Henrique Cardozo, a renowned economist, gained the confidence and support of the Jewish community. In recent years, Jaime Lerner beat back an attempt to rouse anti-Semitic feeling against him to be elected governor of the state of Paraná.

In Mexico, electoral outcomes have been predetermined within the hege-

monic Partido Revolucionario Institucional. PRI, its revolutionary credentials somewhat tainted by its fifty-year monopoly of power, is only now beginning to be effectively challenged by rivals. It can be surmised that Jewish Mexicans first achieved some political influence after 1975, as a result of the threat by United States Jews to boycott Mexican goods if the government did not rescind its affirmative vote on the United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism. That did not happen officially until 1992, but in the interim, relations between the government and the Jewish community measurably improved, despite frequent sackings and desecrations of Jewish cemeteries by persons unknown.[31] Personal contact and discreet financial contributions may take the place of the ballot, which is as ineffective for Jews as a group as it is for other would-be power contenders who cannot control a mass of "voters." As a small urban minority, Jews cannot compete with landowners who truck their peons to the polling station to cast their open ballots.

The growing acceptance of cultural pluralism in Mexico (manifested by government funding for publication of books on Mexican Jewish history and sponsorship of an international conference on Latin American Jewry), and perhaps also the government's recognition of the importance to the national economy of Mexican Jewish businessmen and industrialists with connections to the United States, has led to the appointment of Jews to government positions. Most of these are technical in nature. A series of modernizing Mexican presidents have relied increasingly on technocrats, including Jewish ones, and Ernesto Zedillo's government includes Arturo Warman, secretary of agrarian reform; Santiago Levy, undersecretary for expenditures; Jaime Zabludovsky, undersecretary for communications; and Jacques Rogozinsky, director of tourism. These appointments, as well as the election of Esther Koleteniuk to the city council of Mexico City, mark a clear departure from the past.[32]

The 1990s have been a breakthrough decade for the acceptance of Jews in public office in Peru. As is well known, that country already had elected a Nisei president, Alberto Fujimoro; it next acquired a Jewish prime minister, Efraín Goldenberg-Schreiber. The son of Russian Jewish immigrants, Goldenberg was born in the Pacific coast town of Talara, where he was the only Jewish child in his primary school. He attended high school and San Marcos University in Lima, earning a law degree before entering his family's export business. He also served on the board of the Lima Jewish community association.[33] While Jewish political appointees have commonly been chosen from among businessmen, political activism was the background for selection of Moisés Jarmusz Levy as Bolivia's minister of development and environment by the president of Bolivia in 1992. Jarmusz Levy had been executive secretary of a Bolivian political party allied with the government.[34] In Santiago de Chile, Marcos Libedinsky became the first Jew to be named to that country's Supreme Court and Benjamin Teplitzky Lilyavetzky was appointed minister of mining. Both men are active members of the Santiago Jewish community. Milos Alcalay was appointed director general of the Venezuelan foreign ministry. In Costa Rica, while Sandra Piszk and Saul Weisleder were elected to Parliament and German Weinstok was appointed minister of health, Rebeca Grynspan was elected vice-president of the country.[35]

The fact that many current appointees are active in their local Jewish community marks a departure from past practice, when nearly all those who entered public life had previously dropped any connection to Jews and Judaism. Furthermore, until the 1980s, Jewish individuals were appointed exclusively to offices involved with finance, conforming to the nacionalista mystique that "Jews are good with money." This situation is now changing, with greater numbers of Jewish individuals being appointed to a wider range of offices, while retaining their identification as Jews.

Jews in Politics: A Schematic View

This roster of non-hispanic names in Latin American politics announces a significant change in social attitudes, one that acknowledges the citizenship rights of Jews. A meaningful future for Jews is difficult to envision without admittance to political participation. It may therefore be a useful exercise to review the conditions under which Jews are able to participate in politics in Latin America. This question can be viewed from three different perspectives: that of society at large, the organized Jewish community, and politically active Jewish individuals; and in three different contexts: democracies, authoritarian states, and under revolutionary conditions.[36]

From the standpoint of society at large, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Panama have all elected respectable numbers of Jewish candidates to public office during democratic periods. No legal barriers to their election or appointment are known to exist, but ancient hatreds may surface when partisanship becomes heated, or may be deliberately employed in order to drive a wedge through the ranks of the opposing party. The periods 1958–62 and 1983–85 in Argentina and 1970–73 in Chile demonstrated this political schizophrenia: Jews were elected to office, but nacionalistas attacked the government for being "under the control of Jews."

Authoritarian regimes restrict political participation by all citizens, often converting political interests to financial ones. Robert Levine records an instructive incident from 1930s Cuba. "Relations between the Jewish colony and officialdom followed the rather personalistic formula required by the fact that Batista was de facto the head of state. When anti-Semitic broadcasts on one radio station increased in bellicosity in 1935, representatives from the UHC [United Hebrew Congregations] paid a visit to Batista during which they pledged ten thousand dollars toward the campaign to build a new national library; and they used the opportunity to ask that something be done about the broadcasts. Batista denied that he had any power to influence things but . . . within a few days unknown vandals smashed the radio station, and the offensive broadcasts were stilled."[37] Jews are not found in nacionalista administrations, though presumably these accept emoluments as well. Revolutionary regimes tend to be more puritanic, since they come to power on a platform

of cleansing corruption. Furthermore, nations in turmoil face problems of such magnitude that there is usually a desire to avoid complications arising from concern for the status of Jewish citizens; in Castro's Cuba as in Allende's Chile, care was taken to protect the regime against charges of anti-Semitism. Sandinistas too reacted quickly to the perception that their actions might have been prejudicial to Nicaraguan Jews.

In considering the political process from the perspective of the organized Jewish communities, it should be remembered that the kehillot originated in the desire to develop a base for working out coherent policies on issues that concern Jews specifically. Representative bodies such as the Argentine DAIA are organized for the purpose of presenting a Jewish point of view to the government on such issues as the free exercise of religion, lay education, and the situation of Jews abroad. As in the United States and many European countries, governments find it useful to have a single channel of communication, and may even request that one be formed; they may also require that the community name a chief rabbi to fill this role, as did General Pinochet in Chile.[38]

Transactions between a kehillah and an authoritarian regime cannot be completely known because of the closed nature of such regimes. With unsanctioned political initiative suppressed, everyone's principal concern is survival, if possible with one's human, cultural, and economic characteristics intact. In the absence of regular political channels, evidence points to a considerable exercise of *shtadlanut*, or recourse to back channels. The strategy dates to the Middle Ages, when Jewish communities, politically immobilized by laws incarcerating them in ghettos, depended on the king to guarantee their safety. Shtadlanut may have been called into play in both Argentina and Chile in the 1970s, enabling Jewish institutions to escape physical invasion by government forces.

Shtadlanut would appear to have no place in postrevolutionary societies such as Castroite Cuba or Sandinista Nicaragua, where the victors are in rebellion against traditional patterns of behavior. As a practical matter, all the wealthy and politically sophisticated individuals who might conceivably fill the role of *shtadlan* (the intermediary) will have left the country by the time their talent is required. Under conditions of democracy, the kehillah loses authority and can no longer speak for its members, who pour out into general society via employment, education, intermarriage, and political engagement.

For individuals, being Jewish confers no advantage to a Latin American politician, which is why ambitious persons drop their relationship to the community. One thinks of Nestor Perl, peronista governor of the Argentine province of Chubut. But identification with Judaism is less of a handicap now than formerly, and increasing numbers of self-identified Jews are accepting the challenge of public service. The need of modernizing elites for educated, technically competent individuals can override residual prejudice; working relationships erode inherited prejudicial attitudes. Modernizers who recognize the need to make use of available talent appoint Jews to office on the basis of their technical qualifications rather than their ancestry, and Jewish emphasis on education positioned thousands to take advantage of the new openness.

Under conditions of liberal democracy, the number of Jews holding public office rises dramatically, demonstrating enhanced acceptability of Jewish candidates among liberals as well as the existence of a reservoir of political talent and desire for public service that previously were locked up within the kehillah or confined to the business world. Jewish appointees appear to outnumber Jews who are elected to public office, though this observation has not been tested by research.

No Jews have been identified as serving right-wing authoritarian regimes. There are no doubt highly conservative Jews, some of whom may sympathize with the goals of such regimes, but the anti-Semitism inherent in the nacionalista orientation precludes their appointment to government office and mandates the expulsion of any who may already occupy a position. In revolutionary times, some Jews join the revolution, others leave the country, and the remainder stay put but adopt a low political profile. This happened in Cuba and Nicaragua, where the majority of community members left the country but individual Jews remained and continued with their lives.

Overall, one may say that individual Jews are motivated politically by the same forces that motivate non-Jews, but conditioned by the presence or absence of anti-Semitism. The kehillot have adapted to the entire range of governments that have exercised power in Latin America, but they have never been able to control the actions of individual Jews, who are free to drop their association with the community. Adaptation takes place through the increased acceptance of Jews in public life, and the emergence of politically sophisticated community leaders who have grown up in the national political system and learned how to work with it. As Latin as they are Jewish, these leaders adapt Jewish institutions to the exigencies imposed on them. So the communities have survived under every conceivable type of government, but they are diminishing in size as different socioeconomic classes, buffeted by left-wing revolution or right-wing repression, find they cannot survive under the prevailing regime and choose reluctantly to emigrate.

Integration

There were at all times in the history of Latin America individuals and classes who were uninterested in scapegoating and more concerned with the modernization of social attitudes. Masonic lodges, with their history of opposition from the church, were receptive to Jews as allies. Positivists in Brazil and Mexico welcomed European Jews as modernizers. Anticlericals deplore the teachings of the church with respect to Jews and sometimes become pronounced philo-Semites, collecting Jewish and converso memorabilia and endowing themselves retroactively with Sephardic ancestors. It has been noted that individual non-

conformists and rebels sometimes identify spontaneously with the ultimate nonconformity of Jews. In recent years, important elements within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, particularly in Peru, Brazil, and Chile, have collaborated with the organized Jewish communities to reduce the level of free-floating anti-Semitism in the spirit of the enlightened encyclicals of John XXIII. Nevertheless, those who are most actively involved with ecumenical initiatives acknowledge that their efforts have not thus far penetrated popular consciousness.[39]

An optimistic view of relations between Jews and non-Jews was projected by a survey sponsored by the American Jewish Committee in 1992. Attitudes toward Jews and other immigrant groups were surveyed in five regions of Argentina (federal capital, Greater Buenos Aires, and Córdoba, Tucumán, and Santa Fe provinces) a decade after the junta's dismissal from power. In order to distinguish between specifically anti-Semitic sentiments and generalized xenophobia aimed at all immigrants, the poll asked respondents to rate five immigrant groups—Italians, Paraguayans, Koreans, Jews, and Arabs. The survey found that 82 percent of respondents considered ethnic origin, nationality, and religion either "not very important" or "not important at all" in dealing with neighbors or colleagues at work. An even higher percentage had no objection to a son or daughter marrying a member of any of the five immigrant groups; only Italians scored higher than Jews. Seventy percent of respondents rejected the idea that the country would be better off without these ethnic groups, and 80 percent upheld the right of Jews, Protestants, Muslims, Evangelicals, and Buddhists to practice their religion freely. Jews were rated by 62 percent as the "most achievement-oriented" group; Italians were seen as the most devoted to family, with Jews running a close second. Ambivalence showed up in response to the question: "Would you say that in Argentina today, (group) or their descendants are part of the Argentine people or belong to a separate people?" On this, respondents split almost evenly. Forty-seven percent felt that Jewish immigrants and their descendants are separate peoples (Koreans appeared even more alien); while 49 percent responded that Jews are a part of the Argentine people.

The highest levels of anti-Semitism were found in the province of Tucumán, where traditional attitudes privileging cultural and religious homogeneity are most persistent. Also, the lower a person's position on the socioeconomic ladder, the less likely was he or she to endorse cultural or religious pluralism.

> While negative feelings toward Jews . . . are a minority phenomenon in Argentine society, they do increase the lower one goes on the socioeconomic ladder, to the point that the lowest groups show a considerable degree of negativity. In general, for every one respondent at the high or middle levels expressing some form of rejection of Jews, four respondents on the lowest level do so.
>
> Hostility toward Jews is also related to educational level: the more educated the individual, the less likely he or she is to manifest negative feelings toward Jews. Thus, while only 2 percent of college-educated respondents assert that Jews are undesirable as immigrants, among those who have only an incomplete primary education such belief reaches 15 percent. Not surprisingly, the same applies to a pluralistic outlook in general, with college educated-respondents being most open to cultural and religious diversity. It is important to note that the less educated sectors show a greater hostility toward Jews than toward other minority groups.[40]

The generally positive perception of Jews found by this survey is surprising in the light of Argentine history and in view of other surveys that have been conducted periodically since at least 1919 and that have found higher levels of anti-Semitism.[41] It points either to a reversal of historic beliefs (perhaps inspired by acknowledgment of the excesses to which these beliefs have led) or else to flaws in the design of the survey. Only time will tell which interpretation is nearer the truth. "In a violent society where public constraints against defamation are not very well institutionalized, the political culture of Argentina is ill-equipped to neutralize anti-Semitism, despite the enactment of anti-discrimination laws."[42]

During democratic interludes, not only Jewish politicians but Jewish intellectuals and artists become visible in the public sphere. Jews occupy faculty positions at institutions of higher learning in numbers that apparently exceed their proportion in the population, although many intellectuals of Jewish origin no longer consider themselves Jewish. Perhaps the area of greatest achievement by self-identified Jews has been literary. Fictional works by Jewish authors, widely sold throughout Latin America as well as in translation abroad, no longer portray the idealized landscape painted by Alberto Gerchunoff in his centenary homage to Argentina, *Los gauchos judíos*. The next generation of authors such as Mario Szichman, Germán Rozenmacher, Mario Goloboff, and Pedro Orgambide expressed disillusionment at Jewish marginalization and the ingenious ways in which the marginalized attempt to accommodate to their capricious, often malevolent, circumstances. Contemporary Latin American Jewish authors such as Angelina Muñiz, Esther Seligson, Ilan Stavans, and Margo Glantz (Mexico), Victor Perera (Guatemala), Isaac Goldemberg (Peru), Ricardo Feierstein, Manuela Fingueret, Alicia Steimberg, Eliahu Toker, and Marcos Aguinis (Argentina) elaborate on "multiple exiles," "zones of marginality," "cultural mestizaje," and "dual identities," the latter being a more serious affliction than "dual loyalties" because it attacks one's inner self. Samuel Rawet, Clarice Lispector, and Moacyr Scliar, each with a different response to their Jewish heritage, are all respected Brazilian writers. Scliar turned his Jewish protagonist into a centaur to express the ambiguous status of Jew as Brazilian and human being. These artists' breadth of imagination, willingness to experiment with traditional genres, and creativity in inventing new ones have attracted a general readership while also revealing a profound insecurity; disillusionment is the hallmark of their work. And this very hispanic *desengaño* has won them public acceptance. Through fiction, poetry, and literary criticism (one thinks

of María Rosa Lida, David Viñas, Daniel Muchnik) Jewish sensibilities and Jewish authors are winning a place in the Latin American literary canon.[43]

Many Jewish immigrants turned to journalism as a profession, and a considerable number founded their own journals of opinion. The total number of periodicals emanating from identifiably Jewish sources that have circulated in Buenos Aires at one time or another probably comes to as many as 250.[44] With the acculturation of the second generation and attrition of the communal press, journalists who are Jewish emerged into the wider, multimedia, Spanish- and Portuguese-language world. Bernardo Verbitsky of *El Mundo*, Antonio Portnoy of *La Gaceta* and others introduced a substantial presence of Jewish journalists into the Argentine press. The most famous of practicing journalists outside the country may be Jacobo Timerman of *La Opinión;* but equally provocative inside Argentina was the non-English-speaking Hernán Schiller, ousted editor of *Nueva Presencia*, who championed human rights during the worst days of the proceso. The current president of Argentine PEN is a Jew, and so is the first Latin American to be elected president of the Federation of International Association of Journalists.

We have already seen that Jews were among the pioneers of Argentine films: Aida Bortnik's *The Official Story* dramatized the infamy of the proceso for non-Argentine audiences. Paloma Efron ("Blackie") and a host of other entertainers achieved fame on the Argentine radio and stage despite their "exotic" origins. Participation by individuals of Jewish origin in the cultural life of Latin American societies, tentative at the start and largely confined to the world of Yiddish, accelerated in the years between the world wars, with the coming of age of a generation for whom Spanish and Portuguese were native languages. Actors occupy several pages in recent books about Jewish Argentina and Mexico.[45] As writers and performers, Jews present in socially acceptable ways the tensions, humors, and aspirations they share with their audiences. They perform on club and concert circuits, compose tangos, and join the society for the preservation of *lunfardo* (the porteño dialect).

Dissemination abroad of works by these writers and artists is partly attributable to the fact of their emigrations and exiles. Exile sensibility is a major element in postmodern literature, and in this respect, Jews had a two-thousand-year head start. Emigration gave Latin American Jewish writers access to publishers and audiences beyond the Spanish-speaking world. One thinks of the Chilean Jewish social critic (*The Empire's Old Clothes*) and dramatist (*Death and the Maiden*), Ariel Dorfman. Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil have all suffered serious diminution of their intellectual and artistic capital as large numbers of talented men and women, Jews among them, were exiled or fled repression. Many were attracted to the United States, owing to its freer intellectual atmosphere, economic incentives, and the existence of New York as a major cultural center. Others, especially Sephardim, made new homes in Spain. The Asociación Internacional de Escritores Judíos en Lengua Hispana y Portuguesa (International Association of Jewish Writers in Spanish and Portuguese Languages) is based in Israel and its principal literary journal, *Noaj* (Noah) is published

from Jerusalem, replicating in an uncanny way the experience of fifteenth-century Sephardim, many of whose greatest achievements were accomplished beyond the borders of Spain in Egypt or Turkey.

Some performing artists find it necessary to quit their native lands for less dramatic reasons: to acquire the training they need, or in search of an international career. Bolivian Jaime Laredo, the Argentine composer Lalo Schifrin and the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim all made their reputations in the United States. Schifrin was born in Buenos Aires to Latino parents with roots in Russia. His father was concertmaster at Buenos Aires' Teatro Colon and his first piano teacher was Enrique Barenboim (father of Daniel). After studying with Olivier Messiaen, Schifrin formed a jazz band that attracted the attention of Dizzy Gillespie, who brought him to the United States in 1958.[46] Daniel Barenboim, born in Buenos Aires in 1942, debuted in the United States in 1957 and went on to an international career. In 1996 he made a nostalgic trip down memory lane with a cassette of tangos titled "Mi Buenos Aires Querido." The title comes from a Carlos Gardel tango, which itself may owe something to a Yiddish song.

The underground survival of Jewish culture during periods of repression was demonstrated in 1983, when, within a month of the resignation of the military regime, Buenos Aires audiences were treated to a production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and a recital of Mozart songs sung in Yiddish. The arena within which artists and intellectuals of Jewish origin may function—theatres, universities, art galleries, radio and television—has expanded dramatically in recent years, a fact worth noting because their success depends not only on talent but on their acceptability to the public.

The roster of Jewish scientists who have emerged from Latin cultures to play a role in the evolution of scientific knowledge is distinguished and should be the subject of a separate monograph. A not atypical life history is that of César Milstein, son of a Jewish farmer from Villaguay, Entre Ríos, and a Russia-born peddler who founded the first Yiddish school in Bahía Blanca. César graduated in biochemistry from the University of Buenos Aires, where he founded the first cooperative bookstore. His doctoral thesis was awarded a prize by the Argentine Society of Biochemists, and he went on to win a fellowship to study at Cambridge. Returning to Argentina to make his career, he became director of the Department of Molecular Biology at the National Institute of Microbiology. He resigned his position in 1963 because of turmoil in the institutions of higher learning. Thereafter, he returned to Cambridge. He was awarded a Nobel prize in medicine in 1984.[47] He is just one of the hundreds of intellectuals who were lost to Argentina due to the brutalization of politics in that country.

The integration of Jews into Latin American societies is taking place in an amazing variety of ways. Jewish gauchos continue to exert their charm: in 1995, two Buenos Aires plays dealt with that vanished tribe. Countless colombianos wear a six-pointed Star of David on a chain around the neck as a

good luck charm. At another level, in 1992, Uruguay issued a postage stamp commemorating five hundred years of a Jewish presence in the Americas; the stamp was designed by Raquel Orsuj, daughter of the founder of a Yiddish-language daily. In a meaningful symbolic act, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori prepared for Efraín Goldenberg's swearing in as prime minister by removing the crucifix that usually presides over such ceremonies. In a cemetery in Manaus, Christians make pilgrimage to pray at the grave of Rabbi Salon Moyal, who died on the banks of the Amazon in 1910. The saint, it is said, miraculously confers health and fertility on those who pray here and leave a pebble on his tomb. Not all the mythology is unfavorable to Jews.

Reorienting Jewish Life

Events of the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated that the accommodation Jews had made to Latin American life—a secular minority attached to Zionism as a substitute for its ancestral religion—had reached its limit. The close relationship with the State of Israel, originally a source of pride, presented dangers as Zionism came under attack from the right (as a form of dual loyalty) and the left (Israel as an ally of imperialist powers). Originally, the Jewish state had enhanced the security of insecure immigrants. A generation down the road it was clear that Israel was driven by its own needs, not by the difficulties of Latin American diaspora communities. Mutuality of interest between Israel and Latin American Jewry could no longer be taken for granted. Most important, the original goal of Zionism had been achieved. Not only does the State of Israel exist, but it has emerged as a political force beyond the control of its supporters in the diaspora. Attention could now be turned to local problems.

The secular option had also played itself out. Secularism had been sufficient to sustain Jewish life among immigrants who carried their Judaism within them, for whom Zionism, memorializing the Holocaust, and campaigning for the release of Soviet Jews provided adequate spiritual sustenance. But secularism proved itself inadequate to the task of transmitting Judaism to succeeding generations who had never been exposed to the all-embracing Jewish life of the European, Asian, or African kehillot, and to whom the Holocaust seemed as distant as the Expulsion from Spain. Absence of a religious core to Jewish life came to be seen as a principal reason for the accelerating rate of intermarriage, which brought with it the prospect of disappearance of Judaism from the continent entirely. Furthermore, governments that repressed other aspects of Jewish life, such as Zionism or Bundism, had a record of respecting religious observance. Interest in Judaism as a religion increased as commitment to Zionism waned.

As noted earlier, Argentine synagogues, sports clubs, and cultural institutions all gained membership during the repressive military regime of 1976–83 as they were perceived to be safe havens. With the return of democracy, some parents feared that their children would bolt from their protective custody and return to the national political maelstrom, once more exposing themselves to danger. At this juncture, a species of religious revival began, influenced by

global as well as regional developments.[48] Religious commitment is evidently increasing throughout the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish worlds. Within Judaism, the phenomenon of the *baal t'shuva* (one who returns to belief) has gained importance. Orthodox rabbis with a mission of outreach to the lost Jews of Latin America took up the challenge in the 1980s. Missionaries of Agudat Israel, as well as Lubavitcher and Satmar Hasidim were sent to principal cities all over Latin America; founding *yeshivot* (religious schools) to attract the sons of the unaffiliated. Rejecting efforts to modernize the ancient religion, Orthodoxy receives considerable financial and moral support from Jews who lack religious formation themselves but are now seeking their spiritual roots. It detracts nothing from their spiritual motivation to note that the choice of Orthodoxy sometimes originates in the desire to inoculate their children against assimilation and keep them out of reach of another round of rebellion and repression.

As described earlier, the Buenos Aires rabbinical seminary has prepared several classes of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking rabbis capable of presenting Judaism in a modern vernacular. Their Progressive congregations attract parents who may themselves be agnostic but who want to give their children a Jewish identity without entering into the Orthodox world. These congregations have acquired social status, as upwardly mobile families exchange their Yiddish-speaking schools and clubs for modernized religious congregations. By 1988, some fifty Conservative congregations were functioning in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico, thirty of these with Seminario-trained rabbis, and embracing about one hundred thousand congregants whose enthusiasm can achieve lyrical heights.[49] Progressive rabbis also engage in dialogue with Catholic and Protestant clergy where such initiatives are possible, advancing into territory Orthodox Jews avoid. The dialogue is probably most advanced in Brazil; in Argentina, engagement with the church was foreclosed by the hierarchy's involvement with the military repression. Interfaith dialogue could begin only in the postdictatorship period of the 1980s, when it was jump-started by officials of the World Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, and American Jewish Committee. Today, dialogue and the publishing of guidelines for activating the 1952 reforms of Vatican II proceed at a dignified pace. But the principal spokesmen for Jewish and Catholic rapprochement reside in the United States.[50]

Possibly the most spectacular instance of a revival of religion among Jews is taking place in Cuba. Under the Revolution, *creyentes*— religious believers of any faith— were not accepted as members of the Communist party, and therefore could not be admitted to a university or a professional career. Even so, five synagogues survived in Havana, although most Jews abandoned the island and few of those remaining were interested in religion.

When the government's religious policy was relaxed by decision of the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist party in 1991, synagogues revived along with churches. As Cubans were relieved of the necessity of suppressing

their religious beliefs, Jewish life revived. There were still holes in its roof, but the Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba resumed functioning as a synagogue and community center. Leadership was assumed by a physician, Dr. José Miller. Lubavitcher rebbes began visiting the country, bringing prayerbooks. Argentine youth groups visited, taught their songs and dances to local teenagers, and started a youth movement at the Patronato that drew from all the ethnic and religious congregations. Rabbi Shmuel Szteinhendler traveled to Havana monthly from Guadalajara, Mexico, in order to teach, perform marriages, and preside over *brit milah* (ritual circumcision), performed in a government hospital. In a community where by 1990 almost everyone married in the preceding thirty years had married a non-Jew, interest was now aroused in the conversion of non-Jewish spouses to Judaism. Rabbi Szteinhendler, a graduate of the Buenos Aires Seminario Rabínico, was religiously prepared to carry out the conversions, and the tiny community of 809 almost doubled in size.[31] In the drab days of the winding down of Communist society in 1994, while teenagers were leading a group in perfectly articulated Hebrew songs upstairs at the Patronato, downstairs a visitor chartered a Havana chapter of Hadassah. That none of the new members had ever before heard of the largest organization of Jewish women in the world was a measure of their isolation. The new chapter's first president was Dr. Susana Bleifisch, an Argentine who earned her medical degree at the University of Buenos Aires and taught otolaryngology there until 1966. That was the year General Onganía assaulted the universities, provoking the brain drain that has afflicted Argentina ever since. When faculty were dragged from their offices and labs and beaten up on the street, Dr. Bleifisch transferred her knowledge and her family to Cuba.

Kehillot mirror the societies in which they operate. A closed regime cannot tolerate a democratic polity in its midst, and kehillot necessarily adopt the reigning political style. With the renewal of democracy throughout Latin America in the 1980s, opportunity was created for democratizing the kehillot. A new generation assumed leadership, reformed electoral procedures, and developed agendas relating to local needs as well as those of the State of Israel. Energetic young researchers turned their analytic sights on their own history, and books on Jewish subjects found publishers. Sponsorship of international conferences opened the windows of the Jewish world to global winds of change. Advertisements for events of Jewish interest were posted in public places for the first time, and Jews who ran for public office incurred less criticism for endangering the community. These changes could not have come about without the growth of tolerance in the body politic.

The alternation of anti-Semitic razzias during democratic periods with the repressions of militarized periods demonstrates the vulnerability of Jews to political and economic pressures. As a largely middle-class population living in polarized societies, Jews are inordinately affected by social dislocation. Those engaged with Jewish life may be somewhat shielded from repressive actions, but they are marginalized by societies that demand their total immersion in the non-Jewish milieu. Those who have abjured Judaism and won acceptance within liberal and progressive sectors find themselves defenseless against repression from the right. The experiences of the 1970s and 1980s ended the dream of integration into a secular society. The destruction of the AMIA, compounded by the impunity allowed the terrorists, brought into question the future of the largest of the Jewish communities of Latin America and underscored the need to rethink the strategy for Jewish survival in Latin America.

The ideal of a secular Latin American Jewish identity foundered on the rock of nacionalismo. In this situation, a turn to religion could be seen as a way of gaining acceptance as a tolerated minority. It was not the path originally chosen by the Ashkenazic immigrants; it is not the liberalizing solution sought by the immigrant generation. But it is close to the path historically followed by Sephardim, whose culture and whose survival skills were developed in a thousand years of living in hispanic societies. During the Columbus quincentenary year the governments of both Spain and Portugal abjured the anti-Semitism that led to persecution and expulsion of the Jews five hundred years ago. If the Latin American republics follow a similar path, religion could become a way to satisfy both the Jewish quest for survival and the proscriptions that these societies lay upon their nonconformists.

Chapter 11

1. For recent scholarly analysis of anti-Semitism in Latin America, see Haim Avni, "Postwar Latin American Jewry: An Agenda for the Study of the Last Five Decades," in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America: New Studies on History and Literature*, edited by David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996). For analysis of the phenomenon, see especially Haim Avni, "Antisemitism under Democratic and Dictatorial Regimes: The Experience of Latin American Jewry" (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1985); Judith Laikin Elkin, "Antisemitism in Argentina: The Jewish Response," in *Living with Antisemitism: Modern Jewish Responses*, edited by Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987); and José María Ghio, "La cuestión nacional y la cuestión judía," in *El genocidio ante la historia y la naturaleza humana*, edited by

Beatriz Gurevich and Carlos Escudé (Buenos Aires: Universidad Torcuato DiTella, 1994), p. 235.

2. Alberto Spektorowski, "La imágen del judío en las corrientes integralistas y populistas del nacionalismo argentino," in AMILAT II, p. 112.

3. Haim Avni, "Antisemitism in Argentina: The Dimensions of Danger," p. 69.

4. Ibid., pp. 68–69.

5. Leonardo Senkman, "El antisemitismo bajodos experiencias democráticas," p. 7.

6. Ibid., pp. 13–18.

7. David Rock, *Argentina, 1516–1982,* p. 340.

8. Senkman, "El antisemitismo bajo," pp. 90–92.

9. Ibid., 91.

10. Robert M. Levine, "Anatomy of a Brazilian Anti-Semite."

11. Figures from Bernardo Kligsberg, "La juventud judía en la Argentina," cited in Robert Weisbrot, "Jews in Argentina Today," p. 396.

12. Haim Avni, in "Antisemitism in Argentina: The Dimensions of Danger," pp. 62–63, asserts that "The affiliation of Jews with either organization (ERP and Montoneros) required the renunciation of Jewishness." A similar statement by the present author in the first edition of this book aroused a passionate denial from a Jewish former member of the Montoneros who asserted that Jews were accepted on equal terms with non-Jews among leadership, middle echelon, and action cadres alike. My informant also claimed that Jewish radicals were effective within the Uruguayan Tupamaros despite the anti-Israel stance of that group.

13. Testimony of Laura Bonaparte de Bruschtein, from exile in Mexico. In *Exigimos justicia porque queremos la paz,* pp. 7–8.

14. Kaufman, "Jewish Victims of Repression in Argentina under Military Rule (1976–1983)," p. 489.

15. Barromi, "Argentina: twenty years afterwards"; and Senkman, "Israel y el rescate de las víctimas de la represión," pp. 283–93.

16. Mirelman, "Las organizaciones internacionales judías ante la represión y el anti-Semitismo en Argentina," p. 243.

17. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, American Jewish Committee, and the World Jewish Congress all tracked these incidents. Reference may be made to their numerous publications for details.

18. See, inter alia, Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number;* CONADEP, *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared;* Carlos Gabetta, *Todos somos subversivos;* Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, various publications reproducing testimony of victims.

19. Kaufman, "Jewish Victims of Repression," p. 491 and appendix.

20. Edy Kaufman, "Introducción," p. 194, in *Legado.* My translation.

21. Paúl Warszawski, "Régimen militar, iglesia católica y comunidad judía en la república argentina," pp. 221–23.

22. *Nunca Más (Never Again): The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared,* passim.

23. Haim Avni, "Argentine Jewry," part 1, p. 152.

24. Jacobo Kovadloff and Susan Rothblatt, "The Argentine Jewish Community under Alfonsín."

25. Leonardo Senkman, "The Restoration of Democracy and the Impunity of Antisemitism in Argentina," p. 42.

26. A moving memorial to the victims will be found in Eliahu Toker, *Sus nombres y sus rostros: Album recordatorio de las víctimas del atentado del 18 de julio de 1994.*

27. By way of example, here is Gen. Juan Velasco Alvarado, on the first anniversary of the military takeover in Peru. "I want to repeat that not one of us has political ambitions. We are not interested in competing in the electoral arena. We have not come to play the game of politics . . . . Some people expected very different things and were confident, as had been the custom, that we came to power for the sole purpose of calling elections and returning to them all their privileges. The people who thought that way were and are mistaken." Cited in Loveman and Davies, *The Politics of Anti-Politics,* p. 211.

28. Mario Sznajder, "Judaísmo chileno y el gobierno," in AMILAT II, p. 143.

29. Despite Chile's international reputation as a democratic society, in the 1950s the country had the second highest infant mortality rate in the hemisphere, exceeded only by Haiti.

30. *American Jewish Year Book* 77:356.

31. Alicia Backal and Gloria Carreño, *Parte de México,* 7:144–46, *Generaciones judías en México.*

32. *American Jewish Year Book* 96:226.

33. *Washington Jewish Week,* 3 November 1994.

34. World Jewish Congress, *Dateline,* 1992.

35. Names and offices were reported in successive issues of World Jewish Congress *Dateline* and OJI (Buenos Aires).

36. A more detailed analysis is to be found in my essay "Is There a 'Jewish Interest' in Latin American Politics?"

37. Robert M. Levine, "Cuba," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust,* pp. 786–87.

38. Interview, Rabbi Angel Kreiman, at the time chief rabbi of Chile.

39. Interview, Rabbi Henry Sobel, Congregação Israelita Paulista, São Paulo, 1996.

40. Edgardo Catterberg, "Argentina Survey." Nineteen hundred individuals were interviewed face-to-face in their homes between 12 November and 3 December 1992.

41. The three most influential studies are Gino Germani's class-based "Antisemitismo ideológico y antisemitismo tradicional," *Comentario* 39(1962); Enrique Pichon Riviére's comparison of civilian with military opinion, "Los perjuicios raciales en Argentina," in *Nueva Sion* for 31 January 1964; and Joaquín Fischerman's "Etnocentrismo y antisemitismo," *Indice* 1 (December 1967). All were reprinted in Sebreli, *La cuestión judía en la Argentina.*

42. Senkman, *Impunity,* p. 54.

43. See, for example, Lois Baer Barr, *Isaac Unbound: Patriarchal Traditions in the Latin American Jewish Novel;* Ana E. Weinstein and Miryam E. Gover de Nasatsky, eds., *Escritores judeo-argentinos. Bibliografía 1900–1987;* Ilan Stavans,

ed., *Tropical Synagogues: Short Stories by Jewish–Latin American Writers;* Robert DiAntónio and Nora Glickman, eds., *Tradition and Innovation: Reflections on Latin American Jewish Writing;* David William Foster and Naomi Lindstrom, "Jewish Argentine Authors: A Registry." Ricardo Feierstein, ed., *Cien años de narrativa judeoargentina 1889/1989;* Naomi Lindstrom, *Jewish Issues in Argentine Literature. From Gerchunoff to Szichman;* Saúl Sosnowski, *La orilla inminente. Escritores judíos argentinos;* Robert and Roberta Kalechovsky, *Echad: An Anthology of Latin American Jewish Writings.*

44. Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos,* p. 330.

45. Biographic sketches of hundreds of Argentine Jewish personalities will be found in Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos,* and in Martha Wolff and Myrtha Schalom, eds., *Judíos y argentinos, judíos argentinos.* For Mexico, see Judit Bokser de Liwerant, *Imágenes de un encuentro: La presencia judía en México durante la primera mitad del siglo XX.*

46. Wolff and Schalom, eds., *Judíos & Argentinos,* p. 225.

47. Ibid., *Judíos & Argentinos,* p. 246.

48. Research into the practice of Judaism in Latin America is almost nonexistent. A rabbinic thesis on "The Emergence of the Progressive Judaism in South America" was submitted to Hebrew Union College by Clifford Kulwin in 1983.

49. *Maj'shavot/Pensamientos,* 27:1 (Jan-March 1988): 16.

50. Rabbi Leon Klenicki (Anti-Defamation League) and Eugene J. Fisher (National Conference of Catholic Bishops) have jointly published instructional materials in Spanish for putting into practice the principles of *Nostra Aetate,* the 1982 document in which the Second Vatican Council spelled out the spiritual bonds between the church and the Jewish people.

51. In 1991 the number of persons registered to receive matzo at Passover was 809.

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Edited by

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Boston 1987
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16

*Latin American-Jewish Writers: Protecting the Hyphen**

Saúl Sosnowski

The hyphen is a useful commodity: It contributes to a unifying feature where none would be expected to exist. As we join terms such as *Latin American* and *Jewish* with a hyphen we are struck by its implications: They do not "normally" belong together. Both terms have a set of references that conform to different historical and political realities and, above all, to different *public* perceptions of what each *should* mean. Associations to the commonality of definitions of Latin America are just as inappropriate as the perceptions of the Jew that appear in all too many Western literary characterizations. Within the mainstream of Western discourse, and until very

*This reading is based on a number of studies that I have carried out on Latin American–Jewish writers; thus the absence of detailed notes to identify specific issues with given authors. For individual authors, the patient reader may wish to consult: "¿Quién es Edmund Ziller?" *La Semana de Bellas Artes* (Mexico), 8 (1977): 8–11 (re Pedro Orgambide); "Germán Rozenmacher: Tradiciones, rupturas y desencuentros," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* (Lima) 3 (6) (1977): 93–110; "Gerardo Mario Goloboff: Hacia el décimo mes en la diáspora," *Escritura* (Caracas), 4 (1978): 255–282; "Los gauchos judíos y los gauchos no-judíos," *Nueva Presencia* (Buenos Aires), 5 (347) (24 Feb. 1984): 8–10 (re Alberto Gerchunoff); a study of Mario Szichman's work remains in manuscript. Two more general studies on the subject are S. Sosnowski, "Contemporary Jewish-Argentine Writers: Tradition and Politics," *Latin American Literary Review* (Pittsburgh), 6 (12) (1978): 1–14, and "Latin American Jewish Writers: A Bridge Toward History," *Prooftexts* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), 4 (1) (1984): 71–92 (with particular references to the Argentines Gerchunoff, Rozenmacher, Szichman, Goloboff, and Orgambide, the Venezuelan Isaac Chocrón, the Mexicans Margo Glantz and Esther Seligson, and the Peruvian Isaac Goldemberg). I have developed this topic further in my book *La orilla inminente (Escritores judíos-argentinos).* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1987). From a thematic piont of view, Leonardo Senkman's *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pardés, 1983) has become mandatory reading.

recently, both *Jewish* and *Latin American* conveyed the notion of the outsider, of the troublesome presence that incommodated with his awkwardness, his resilience, and his tacit accusations against wrongdoers. With varying degrees, admittedly, these are images of refusal: refusal against odds of survival, against historical complacency, against peaceful acceptance of repression. Both are literary figures of marginality that, as such, establish the parameters of the reach that the dominant culture and dominant powers—the metropolis vis-à-vis Latin America and the Jew also *within* the majority's control—can have over them. In very different contexts and with very divergent historical, cultural, and linguistic developments, the hyphen unites elements that do not necessarily evoke from the reader urgent pleas for recognition. Apparently uncomfortable in their respective niches, they are protected by the hyphen from an assimilationist integration into the mainstreams of a majority cultural or geographical identification.

Comfort in itself is not, however, a determining factor of major works of literature. Their avowed aim is, precisely, to generate in the reader a disquieting sense that runs through the written page to the realities that literature founds on the uneasy edifice of words. Literary discomfort, in its highest and most positive sense, is at the very core of the text that probes into its very own existence and questions its capacity to convey with mere words the enormity of the universe (Borges dixit). Far from ratifying the resilience of the printed word, such a text challenges superficial understanding and confronts the complacent reader as it hurls reality toward the one who is willing and able to absorb the impact and launch a new search for meaning. Thus seen, a literary text will have to encompass, even in its transit through the descriptive charms of bucolic passages, the very sense of itself: the "reasoned" conglomerate of words that at every step looks back and asks about its past as it draws the configurations of the future. Not many pages will belong in this highest category, but even as an ideal—perhaps a poetic height that should be reached before a word meets its printer—the troubling essence of literature should be considered along with pleasure and imitative modes or escapist proposals in the ideological spectrum of critical readings.

Within this strict notion of literature, an extraliterary projection can be made towards the presence, or the view, of minority power in the numerical vastness of majority dominance. Until very recently, Latin American literature did not rank—and, according to many, did not belong—in the leading cultural centers of the West. This literature came to the forefront when historical events forced the world to look south and to recognize the existence and uniqueness of some independent states.

As part of political and historical recognition, the presence of Latin American literature and culture was accepted under the pretenses of the

"new" and the "different." It may have been a new literature for those who had refused to see it; it was an integral component of national knowledge for those who did not await recognition from "above" to see their own literature and value it as such. The fortunes of an empire as the guiding light of its language and subsidiary artifacts are well known. Discovery by the masters assures public (the nonlocal public) acceptance. With it also comes the positive byproduct of dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of a literature worthy of world readership. But, and therein lies a disturbing feature, promotion itself is done on the basis of the element of surprise. The emergence of a literature of universal proportions has somehow run counter to expectations because, as certain faulty reasoning would have it, political subservience by the ruling elites compacts all national creativity. Some Latin American works belong to that disquieting realm that I have mentioned before, not only because of their radical proposals in literary theory and production—undeniable merits indeed—but also because of the world that they portray. This literature is built on another meaning of "the different," on the estrangement that the unsuspecting reader finds when the unknown or the unexpected are thrust upon accepted versions of reality.

When in addition to *Latin American* one adds the defining term *Jewish*, it is easy to recall astonished gazes and conflicting images of the accepted and simple cliches for both. This is oftentimes the reaction when writers, through the mediating effects of all literary language, have combined both components into one single text. The reaction—and the readership—will be different for those who, in spite of their biographical attributes as members of both the Latin and Jewish communities, have chosen to write only about one or to write of each independently of their interaction. The conflict that can arise from the confrontation of disparate categories spills over a series of questions on the nature of separate treatments. In the lack of integration lies another source of inquiries, because it is as powerful a literary and critical motif as the incorporation of two elements into a body that searches for a cohesive self.

Without engaging in endless definitions of national or ethnic literatures, it may prove useful to consider that in many cases it is the explicitness of literary motifs that render a text "Latin American" and/or "Jewish." Identifiable content, then, may serve to delineate the parameters around the hyphen. Perhaps it is a sign of the exigencies of time and pressing contemporaneity that particularly Jewish elements appear in sharp contrast to the "other." The emphatic presence of the "I" as a different and differentiating entity emerges in a series of contrasts and oppositions that can ill afford the subtleties of an aura that only other minority members will recognize as fitting their particular interests and character. Jewish components are defined as such in order to mark the entrance into a realm where a new set of

literary and cultural conflicts will emerge beyond the seemingly flat surface of the page. The need to accentuate identity imposes itself upon the reader who from the outset is forced to recognize that "Latin American" in itself is not sufficient to place a text that challenges partial definitions. Molds are broken when elements considered extraneous to dominant cultural patterns are challenged. New perceptions are broadened when into the very strict definition of nationality caveats are made for the different; and even more when the different in itself, and not the common, becomes part of the norm for the national.

When we establish, then, the Latin American–Jewish (or vice versa) as members of a minority we take ourselves out of a vast identity to proclaim that it does not suffice to cover our being. Geography is not enough to provide a territorial belonging; it mandates the assumption of a historical past and the embodiment of traditions extraneous to the new land. Within literary parameters, cognizance of a double or triple (national/hemispheric/cultural–religious) allegiance—let alone one of class values—may, and in fact does, become a central issue for many of these writers. No issue can be taken with writers who, regardless of their Jewish origins, abandon ancestral traces in favor of an exclusive concentration on either their local or universalist readings of reality, nor can claims be laid unto writers whose exclusive concern is their historical origin. Both have found their milieu to the exclusion of literary zones of friction. It is, however, in the writers who (un)settle themselves in the uneasy gray areas of identity, of belonging, and of future allegiances, that other dramas begin to unfold. This does not mean addressing different issues—"Jewish subjects" and "non-Jewish subjects"—in different texts, because then the conflict is resolved in a separate but equal doctrine of inner peace. Conflictive elements emerge when coexistence of the Jewish with the non-Jewish national state are thrust upon each other and self-recognition is challenged by state doctrine or non-Jewish perception of the foreign elements in the national fabric. The Israeli writer is probably the only one for whom Jewish identity will not be posed in an initially adversary relationship to his or her state. Probably most others who *incorporate* and assimilate into their self-definition the majority, and often hostile, attitude toward the different will engage in the debate over what it is to be a citizen of a given land *and* a Jew in a land where being Jewish in many cases marks distances from the civil privileges given to all others.

Belonging always refers to space, to territory. It also refers to identity. The inhabited space that shrinks to the measure of man and expels people from the land of the living as a conscious decision to extirpate them has not only exercised a political and programmatic decision, it has also fulfilled a definition of cultural values. Whether murder or cultural suicide, negation

asserts disappearance and perpetual silence. When space is expanded beyond the limits of the self to encompass a sense of community in the midst of an acquiescent or merely tolerant social construct, that conquered space becomes the territory upon which a new set of alliances will be established between the new inhabitants and their hosts. In the long historical journey of migratory movements, the dynamic relationship that will emerge from that original contact and the laws that govern expansion, growth, or ghettoizing restrictions will mark the oscillating lines between tolerance and integration—assimilation being the end of all conflicts.

Territory acquires a special meaning for Latin American–Jewish writers, not in the sense of appropriating a land—a central concern of the conspiracy-bound fascist mentality—but in the very limited sense of the descendant of immigrants who searches for space to rest the body and develop the soul. With that acquisition comes the embodiment of lofty ideals of liberty and religious tolerance absent in many of the countries of origin. For the newly arrived, Judaism constitutes an unquestionable set of values and a way of life in search of freedom to carry it out. But emergence from the *shtetl* and contact with the nonkosher world contaminates the past. New desires are readily accepted by many of the immigrants' descendants, by those who practice a new language and who find their own identity in the hyphenated call of the different. In the New World, clearly delineated options can be exercised: Either of the two components is given, and so are combinations of the two with *shifting* allegiances. It is those very shifts that mark the transit of generations who accept the land that is a birthright with the tradition of ancestors that is their other rightful obligation to consider, to integrate, or to dismiss. Boundaries also shift: Zion as the messianic ideal is Israel, but it can also be a land of liberty and plenty elsewhere; Judaism is faith and strict adherence to religious observance, and it is a set of cultural tenets and human values that extend beyond the confines of the immediate community. Judaism, moreover, can be a perception of the world, a mode of behavior of a nationality built on the lofty ideals of most civil constitutions, or the mere folkloric remembrance of culinary tastes. Judaism can offer the path to cultural or religious introspection, and also the means of emphasizing the heterodoxy of free thought where all discourse submits to obedience or irretrievable silence.

A global reading of Latin American–Jewish writers will afford a varied mosaic of attitudes vis-à-vis both components. The denial of a Judaic presence in some will be countenanced in others by the overriding folkloric dominance of Judaic motifs that bury Latin America under a cloak of acrobatic reminiscences of a misplaced exegesis. Serious and lofty analyses of Israeli–Arab relations and Zionist ideals will be confronted with folk be-

havior and sounds as definitions of Judaic character. Talmudic discourse will find its way alongside coarse Yiddish expressions as definitions of Jewish belonging.

Although Yiddish writers have made important contributions to an understanding of the newly arrived's contacts with the New World—notably in Argentina—it would be difficult to establish a direct linkage between them and the more recent generation of writers whose sources lie far from those whose language most are increasingly unable to understand. Their literary masters are not these writers but the same writers who have served Western minds. Moreover, many of them have drawn their Judaic motifs from family stories and literary glimpses at unknown worlds rather than from Yiddish authors. The issue forced upon us is, however, that regardless of the degree of knowledge of Judaism, a series of identifying motifs single out a number of authors as possessing a literary baggage that is different from the texts of their national counterparts. The question remains whether it is only content and allusions that make certain Latin American writers Jewish. The answer does not revolve around theological tenets on "who is a Jew?" but on what makes certain literary texts part of a developing body of literature that is *both* Latin American and Jewish. It is possible to discount awareness of Judaism, in any number of its facets and degrees of close allegiance to canon, as a sine qua non for such a textual recognition, regardless of the author's individual behavior. Perhaps the best proof of such criterion is the inclusion of Jewish motifs in writers who had not had any direct proximity to Judaism in previous works but in whom historical circumstances (exile chief among them) evoked mythical figures of the wandering Jew as an epitome of their own situation. The claim could rightly be made that the occasional appeal to Jewish motifs does not in itself incorporate a text into the Latin American–Jewish category. Or can it? If literature is accepted as a changing (mutating) exercise of perception and apprehension of a given reality, the appeal to any word and to any motif to reproduce any given literary moment is a legitimate exercise. When motifs heretofore unused are called for in a text that builds from any platform on a literary interpretation of reality, and when the motif called for is rooted in a Jewish tradition or in an interpretation of Jewish motifs, we can legitimately incorporate such a text into the global literary tradition that falls under this rubric. No quantification can justify inclusions or exclusions, nor can a single text justify definitions of its producer, but that precise text in itself is a *free-standing structure* that attests to the need to call forth Jewish elements as the only ones capable of responding to literary needs. If exile in Mexico from a repressive Argentine regime is understood through the eyes of the wandering Jew clad in the historical raiments of global persecutions and the exploitation of unprotected masses, that element constitutes an

important contribution to the understanding of the Jewish impact on literature and to the incorporation of that text into our hyphenated categories. Further, this one incursion into literary lore may in itself serve to reexamine the meaning of the Jewish presence in any given country and to explore the immigratory past as a fundamental step in the historical changes of Latin America and in the individual and national transformation of the Jewish immigrant.

Bucolic images and endless pastoral bliss may provide the immediate gratification of the senses and respond to demands of aesthetic equilibrium. But the literature that concerns us—with exceptions appropriate to the initial stages of integration in the New World and the idealization of all promises—surges out of conflict. Complacency with the present and blind acceptance of the past is unacceptable, for both times are rooted in failed hopes and corrupted chronicles of deceit and betrayal. In this central aspect, Jewish writers join many others in denouncing the failures of liberalism, the advent of authoritarianism and its ensuing moral bankruptcy, and individual responsibility for being acquiescent, silent, an accomplice to decaying values. The time has long passed since streets were seen with the golden shades of wealth and rural scenes evoked songs of praise to the Almighty and to the benefactors of new republics. Colors have drastically changed and the acquisition of unrestricted wealth has taken its toll in unmitigated deaths and in the suspension of disbelief when graves reveal the seeds of gore. In this respect, to be Jewish and Latin American adds an experiential dimension that no other can evoke with equal force and, at the same time, with the fragile disdain of one who has experienced and survived human hell. The all too easily used words *genocide* and *holocaust* weigh heavily in the analogies to current facts and shed a historical perspective on the processes of the arrogance of power. To be Jewish and Latin American does not preclude alliances along class lines and along institutional affiliations. No uniformity there. When faced with real or apparent danger, ranks will not be closed along Jewish lines but along class lines: Property, the impoverished notion of a territory possessed that is one's own, digs trenches that are also graves.

In Latin American countries that have faced unparalleled repression, survival—perhaps *the* major motif of all Jewish literature—has also occupied a central role. For individuals, as such or as members of a persecuted minority (not the Jewish minority, but the broad-based spectrum of the opposition to a repressive regime), survival has become an everyday struggle that has filtered through literary explorations both inside the countries and in the new exile communities. And it has also been within these parameters that Jewish elements surfaced as means to interpret a reality to which centuries of persecution had already accustomed the Jew of the past. Juda-

ism is then perceived as a bridge from history toward projections for the future. Far from heroic exploits, survival acquired the smallness of everyday life, the routine *kleinmenschlichkeit* of characters in search of a sign to rise from mediocrity as fundamental historical changes passed them by. Or it leaped toward the fantastic in search of hopeful responses to ceaseless misery.

To survive had the primary literal meaning of staying alive and the secondary attributes of maintaining human dignity and self-respect, identifiable traditions that ought not to be dismissed at the stroke of an armed pen. Survival is also finding the means to accommodate varying national sources of identity into a working definition of the human. Until a bridge is found across conflicting traditions, until sounds and habits juxtapose into a livable harmony, and until a common language is created to surmount contrasts as these are enunciated, lines will be drawn along conflicts and clashes of purpose and desire. Demands for strict allegiance to misunderstood national exigencies will in some cases produce a rejection of the different (i.e., the Jewish) side of the nationals with ensuing anti-Semitic outbursts. Only when to be "Jewish" and a "member of a nation" are understood by the politically conscious writer as compatible elements of a pluralistic society will the conflict deflect in another direction: the division of both the national fabric *and* the Jewish community into class lines. These, in turn, will serve to exacerbate for some that hated segment of the personality that still accentuates differences as it tries to deny them in integrationist proposals. For some, rejection of Judaism will come as a result of mistaken identifications with questioned middle-class values or petty bourgeois modes of behavior, as if Judaism itself were intrinsically and inherently embodied within a class structure. For others, it will come in a drastic demystification of Judaism until only a vague remnant of historical echoes will sound out of a scarcely recognizable past. In others still, it will be reduced—in both positive and negative terms—to the folkloric tints of Yiddish expressions, Jewish jokes, an appeal to identity through cliches and local garb and sound. What remains is oftentimes a pale memory of childhood or a secular version of wishful Judaic history and thought. But even then, these motifs may suffice to bring forth a literary dimension that is strikingly different from similar Latin American voices. An ironic mode, sarcastic self-deprecation, a moist remembrance of an old immigrant grandfather, a vulgar Yiddish expression, and the shape of Hebrew letters begin to mark the difference. And so does the excruciating need to recall the distant past and also the recent immigratory past, to rebuild history and thwart the crooked future from distorting hopes and repeating a sequence of persecutions and pogroms that were supposed to have died with the Old World.

Other Latin American writers have also centered their literary projects on a revision of history. Nevertheless, one is tempted to view historical introspection within definite geographical and linguistic parameters organized around the theme of survival as an identifiable motif of many Latin American–Jewish writers. Whether in highly developed urban centers or on the roads that lead from small towns to nowhere, whether through the reconstruction of a petty and immediate past or through the glorification of imaginary feats, the remaining sounds of another world attest to survival. Witnesses attest to it through children and grandchildren who speak another language and build new chapters of a continuing history. And building these new histories may perhaps constitute another definition of survival itself.

When Judaism cannot be affirmed solely on the basis of a national territory, and when religion is challenged within its own parameters in a refusal of formal observances or probing disbelief, Jewish identity in literature must per force acquire an aura of ethnicity as a defining feature. But it can also acquire, as it has, an exaltation of human values found in Judaism, an internal code of ethics that rises above history's latest atrocities. Ethnicity and heterodoxy are the signs of Judaism's lay incorporation into Latin American literature. Again, religious celebrations, concrete references to holidays, traditions, and "typical" Jewish subjects or characters, are not wholly absent in many authors. What is striking, however, is—in my opinion—that Jewish literature in Latin America is not built exclusively on the readily identifiable "Jewish" motifs, but on their relationship to developing realities where accepted tenets are questioned and challenged in modified social constructs. Jewish motifs might then be the loose threads that weave fantasies and family memoirs or the acerbic impact of institutional and class oriented critiques. At any rate, when restrictive and secure borders become elastic and allow into the midst of faith and innocent complacency the shadows of doubts that collapse the infallibility of a ruling center, Jewish motifs can once again be a backdrop to establish identity and probe its own definition. History and tradition are not necessarily denied, they are reworked, like all other fictive matter, to respond to patterns in constant flux.

One of these central concerns is precisely security, or the lack thereof, in societies where the survival of a minority must be justified. Not only concrete geography comes into question with the ensuing debates over immigration to Israel or Jewish assertiveness in any land of the diaspora, but also the logical and spiritual territory that amasses concepts of freedom of rational discourse and free expression. Families, communal institutions, and anti-Semitism are themes that open up the debate over identity and survival in hostile territory. Further, for some writers, repressive societies have made literary Judaism—quite distinct, but not necessarily opposite, from accepted norms and rabbinical definitions—a new area of inquiry. Far from

marginal security, Jewish memories call forth migrations and exiles and the hopes for their end, and thus, within the mutations of circular history, they convey the trust that this too shall pass and the return to the home/homeland will recur. In this sense, the accepted referents to Israel and the diaspora have also changed: Their territorial place has shifted to accommodate any definition of homeland–exile in the dynamic correlation of peace–repression. In other words, this Jewish–Latin American literature flies over boundaries as it redefines its perceptions of nation, exile, communal ties, and the role that Judaism, in whatever personal definition, has achieved.

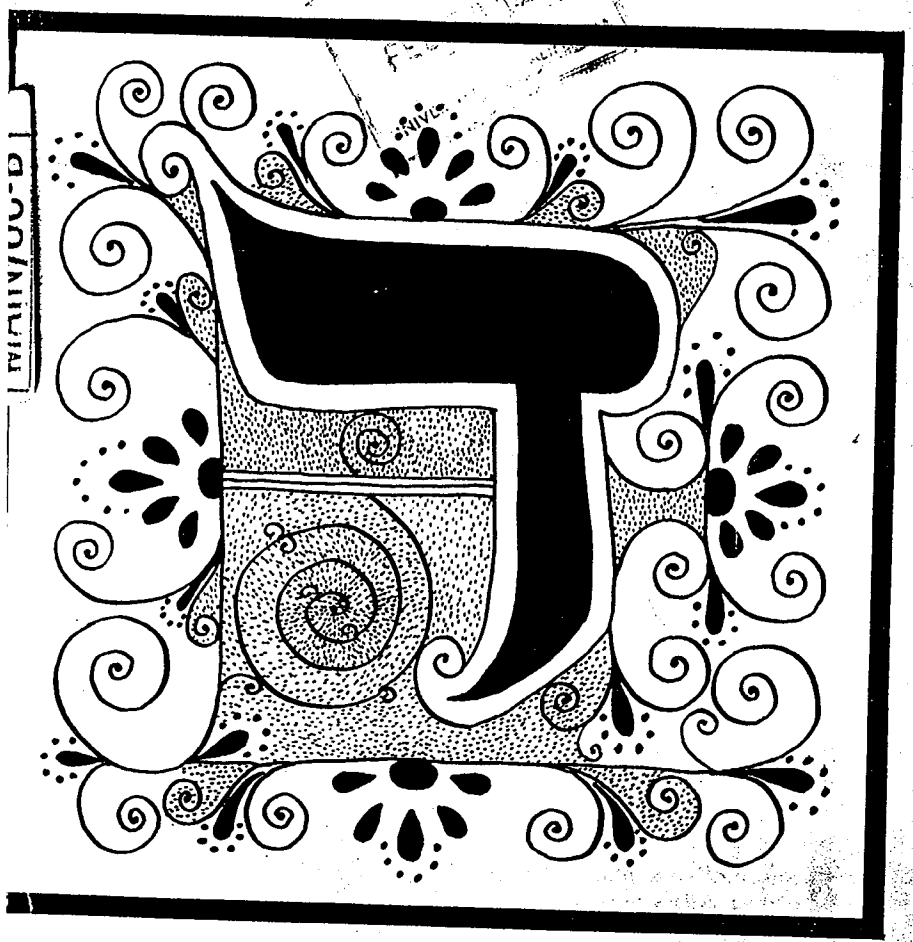
Jewish motifs can be found throughout Latin America's literary history, whether in the recreation of immigrants' experiences, in the processes of adaptation, or the less kind perspective of anti-Semitic fiction. Still, it is in recent years that a number of young authors have emerged as a notable global voice within the overall rise of Latin American literature. The assembled works of the writers who exist within the parameters here outlined do not satisfy a separate literary category; the analysis, even in the best of terms, still constitutes a thematic approach. These works will survive within their respective national literatures and *not* as a separate entity labeled "Jewish–Latin American literature." The critic's eye singles them out of their national literatures to assemble a new vast literary text that is garnished with a collective title. It is a legitimate practice provided each work is also seen as a direct result of hybrid elements in search of unity and of amalgamated voices. These texts are important, further, because they do address one of the significant components of a plural society by traversing the full gamut of the ideological debate and by forging tenets for renewing the dialogue along cultural and political lines. Jewish topics do not emerge now as a result of the nostalgia wave that has affected other circuits, but as expressions of conflictive relationships that find expression in the radicalization of historical processes.

Fiction stands, and rightly so, on the power of imagination and on the aesthetic relationship forged between the reader and the text. Jewish–Latin American fiction stands also on the strength of its documentary phase and on the emergence out of that phase of the references that underline that, given certain conditions, tradition and remembrance of things past are a flight to present-day conditions. If identity and survival can be considered fundamental motifs of Jewish literature in its many national versions, the debate over identity surges out of the threat to survival. Survival of Jews in Latin America, however, is not contingent only on memories of the Holocaust or on total integration in the state of Israel, but on a firm stand within Judaism in the new native lands. The response to this stand is a literature that bridges worlds, rescues filtered versions of Jewish traditions, and accommodates them to this hemisphere and to its languages. For Latin American–Jewish authors there is no question of a language that is their own. Spanish and Portuguese are not the languages of renewed exiles, but the languages of native affirmation that tolerate the reading of old–new debacles on the history of integration. As such they join Hebrew and the Jewish exile languages, Yiddish and Ladino, as languages to express the hopes, aspirations, and the reconstruction of all pasts that have been marked across the centuries.

Languages are transformed by the information they channel unto the conveyors of historical versions. Fiction works on a language of confrontation with the outside world. It achieves its inner coherence when that outside world is molded into the only possible version for its own singular fictive universe. Within a thematic approach of the Jew vis-à-vis Latin America, whether it be the case of a newly arrived immigrant, of the product of mixed marriages, or of the second- or third-generation "Latin-born Jew," we can address a Jewish sector of Latin American literature. Individually, each of the texts finds its own reading within a localized national environment nourished by readers who share either or both ethnic or national components or who approach the text with the illusion and care that all myths and fantasies require. Literature is not ethereal nor does it belong in idealist categories that preempt its correspondence to specific modes of production. To project a text beyond its origins and its concrete specificity is to create a new definition of diaspora, one that lies beyond all limits, detached from its producer, alien to the material reader that affords it its own right to exist through interpretation.

Language presupposes a dialogue with the other. Within Latin American–Jewish literature, the other is embodied in the dialectics of affirmation of these two components as they develop a mode of *co*existence that strives to affirm unified existence. Needless to say, no single text achieves peaceful unity. It is the search for that unity of purpose in drawing the design of Latin America from the perspective of a multicultural history that constitutes a major contribution to contemporary letters. Comparison to other, non-Jewish authors establishes modes of identification and marks the pace for the readers; it also stresses national belonging. To mention the Jewish component marks the entry to the exotic within Latin America—the foreign yet recognizable element that sheds light on the majority as it stares at itself with the fading belief in its uniform authority. Hyphens always produce unease. They signal the inability of language to produce a composite word and of beings to give birth to a gray, melted self; they also refer to the victory of the composites against assimilation. No single word can call into one that which belongs to many worlds. Latin American–Jewish writers and their texts stretch along millenary historical bridges as they walk firmly across the map of their new countries and their new letters.

PROOFTEXTS
A JOURNAL OF JEWISH
LITERARY HISTORY



THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS
JANUARY 1984 VOLUME 4 NUMBER 1

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Latin American Jewish Writers: A Bridge toward History

1

LATIN AMERICA is still fairly exotic. Although it appears increasingly as front page news, perceptions about its geography and its peoples are still tainted by clichés. Images of unease, turmoil, pointless violence, and political immaturity seem to justify taking Latin America less than seriously. This attitude is neither universal nor constant. Whenever metropolitan control is threatened, signs of respect emerge from official quarters, but seldom is there a timely, reasoned, and calm reading of the complexity of Latin America. Until twenty or thirty years ago, Latin American literature and culture attracted attention only from specialists and eternal seekers of lore, legend and distance from the everyday life of the West. Latin America was expected to satisfy a yearning for the "foreign yet near," for the backyard that forever unveils hidden forces and passions present in all men but comfortably relegated to an alien culture: the not "us."

Latin America is indeed different, refusing even to stay within the bounds of its own unreliable name. The Caribbean, the Indo-American and the Black-American as well as many other hyphenated components still search for entrance into the official name. These republics refuse to settle into a North American notion of order and predictability. The Continent's own lore capitalizes on the seemingly perennial refusal for easy and peaceful transitions, constantly challenging theories and pre-established patterns of behavior. Following its own unique pluralistic paths, Latin America defies any univocal prescription. Understanding would be facilitated by abandoning the search for single isolated entities

PROOFTEXTS 4 (1984): 71–92 © 1984 by The Johns Hopkins University Press

and challenging the centrist view of the geopolitical map. The literary map, too, must be revised.

Our mental framework tends toward structural organizations, which generalize the complex and thereby afford illusions of order. To address Latin American literature as a whole yields misreadings of the texts, in the same way that addressing the Latin American republics as a whole generates mistaken analyses and policies. Nevertheless, some common features and unifying issues do bind both political and literary issues. To cite just one example: it is undeniable that the Cuban Revolution altered the perception of Latin America both within the Continent and outside of it. This historical process has been a major factor in the attentive and occasionally worried public gaze that has since characterized official pronouncements about other events in Latin America: current developments in Central America and the Caribbean Basin are obvious responses to these concerns.

It is not mere coincidence that Latin American literature has come to the forefront of Western literature. In recent decades, some of the most brilliant Latin American literary figures (García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, Fuentes, and many others) have been internationally recognized. Nevertheless, the promotion of a "new Latin American fiction" cannot but emphasize the relativity of the "new." New for whom? Many of the authors, including the justifiably heralded Borges, were new in Latin American capitals (an excision of cultural centers is mandatory there too) shortly after publishing, not when non-literary historical conditions promoted the marketing of a well and deserving package under the glossy colors of novelty.

Current political developments in the region have brought recognition; they have also generated cognition. Between the dramatic blows to the remaining shreds of human dignity, out of manifold abrogations of social contracts, renewed attention is focused on the solitary tasks of writing and reading. Beyond the trappings of publicity and marketing appeal, a bridge is stretched along every sentence, and each page is an exquisitely private crossing, a dialogue of perceptions that lies at the foundation of all aesthetic encounters.

The feeling of strangeness, of distance and unfamiliarity, is compounded as one approaches Latin American Jewish writers. The self-imposed isolation of writing serves here as a metaphor for the minority writer. This paper is not concerned with origins or ties to a minority as much as with the presence of ethnic, social, and religious elements that define a certain literature as different from the majority culture and as distinct from the reiterated manifestoes of the establishment. To surrender the defining characteristic of the individual in order to be identified with the dominant culture is the equivalent of assimilation.

Particular attention will be paid to texts that certify a rupture, a distancing from official tenets, both literary and institutional, and an awareness of the unique situation of the writer who addresses issues of a minority inscribed within a society that is, at least in part, alien to his/her beliefs. Therefore, those who write in Spanish about exclusively Jewish issues or who do not reflect centrally on the intersection of Jewish traditions with the concrete facts of being Jewish and Argentine, Peruvian, Mexican, etc., will not be considered. The Jewish-Latin American authors studied in this paper constitute an additional source of curiosity within the broad panorama of Latin American literature. However, they deserve attention not for that *rara avis* quality, but rather for the multiplicity of planes their literary projects traverse. Their texts may, in some cases, signify the breakdown and the realignment of traditional Western literary paradigms. To incorporate Jewish motifs into a Latin, Christian framework shatters conventional expectations about the uniformity of Latin America. This effect reverberates at all levels and in all quarters: Jewish writing and Latin American writing—insofar as definitions of content are concerned—cease to function as exclusive clauses. The results, which are as old as social migrations, cut across narrow categories. With rare exceptions, these writers are not so much committed to Jews and Judaism as to the attempt to understand the current predicament of Latin American societies, with Jews and Judaism serving as a useful motif. Deprived of its principal religious components, Judaism is reduced to images borrowed from literary sources and family tales and, as it were, "updated" and reduced to folklore. This folkloristic material is transplanted to a different historical course where the sacred comingles with the profane to defy all religious valuations. There is no retreat from Judaism as such. As with every selective process, Judaism is distilled; the resulting motifs are incorporated into literary practice rather than into a way of life.

All times can be the worst of times. The perception of political instability, the new experience of exile (every exile must be new to the newly exiled), the all-too-readily made analogies to "genocide" and "holocaust," have led to some short cuts to Judaic traditions. Whether as re-enactments of Jewish middle and lower-middle class values at the initial stages of immigration to Latin America, or the consoling recuperation of the Wandering Jew as epitome of historical survival, the presence of Jewish elements in contemporary Latin American fiction provides a shelter (if only temporary), a homecoming (albeit anguished and critical), and a recognition that the identification as "Latin American" does not require a denial of Judaism. This realization is an integral part of the physical and human geography that is at the center of this literature.

2

In 1934, Luis Karduner reviewed the presence of Jewish writers in Argentina and praised their contribution to the shaping of national culture.[1] He distinguishes between those who are tied to Judaism only by virtue of a universal sense of belonging to the human race and those who have endeavored to incorporate Jewish values into their literary production. Rarely, he claims, have those who abandoned the peculiarity of their condition in order to labor universal subjects risen above the crowded field of writers with similar aims. What is needed, he asserts, is a Jewish literature in Spanish that will capture the particular interest of the evolution of the Jewish community. The older generation of immigrants, he indicates, represents a conservative trend; the younger elements exhibit assimilationist tendencies as a result of a lack of appropriate schools, teachers, and a Jewish educational environment. All need to forestall the growing forces of antisemitism and cement a strong Jewish national base for the future. To encourage writers to move in this direction, he argues that Jewish life would not only be of interest to the Christian public, but would also supplement the instruction received by the few in Jewish schools and libraries.

Karduner's attempt to stimulate writers encapsulates many of the dilemmas of the Argentine Jewish writer. The desire to integrate into a new land suggested to some that their literature should reduce differentiating features, i.e., should disappear within the melting pot of the new nation; a pot that should be forever stirred and never cease to accentuate the alien ingredient. In 1910, Alberto Gerchunoff (1889–1950) celebrates his new country in *Los gauchos judíos*.[2] It is the year of the centennial in the "new Zion," and the land of freedom, prosperity and peace is to be lauded. No tsarist pogroms would befall the Jewish population. A drunk gaucho did kill Gerchunoff's father but this could not be ascribed to a national policy. Restrictions imposed by the Laws of Residence had been in place since 1902; in addition, since the 1880s the country had been undergoing a round of xenophobic and antisemitic outbursts. Aimed at all elements that were changing the ideals and social construct of the nation, these outbursts too were marginal and alien to the spirit of the country. Gerchunoff's remarkable career took him to the conservative literary pages of the newspaper *La Nación*. He joined an elitist project that saw Argentina as "the land of the advent," with all the messianic overtones such a view implies. He believed in the power of culture to effect a fusion, binding Jews into the essence of the land. There was no need to renounce Judaism; it would enrich Argentine culture as the country advanced on its homogenizing project. To be a Jew and a farmer marked the beginning of a new order: the myths of the new land allowed the Haggadah to be recited alongside the national anthem. From Egypt to the agricultural colonies of Entre Ríos (another Mesopotamia), the exodus had finally come to a close. The immigrant should shed the shtetl's habits and assume the physical contours of the local population. Gerchunoff had come home: "Argentina is Palestine for the Jew," he wrote in 1914, "the promised land, in the strict sense of the Scriptures, is the land of freedom." This line of thought would lead him to maintain: "I do not aspire to sing only of Jewish life: I am above all Argentine and my being an Argentine directs my existence as a man of letters."[3] Gerchunoff's determination to be part of a national entity undermined his analyses of the local social and political crises and allowed him to maintain an elegiac remembrance of his earlier visionary days. For the oligarchy he was a model immigrant: he exulted patriotic feelings and abstained at first from emphasizing the plight of many of his fellow Jews. He did, however, denounce the European situation that led to World War II and later strongly defended the legitimacy of Israel. At the same time, he stated that there were no "religious questions" in Argentina, failing to see the ramifications of the restrictive laws and other overt maneuvers of the ruling class. Gerchunoff managed to become an "insider." While maintaining some distance from unsavory political circles, he remained culturally aligned with advocates of an elitist view of the national experience. For him, middle class beliefs supplied a path to integration and hence to the relative safety of established society.

More than any other member of his generation, Gerchunoff exemplifies the total commitment to the official version of Argentina's initial claims to an idyllic future. He should be understood as a bona fide member of a persecuted minority who joined in a national project that promised tranquility. Like exiles of later years, and even as a citizen, he refrained from publicly chastising his hosts for the violations suffered by others. The transition from "outsider" to "insider" demanded that he share official values and the dominant morality. Meanwhile, the socialist and anarchist immigrants who differed, confronting the armed forces in the south or the police in the streets of Buenos Aires during the period of the centennial celebrations, lingered in the jails; the ashes of others were scattered to the winds. There was no single unified front in the Jewish community: class lines defined the limits of dialogue. Then, as now, the survival of an official Jewish community rested with those whose rhetoric and social beliefs could approximate the language of the day. Ethnicity or any other binding communal force receded before the threat to the established order.

Uneasiness and turmoil continue to characterize Argentina. The official Jewish community weathered various nationalist and other extremist positions and allied itself with the bourgeoisie.[4] Thus, the perception of the Jew emphasized distance from progressive political

causes. The rejection of middle class values by younger, more militant Jews, resulted in a simultaneous denial of a Jewish way of life. Failing to differentiate between bourgeois Jews and Judaism, this position served as an additional stage in the progressive elimination of characteristics that denoted a difference with the national majority. The concept of the antisemite was incorporated by accepting that to be Jewish was not to be a complete Argentine.[5] In general terms, this notion fits the tactics of every reactionary regime that excludes from protection those citizens who challenge its legitimacy as a representative of the nation's character. For the Jew to participate in a "progressive" movement meant to exacerbate the existing tensions between the middle class and more radical solutions. It also meant to reject the inherited past in order to embrace a platform that promised equality at the price of self-denial.

Perhaps no other Argentine writer enacted this dilemma better than Germán Rozenmacher (1936–1971). In *Réquiem para un viernes a la noche*[6] and in several short stories, he established the distance between the East European immigrant and the generation attempting to take hold of a new land. The anxious search for a geographic anchor seals forever the existence of a diaspora and a distant Zion as the only solution. In *Réquiem,* the son scorns the parental concern for money. His progressive leanings, though schematic, prevent him from understanding that his parents' class cannot set aside their concern for immediate survival. He believes that intermarriage will earn him total acceptance as an Argentine. To leave the house of the father and accept his spouse's embrace represents not a solution but merely a challenge to Jewish tradition and a rejection of a way of life. Instead of becoming a cantor like his father, he clings to the hope of becoming a writer: a simple exchange of "professions." His project of becoming an Argentine with an historical conscience and knowledge of his origins is not initiated by the Jewish experience, but rather by denying the very source that could contribute to a critical perception of the national experience. The home that he leaves, as the father wisely states, in time will be filled with strangers.

Rozenmacher was no mere renegade. His writing reflected the battered mind of a perplexed and confused being. It circumscribed a limited area of the Jewish experience and assimilated the sounds and smells of Eastern European origins to a definition of the future. So desperate was the search for a land and acceptance by the majority, that Rozenmacher shed portions of his own fragmented self: the same fragments, ironically, that distinguished his work from that of his generation. Rozenmacher's concern with Argentine politics, with the future advent of a second Peronist era, and his clear anti-bourgeois criticism were also an integral part of his literature. These issues, however, were generally set apart from the texts with a strong Jewish presence. Body and soul, as it were, remained apart. The lack of integration of Jewish and political themes

may have underlied Rozenmacher's inability to cover the distance that artificially separated his Jewish origins from his recognition of himself as an Argentine.

Mario Szichman's (born 1945) approach to the Argentine national project involves a more folkloristic application of Jewish elements. As the Pechof family repeatedly fails during half a century of Argentine history, their saga—which completes the trilogy—parallels a series of national frustrations, as various governmental formulas and military coups certify the bankruptcy of liberalism and facile populism.[7] At the initial stages of Jewish immigration, Gerchunoff struggled with the underlying issue of the relationship between the Jewish and the Argentine, and ultimately enunciated a refined notion of these terms. Later history proves that unconditional integration is doomed. Assimilation means to surrender without guarantees of acceptance by the majority. Rozenmacher demonstrated the anguish of immigrant Jews and first generation Jewish-Argentines facing incomplete choices that prevented full development within the new society. On the other hand, Szichman's Jews, throughout his works, operate on entirely different premises. Some wither away in the daily search for sustenance, while others succumb to petty moral corruption; a few exercise political options. None of them rises above the folkloristic gestures of the diction, garb, and culinary preference of the Eastern European Jew. As members of the middle and lower-middle sectors, they share an outlook on the Argentine situation that, except for statements about antisemitism, does not differ from that of the general population. Throughout their history, the Pechofs are seen ironically reaffirming Szichman's solemn insolence. Many Jews are chastised for their class values, for remaining on the fringes of the course of history, or for failing within organized political forces. Even when the "individual I" resigns part of his exclusive privacy to become a "social I," the successive political hoaxes perpetrated on the Argentine people also cancel his future potential.

The arrival from Europe, and thus the survival from the impending Holocaust, does not promote any cohesive community feeling. The Pechofs disperse and become tainted. There is no hymn to the promised land. The search for family roots begins in 1956, initiated by the stench of death and rotting rubbish. Berele-Bernardo organizes his version of history by utilizing one of the many infamous episodes of recent Argentine life as a point of departure: the execution in a dump of innocents caught with some conspirators suspected of plotting to overthrow the "Liberating Revolution" that ended the first Peronist era.[8] In *La verdadera crónica falsa,* Berele-Bernardo spends seven years in search of a family and a history that span fifty years of questions summed up in the perennial victim's "Is it just?" A mixture of Yiddish words offer familial sounds, but they do not suffice to form a home. No alternative is satis-

factory: neither Yiddish nor Spanish, Israel nor Argentina, neither access to the immediate gratification of the bourgeois family nor active socialist militancy. The searcher surrenders to inaction. The pursuit of uncompromising survival and the active participation in the movement to bring about change are confronted with a political system that is being torn apart as it destroys the country. From the arrival in the new land, and the defeated promises of the radical governments in the early part of the century through the death of Eva Perón in 1952, Szichman interweaves his Jewish characters with an acrid rejection of all official versions of history. No existing myths are allowed to stand, and no rational explanations succeed in interpreting recent decades or making the present less intolerable. In *A las 20:25 la señora entró a la inmortalidad,* only the invention of a fictitious past can allow the descendants of immigrants to join the ruling class. The Pechofs shamelessly forge a glorious Hispanic past. The decay and pretentiousness of certain sectors of Argentine society are dismantled by the Pechof's mixture of chutzpah and ingenious tactics for survival. This most recent novel attests not only to Szichman's craft but, perhaps more importantly, to a frank acceptance of a Jewish family with *pícaros,* determined not just to survive but to invent a more desirable and respectable past. In so doing they engage in the common, futile, and at the official level, tragic exercise of denying the past by simply rewriting the origins of all that has failed.

Perhaps all writing is marked by absence, by the vacuum that is to be filled when the narrator, searching for his story (history), addresses his place within the greater scheme of family, tradition, or national belonging. This perception promotes the search of Gerardo Mario Goloboff's (born 1939) central character, Herman, in *Caballos por el fondo de los ojos.*[9] He follows the pathways from European villages to immigrant experiences in Argentina; the search for a concrete presence of self is attempted through wife and lover, through relations with Jews and non-Jews, by pursuing material well-being and confronting deaths that expose the frailty of any self-satisfaction. This polarity was previously announced in the collection of poems called *Entre la diáspora y octubre.* In the novel, the nationalist and populist governmental cycles exhaust all political possibilities without unifying the surviving evidence of oppression such that a new era might become possible. Goloboff's writings fluctuate between hope and despair, the discovery of origins and renewed promises and the foreclosure of viable options (marked by the bloody remains of Herman's son). The journey of four generations covers the land. It moves from the agricultural collectives to the economic opportunities of the capital, from the initial uneasy sounds of a new tongue to a total manipulation of all the speculative opportunities offered by the bourgeoisie. It also marks a transition from a joyful illusion of permanent peace in the new land to the recognition that the officially prescribed solutions must fail.

Goloboff's novel abstains from folkloristic descriptions of Jewish life in Argentina. Abandoning the ideology of the melting pot, it dwells instead on the ultimate practice of possession: burial in the ground of the new land. The text stresses Herman's re-examination of his family's and his country's national projects for the future, from a newly acquired maturity. No solutions are offered. Socialism, Zionism, and armed warfare are options exercised by others. His first step is to rewrite history and learn from the sadly common grounds of Jewish and Argentine suffering and reactions to oppression that there is need to initiate another time.

The unparalleled violence suffered by the Argentine population over the last decade has produced an equally unparalleled exile. In literary circles, it has generated radical transformations of existing tenets and modified literary projects. Perhaps some correlation between the amount of violence and an increased introspection into the Jewish condition can be established in authors of Jewish origin. Writers who until recently relegated Jewish components to an occasional and even disparaging remark, have rescued the image of the "Wandering Jew" as an embodiment of resistance and as witness to survival. This is particularly the case of Pedro Orgambide (born 1929) and his *Aventuras de Edmund Ziller en tierras del Nuevo Mundo* (1977).[10]

Ziller is the former Jonah, the former Jesus (who escaped from the cross and died an old man in Rome), the embodiment of a Jewish pirate, an Argentine philologist and Hebraist. He is the immortal Jew who makes and constantly reorders history while covering the dialectic relationship of oppressor-oppressed, executioner-victim, colonizer-colonized, etc. Ziller is constantly on the fringes of society, an outsider sought by repressive institutions who capitalizes on his Jewishness as a differentiating element that contributes to the perennial rejection of every established social faction. In the term "Jew," Orgambide condenses the meaning of not belonging, of being a perpetual stranger to every settlement, of living outside the community of the ruling powers. Ziller is also found, by virtue of a universal commitment to justice, alongside the exploited and colonized even as he maintains a keen dedication to his own art. Far from entering into the shallow debate on committed art and literature, this admirer of Tiradentes, the Aleijadinho and the goddess Yembá, underscores the conjunction and unity of revolution, art and sex: the three virtues and pleasures that are denied to the oppressor. In flights of heightened humorous adventure and the sobering analyses of inquisitions and tortures in 1791 and 1971, Ziller proclaims—in not too distant echoes of Borges' "El inmortal"[11]—that one man, Ziller, is all men. However, Orgambide clearly adds a political dimension: Ziller is

ultimately a *mestizo*, one who does not believe in a world that rejects him and that deflects his participation in the mainstream of history.

In the final section, "In memoriam" (an exulted transgression of the kaddish), another character, Pedro, comprehends the meaning of Ziller's opening to the world. Clad in Pedro's grandfather's coat, Ziller offers him protection from the distance that is still to be covered until men will desist from the ills and the madness that prevent them from returning to their original land and place. It is a historical coat: the coat that came from Odessa, that protected the grandfather while he marched through the streets of Buenos Aires on behalf of the Socorro Rojo Internacional, and that shielded him during "The Tragic Week" of 1919. The heritage of being doubly damned, Jewish and communist, points to the origins and also to the limits of the past. Above all, however, it signals a recognition of the need to gather fragmentary and previously dissociated moments of the past in order to define his Jewish international heritage as a call against exploitation. Clearly far from any traditional definition of Jewish tradition, Orgambide's recourse to a Jewish motif to decipher the meaning of a ceaseless accumulation of indignities and repression is nevertheless noteworthy. Writing in exile in Mexico, Orgambide experiences a diaspora, an Argentine political diaspora, that forces him to reread the past and to integrate this previously marginal segment of his literary production.

Exile has produced a re-examination of a similar path taken by others several decades ago. It is, as always, the hour of the wanderer in search of . . . ? But search he must by looking into the past. Orgambide's as yet unpublished novel *Hacer la América*, a coded expression of the dream of acquiring immediate wealth in the New World, traces two branches of a family of immigrants in Buenos Aires. Here, once again, the descendants of the Jews must prove that their traditional heritage is not a barrier to acceptance as full-fledged Argentines. The daily pressures of acculturation and assimilation gather force as the Jews now lack emotional support of a tightly knit community.

Visions of survival will shift with the varying degrees of stability of the country and as individuals redirect their hopes towards a more permanent class structure. Ethnicity and class alliances also serve to address the inevitability of a radical break of societal organization. If the bourgeoisie is seen as condemned to national failure, the recovery of the "international" component of ethnicity rises as a new symbol. The Wandering Jew becomes a metaphor for resilience and the rebirth of positive forces out of the negativity of exile. Rather than formulate strict ways of life, these writers see the Jewish experience as a means to understand current problems. Immigration and integration into new areas become themes not out of nostalgia, but out of a renewed experience of exile.

With varying emphases and foci, these Argentine-Jewish writers have dealt with distilled versions of Judaism and the Jewish experience. Their works transcend the limits of religion, tradition and ethnicity to encompass survival, exile, and territoriality. Many of their characters are in search of themselves as citizens of a country; they appeal to their ancestry in order to cope with the contradictions of their society. Jewish motifs are central to these texts but not as part of an effort to regain a religious or traditional practice. Origins are a fact that may aid in the transition from despair at the sight of endless mutilations of human dignity to the hope for survival within a broad historical context. Judaism is perceived as a search for a homeland, but except for the superificial trappings of Zionism (donations, planting trees in Israel) or the aliyah of a secondary character, Israel is not regarded as an answer. To do so would deny the integration into Argentine society. Furthermore, it would demand an explicit admission by Jews and non-Jews that the Jewish heritage as such is an enriching element of society. These texts also propose that the young generation of Jews must cease to ally itself strictly with the bourgeoisie. Rather, they should identify themselves with Judaism through the commitment to social justice and opposition to all forms of aggression. Acerbic comments and easy clichés about Jews emerge as a rejection of complacency. Elegiac memories are no longer sufficient to counterbalance present day disillusionment and destruction; they can serve only as nostalgia for another form of the mythified shtetl. These novels are distant from the more established traditional lines of Marcos Aguinis' impassioned analyses of the Jewish-Christian relationships or Israeli-Arab differences,[12] or the ease with which Mario Satz brings forth the strength of Jewish motifs to encompass an earthly and a planetary vision.[13] The writers that have been discussed delineate the fundamental Jewish position on the human condition that serves to acknowledge the power of the Judaic heritage as they continue to ponder the essential and more general (and difficult) task of restoring man to his rightful place.

3

That Isaac Chocrón's (born 1933) *Rómpase en caso de incendio*[14] lacks the urgency found in Argentine texts owes, perhaps, to current governmental stability in Venezuela as well as to the author's individualism. He employs a familiar literary conceit: "Chocrón" compiles the letters sent to him and others by Daniel Benabel and publishes them with a postscript about Benabel's assassination in Tangiers. Although the text plays along the line separating fiction from reality, that is not a theoretical concern. The letters recreate Benabel's steps after the earthquake of

1967 that took the lives of his father, wife, and children. Cut off from the immediate past, his historical continuity interrupted, he sets out to settle his inheritance. The journey to the Moroccan village of Melilla to sell his father's properties acquires additional meaning when he senses that his inner properties demand renewal.

Until the earthquake, Benabel had been a dutiful civil servant, successful by middle class standards, an established member of the community forever settled into routine. Death, however numbing, is his liberator. Free from responsibility, he engages in a passive and leisurely introspective journey. In various letters he recalls his infancy and youth, the bar mitzvah ("first communion," he explains, ostensibly for non-Jewish readers), the Rabbi's hopes that he would become the first rabbi born in Venezuela, the "Arab" melodies of the services, the stifling burden of Jewish traditions, and the growing presence and significance that his own being acquired for him. Madrid and Paris are way stations on a search that takes him to the Alhambra where he begins to reach for the sensuality of the "moors." His family in Melilla shows him that the sephardic tradition is still their way of life, that the *adafina* and Spanish expressions from the Middle Ages establish a direct link to a past he had long forgotten. Benabel discovers his own precious self. He is committed to his own survival and to the exposure of his senses to all that is alive. "Absolute liberty" means reacting at will while handling the limited business of the inheritance at a pace that delays his return and forecloses his previous lifestyle.

Although he neither rejects his family nor denies his Judaism—to be Jewish is a compromise undertaken at birth that cannot be cancelled—Benabel does not translate the mark of a Jew, or the Venezuelan, into a framework for action. This "pilgrimage to the origins" does not create a permanent link with them. His commitment does open up a previously regimented lifestyle. In Tangiers he sees himself as the conjunction of all three races: Christian by being Venezuelan; Jewish by birth; Moorish because he has finally remembered to exploit his five senses. The triviality of the discovery underscores the fact that rather than live better he only manages to arrive at a peace with himself. It is not altogether clear at what point Benabel feels (not "comprehends") that he is ready to return to Caracas, to attempt to understand the fractured and mutating city. Yet, this return is never to take place. Caracas and Tangiers afford him a better understanding of his outward grayness and inner glow. He succeeds in leaving behind the dull and unproductive routine in the Foreign Office and in meeting others who have "lived" to the fullest: the rebels, the outcasts. However, even in their presence he remains bland. He admires and helps his drunken cousin, the Jewish transvestite (the ultimate rebel from self and community); he proclaims repeatedly the discovery of sensuality, but throughout he refrains from all contact with others, from any commitment beyond material support. He criticizes Venezuelans because they believe that the world should take stock of their existence and importance, and chastises the communal obligations placed on the Jew. Benabel remains a spectator, a passive recipient of unpredictable tragedy. Even in death he seems a contented being who believes he knows who and what he was. He faces the sea as the stones of Arab hoodlums end his journey. As he writes in a lucid moment, his bones will add more whiteness to the blinding light of Morocco. Benabel's relatives reverse his pilgrimage and go to live and die on foreign soil. His father, who would have liked to be buried in Melilla, lies in Caracas; the son is soon forgotten and remains unclaimed in a land that no longer thrives with the Jewish presence, and where his killers enjoy the spoils of theft with impunity.

The texts of the letters allow for the psychological introspection of a relatively self-centered individual. As fractured as his original city, his character reveals an urgent need to affirm his individuality. The letters contribute to the sense of isolation from immediate contact with the human race; the written pages substitute for his presence and for the often postponed return to Venezuelan society. As he has been absolutely free from commitments, at his death his letters may have been missed more than his physical presence. As a final irony, the editor of the letters reports that his death was known only by word of mouth. His letters are published, by accident, as mere afterthought. His smallness loses its privacy. In the last moments of his life, as he enters the sea to purify his body, he does not achieve salvation. All that remains of his search for the sensual is what the reader, who may glance at the letters and forget their author's name, recalls.

4

Memories are preserved through names, and through texts (as Borges would have it). Memories enter the realm of fiction when the remembrance of things past is woven with the wish to build a life where desire and facts become indistinguishable. Genealogies are supposed to trace origins; as part of a fictitious genre they can also create a past. To read *Las genealogías*[15] by Margo Glantz (born 1930) is to enter a world where the apparent need to approach a definition of herself as a Jew and a Mexican is combined with the reconstruction of her parental figures and the occasional trivialization of episodes that in other writers merited somber reflection. Perhaps the serialized publication of these "memories"—they cannot properly be considered "memoirs"—required a lighter tone; perhaps that tone only veils a weightier intent.

Much as the travelogues and memoirs of the elite are read in other

circles, *Las genealogías* can be read for the curiosity it evokes about an intellectual public figure. Margo Glantz is recognized and her father, Jacobo Glantz, is an overwhelming presence in the text. His character adds luster to these pages, with insightful comments on revolutionary zeal during the idealist stages of the Russian revolution, a passion for poetry in Russian, Yiddish, Spanish and Hebrew. Jacobo Glantz was not a successful entrepreneur. He was a baker, salesman, fund raiser for the survivors of the Holocaust, owner of the well-known Carmel deli, promoter of poets and painters, and narcissist rogue at all times. He and his wife provided the family with a keen sense of non-religious Jewishness, of Judaism as *vivencia*, a loosely defined Jewish way of life. From the mélange of faithfully recorded and imagined memories of Russia (the tsar, his fall, and the rise of Communism), the journey to the New World in search of peace, tranquility, and livelihood, and Jacobo's ever-present drive to surround himself with artists and poets, Margo draws an easy mixture of carefree writing and deeper humorous strokes.

Distanced from her father's poetry by her ignorance of Yiddish, Margo bridges that gulf by writing in Spanish about her sense of exile from Yiddish. Her metaphorical exile from Jewishness is brought to the surface by its enunciation—"And all is mine, and it is not, and I seem to be and not to be Jewish and that is why I write these—my genealogies" (p. 20). Jewish objects are not privileged: the menorah stands alongside relics of the pre-Hispanic Mexican past and a local Passion of Christ with its demons; a Christmas tree rises instead of flickering candle lights of the menorah. There is no guilt, just the clear assertion that this is so and that it does not deny origins. Though such a stance questions the possibilities of a Jewish future, that future is not of major concern in a book that tries to preserve her parents' voices from the past.

Jacobo Glantz inaugurates the Mexican branch of the family by accident. Once the United States refused their entry, they could have gone to Argentina or Cuba. Consequently, the next generation must either pose questions about the nature of being a Mexican or merely accept it as an accident of birth, like being born a Jew. Juxtaposing these legacies, Margo elucidates episodes in the family's history. She recalls the attack of Mexican fascist youths against her father in 1939, her guilt at the screening of documentaries of gassed women who looked like her, and the episodic (and uneventful) Zionist activities that ended in dances and a truncated project. This conscientious but unstructured search retraces her parents' journey. However, even when on her voyage to Russia, when she discovers a kindred spirit who paralleled her family's odyssey but who returned to the Soviet Union, Margo's response is limited to amazement at the coincidence. Still, these sketches allow the reader to recover an image that fades in a lost country.

Devoid of heroic deeds, the family does not follow the traditional pattern of other Jewish immigrants. There are struggles and concerns for daily survival, but there is also close contact with Jewish art and literature: the meetings with Mayakovski, Chagall, Diego Rivera and a host of Mexican poets of several generations. Freedom from communal pressure allows for a narrow gregarious behavior, but Jacobo despairs when Margo "betrays her people" by marrying a non-Jew. Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye der milkhiker* is brought to bear as a literary echo at the youngest daughter's marriage; but unlike Tevye's daughter Chava, Margo doesn't repent. The event produces anguish, but any further introspection is disarmed by the joy that later conversions to Judaism produce in Jacobo Glantz. Similarly, Margo's and her sister's baptism and the Catholic rites they followed when, in early infancy, they are secretly converted by their English teachers, are treated lightly. Attendance at church services is followed by the movies and thus her Christianity is mixed with the comics' heroes and with The Shadow, Dracula, and King Kong. It is, as she says, a "Marvel(ous) Christianity" (p. 218).

Judaism need not draw out the masochist tendencies other Latin American authors have attributed to it. Nor must the journey to origins, even when it spans only the two generations that witnessed the Holocaust, reproduce pain, anger, or depression. *Las genealogías* offers another facet of Jewish life in a Latin American country. When asked why he represented a danger to the nascent Revolution in Russia, Jacobo replies, because he was a "Con-verso Jew" ("A Jew-with-poetry," p. 67). This commanding charm, the free life that Margo Glantz recovers for her version of Mexico[16] and the depiction of this healthy butterfly surrounded by the sensitive and intellectual beauty of the world, mandate the sympathetic response from the reader. Surprise and arresting astonishment at her own life marks the open-ended last page. It could not be otherwise for the daughter of a man who could argue with an almost "typical" Jewish wife and mother, bring forth a satisfied smile, and see his pleased face look back at him from hundreds upon hundreds of self portraits.

A radically different view of Judaism is to be found in Esther Seligson's (born 1941) *La morada en el tiempo*.[17] Here, the journey to the origins means literally a composition of history from the moment of Genesis. The cover of Glantz's book is a painting of a family portrait; Seligson's is an ancient map of the tribal distribution in the Promised Land. Seligson omits all references to her concrete reality as a Mexican. Instead, God's relation to man is interpreted through the historical unfolding of a seemingly endless sequence of violence against His people. Her questions about justice and the rewards of faith are also those of the prophets. Unanswerable gazes search for a response to God's whereabouts during the Kristallnacht and during the efficient burnings at the crematoriums.

By her skillful reorganization of history, the narrator offers cycles of hunger, dispersion, gathering and hopeful reconstruction. At every stage, she ponders the unique meaning of "the chosen": chosen to what end if the Jewish legacy is also disinherited from God's presence?

Seligson's ideal and idealistic conception of history reflects the deeply rooted doubts and probings of a theologian. It introduces a non-material interpretation of present-day Israel and of contemporary Jews who do not live up to lofty expectations. The Jews seem to have failed her by not developing a superior moral conscience that would set them above and beyond all human comparisons. At different stages, all have shown the frailty of the body and the easy inclination toward evil and selfishness. Jews have also shown an inclination to develop as a nation within a defendable territory. The wages of war are indeed horrible, equality to all has not yet been reached, and to date there is no liberty for the word. No building is erected forever but built it must be. Seligson, however, is more concerned with "an abode in time" that stands on a spiritual foundation. At a time when Jews have once again returned to their land and have established a nation that resembles all other nations, she holds out the stubborn hope for a messianic era.

Seligson's poetic theology and desire to see human behavior that truly manifests godliness has possibly contributed to the text's lack of concrete referentiality. The inquisition, Baruch Spinoza, Rachel's laments for her children, and the frequent references to biblical and kabbalistic sources as well as to World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel, are not enough to project an interpretation of history. The writer need not interpret history nor adopt the theologian's pose, but once that choice is made, the reader must wonder where the proposed spirituality and sincere human anguish at today's world may lead within the boundaries of the literary text. It is also possible to advance another hypothesis. Perhaps the narrator's excessive "spirituality" clouds her perception of human reality, a concrete, down-to-earth geography where angels have not yet learned to tread. The abode in time and of time requires its other dimension: residence on earth.

5

The decision to discuss Jewish-Latin American writers who have not maintained a narrow adherence to the establishment, both communal and national, stems from a sense that acculturation, estrangement and marginality tend to produce a more thorough delineation of the fundamental issues that have characterized the Jewish presence in Latin America. The feeling of not belonging to a formalized and accepted social structure must necessarily underscore the dialectic and often contradictory relations of the outsider/insider. Exile from physical boundaries accepted as one's nation further exacerbates the need for insight into the very definition of "nation," "people," "Judaism." The writer may elect any posture within the limits of the text, and then select, alter, and modify data in response to literature's demand to be true to its own internal cohesive exigencies. Thus, for instance, Pedro Orgambide rescues for himself and his literature the figure of the Wandering Jew as a metaphor for present-day exiles from oppressive Latin American regimes. He extrapolates from Jewish tradition a partial Jew as an index of rejection by the Gentile world, but also as a sign of eternal survival and inner strength.

The *literary* motif of the Wandering Jew can also be traced in Isaac Goldemberg's (born 1945) *The Fragmented Life of don Jacobo Lerner.*[18] This time, however, the figure is the reduction of grandeur to the daily, sorrowful, petty and unglorified steps of a Jewish Russian immigrant as he fails to adapt to the unknown parameters of Peru. Neither "here" nor "there," he will remain until his death an unbalanced figure struggling to maintain the dignity that escapes him, to assert himself as a success by the standards of the community (wealth, family, social ties) while performing acts that block all access to his dream.

Jacobo Lerner's choices have already been played out when the text attempts to follow his deathbed effort to piece together the fragments of his life. The episodes out of which he quite appropriately attempts to forge a life, represent the absence of any concrete project or task in the New World. Fears of additional pogroms—after those of 1917 and 1919—led him to abandon Russia. Once in Peru, an overwhelming fright does not leave him nor his closest friend though they live in remote areas of the country. He can set no goal other than to survive "in peace." Far from the cohesive motivations of other immigratory waves to agricultural colonies, for instance, the Jews in these pages share only the usual middle class aspirations for increased wealth and the wish to maintain communal ties as a sense of Jewish identity. Thus, not only is Jacobo Lerner's life fragmented, but also the lives of those who write letters to the editor of *Jewish Soul,* men and women of the Jewish community—functionally separated by labor assignments—who strive to integrate themselves into the country by repeatedly proclaiming the need to acquire Peruvian citizenship. Citizenship would show that the bonds to their new country are not built solely on profit. Eventually, they will seek economic diversification in order to alter the identification of the term "Jew" with "peddler." This, of course, points to a growing class consciousness, that wishes Jews to be protected by inconspicuousness, rather than to a radical growth towards national integration. Without participating actively in politics, the Jews must forestall stereotyped images by promoting awareness of the turmoil that shook Peru in the

1920s and 30s. Jews are called upon to be Peruvian but their immediate past has taught them to maintain a safe distance from direct intervention in national, i.e., non-Jewish, affairs. It is safer for them to condemn Hitler's rise in Germany and to call for support of Jews in Palestine, than to make pronouncements on their immediate surroundings.

Integration and assimilation are, obviously, code words that reflect societal processes of a distinct minority in its relations to the dominant culture. A letter from a non-Jew outlining the hope for a new Peruvian race based on the union of Jews and Indians has a lamentable correlation: Efrain, the illegitimate son of Jacobo Lerner and Bertila, an Indian woman from Chepén. The child was reared in an atmosphere of resentment and hatred toward the Jewish father who abandoned the mother at his conception. Catholic fanaticism and the closing of all possible physical and spiritual growth lead Efrain to an increasingly introverted imaginary dialogue and to fears of all who are outside his darkened corner. Efrain becomes an outcast; even the initial warmth he found in the church is replaced by contempt, for he is the incarnation of "the devil's" passage through town. As the rejection by his family increases, Efrain places his hope in the father who will take him away from Chepén to Lima. Jacobo, however, is replaced by *the* father, the religious figure of redemption, a quasi-human and quasi-divine embodiment of rebirth and renewal that announces a union at once loving and protecting. The last entry of the text, on December 25, 1935, registers this imagery. It comes after Efrain has seen a film version of Jesus' life and death and has transposed the drama of the Passion to his own surroundings. Leon Mitrani is the observant Jew who grew up with Jacobo Lerner, persuaded him to travel and settle in Chepén, and who raised a family with a non-Jewish wife. He died under suspicious circumstances after repeatedly chastising the townspeople with religious arguments. In Efrain's vision, Mitrani becomes Jesus falling under the weight of the cross and of the punishment meted out by police and other heathen and later rising to the heavens. The juxtaposition unifies Efrain's heritage: Christianity no longer affords him the protection it did when he was an accepted participant in the church's rites; Mitrani no longer is the personification of the devil as he had been taught by his fanatic aunts. Both elements, purified by Efrain's growing distance from reality, are a reflection of his hope for a final flight towards human warmth or towards total alienation.

The argument can be made that the stigma of illegitimacy looms over the failure of the family. However, Mitrani's own commitment to staying in Chepén clearly indicates that there is no margin of acceptance on either side when long-held traditions and superstitions organize the town's daily life. Nor does Jacobo's flight from Chepén signal his entry into Jewish communal life in Lima. The drive for money that took him to Chepén, Lima, and other towns, and the same impulse that frightened

the community because of its close association with an uncharitable definition of a "Jew," eventually led him to join with another Jew in the establishment of a "prostíbulo" (whore house).

The secret of his financial venture is kept hidden and this enables him to donate a *Sefer Torah* to the synagogue as a sign of gratitude for having survived an accident. He feels deprived, perhaps by choice, of the possibility of imitating his brother's successful family and social life (itself not unblemished: he cheats Jacobo at the same time that he becomes President of the Hebrew Union), and grows increasingly aware that his behavior and profession have not contributed to society. Jacobo Lerner then undergoes a fanatical religious period that he attributes to being possessed by a dybbuk. Mitrani's soul returns him to religious observance and to prophesying that the community must repent for its sinful life. The exorcism that restores his sanity gives way to depression at a reality that does not fill any promise nor afford any consolation.

Jacobo Lerner's immense solitude is his perennial sign. The loneliness of his deathbed, the very act of dying as the most intense personal event, does not extend to one version of immortality: the son he has never met. Both father and son lie alone, cut off from any possible continuity; the last chapter in the disintegration of Jacobo Lerner's family. His has been a failed journey. The flight from future pogroms and the looming Holocaust was not to produce a solution in the New World. Neither abandonment of the community nor the establishment of new rules in the north of Peru are seen as concrete alternatives, nor do established members of the Hebrew Union offer a model to be emulated. Peru is a haven from European oppression that can be joined to the mosaic of areas where Jews have found new homes. It also offers the terrifying complexity of its own strides toward national integration. In that country, where the formation of a "Peruvian race or nationality" dominates many attempts at a cogent and unifying national policy, fragmented lives and fragmented societies do not offer lasting answers. The bleak and mordant perspective of these Jews does not reject all that is Jewish, but it does address the contradictions between lofty statements and personal behavior, between the interests of a peer group and the proclamations favoring citizenship beyond the immediacy of official documents. It also chastises and laments the "peddler's" transitory stand, the frailty of all those who are just passing through.

6

The preceding pages were not designed to offer a complete overview of literature produced by Latin Amerian Jewish writers. They concentrated on authors from four different countries in order to show some

variations on interrelated themes. Writing can be conceived as arising out of a sense of estrangement when facing the human condition and out of a need to fill the void with words. The works reviewed here function within varying Jewish parameters that exceed the limits placed by a rigorous interpretation of Judaism. The reasoned call to Jewish ethnic origins, the anxious search for the patriarchal or matriarchal presence, the urgent need to find in ancient sources an answer or a promise to present-day violence and exile are some of the reasons that have brought these authors to critical attention.

The simple use of Jewish motifs in Latin American fiction should not by itself be surprising. Some authors have made casual use of Jewish traditions; others have centered on an excruciating probing of a longed-for theological coherence that is confronted by daily challenges to reason and faith. Immigration, acculturation and assimilation have also found expression in many pages. These are fundamental elements in a process of accommodation within a dominant milieu that requires readjustments of the minority as a price for partial acceptance into established social circles. Participation in Latin American political systems discourages ethnic identification. Perhaps of even greater importance for an analysis of the changing faces of Jewish tradition is its emergence as an enduring force that symbolizes resistance to oppression and survival against seemingly overwhelming historical odds. When members of the Jewish community are subjected to unflattering sketches or damning criticism in these literary works, it is not Judaism as a changing historical set of beliefs that is attacked, but certain class values adopted by those Jews. Most of the Latin American writers studied here do not maintain close ties to official Jewish communities. Their use of certain tenets of Jewish life is, on the whole, produced outside of Jewry's jurisdiction as well as outside ruling circles. These might be the necessary preconditions for a critical perception of these systems. Religion or even strict adherence to tradition are not seen as appropriate responses to the oppression that is rooted in rigid social and political structures. Jewish motifs, however, are incorporated into national political projects. This literary act responds to the actual presence of the descendants of immigrants who arrived with the illusion of finding a permanent haven from other persecutions, and the failure of that hope. New generations struggle for another definition of peace and social justice as some attempt to achieve equilibrium between Jewish and Latin American commitments, as if they were wholly separate categories.

Judaism in its varied and filtered perceptions is an intrinsic component of most of this literature. It is not just a fashionable trend that carves out for some writers an identifiable place in limited circles of readers. Nor can it be said any longer that their works offer the exotic attraction of the unusual and the unknown. Each of these Latin American

Jewish writers operates within geographic or cultural boundaries that tie them directly to their respective national literatures. That highly individual adaptations of Judaism are found at the core of their texts reveals their true origins and their need to return to historic and traditional sources. Their literary output also gives evidence that these sources offer means of understanding and resisting present-day violence and exile. In this way, the dilemmas posed by Latin American Jewish writers address the immediacy of their respective countries' particular context and, at the same time, emphasize both universal and Jewish concerns about repression, exile, and survival.

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NOTES

1. Luis Karduner, "Misión del escritor judío en la literatura argentina," *Judaica* II: 16 (1934): 145 ff. See also Lázaro Liacho, "Misión del escritor judío en la literatura," *Columna* 2 (1937): 49–56; José Horn, "Los nuevos escritores judíos de la Argentina," *Judaica* VI:70 (1939): 123–29.

2. Translated into English by Prudencio de Pereda as *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas* (New York, 1955).

3. In "Autobiografí" (1914), included in *Entre Ríos, mi país*, posthumously published in Buenos Aires in 1950. For a modified version, see his 1944 essay *El problem ajudío* (Buenos Aires, 1945), which is a reaction to the Holocaust. Gerchunoff's views were conditioned by the agricultural experience promoted and financed by the Baron de Hirsch. See Gerchunoff, "Noticia sobre la inmigración judía a la Argentina: El Barón Mauricio de Hirsch," in Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *50 años de colonización judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1939), pp. 43–64.

4. See Irving Louis Horowitz, "The Jewish Community of Buenos Aires," *Jewish Social Studies*, 24 (1962): 195–222; "Jewish Ethnicism and Latin American Nationalism," *Midstream*, 18 (1972): 22–28. Other studies of this community: Víctor Mirelman, "The Jews in Argentina: 1890–1930. Assimilation and Particularisms" (diss., Columbia University, 1973); Robert Wesibrot, *The Jews of Argentina. From the Inquisition to Perón* (Philadelphia, 1979) (general overview); Juan José Sebreli, *La cuestión judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1973).

5. León Rozitchner, *Ser judío* (Buenos Aires, 1967). Also his *Moral burguesa y revolución* (Buenos Aires, 1969).

6. I have studied this 1964 play and other texts in "Germán Rozenmacher: Tradiciones, rupturas y desencuentros," *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* III: 6 (1977): 93–110.

7. The resulting "trilogy" of Szichman's novels is composed of *La verdadera crónica falsa* (Buenos Aires, 1972; a revision of his first *Crónica falsa* [1969]), *Los judíos del Mar Dulce* (Buenos Aires-Caracas, 1971), and *A las 20:25 la señora entró a la inmortalidad* (Hanover, NH, 1981). Throughout the three texts, characters reappear following their original functions and covering a period of approximately fifty years of Argentine history.

8. The executions in the garbage dump of José León Suárez were the subject of Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación masacre* that served as a basis for Szichman's first novel.

9. *Caballos por el fondo de los ojos* (Barcelona, 1976). Ten years earlier, he published *Entre la diáspora y octubre* (Buenos Aires, 1966). For an analysis of his novel, see my study, "Gerardo Mario Goloboff: Hacia el décimo mes en la diáspora," *Escritura* 4 (1977): 255–82.

10. *Aventuras de Edmund Ziller en tierras del Nuevo Mundo* (Mexico City, 1977). I elaborate these points in "¿Quién es Edmund Ziller?," *La semana de Bellas Artes* 8 (1978): 8–11.

11. "El inmortal," in *El aleph* (Buenos Aires, 8th ed., 1968), p. 21.

12. Marcos Aguinis calls for a humanitarian and just society based on ethical Jewish principles in his polemical essay *La cuestión judía vista desde el Tercer Mundo* (Río Cuarto-Córdoba, [Cuadernos de Trabajo/Latinoamérica 2], 1974). It is noteworthy that he follows some of the other Jewish-Argentine writers in appealing to the arguments generated by Albert Memmi in his attempt to found a viable political position out of the principles on which Judaism rests. Albert Memmi, *La libération du Juif* (Paris, 1966); also his *Portrait du Colonisé précédé du Portrait du Colonisateur*, published in 1957 with a prologue by J. P. Sartre. Aguinis (born 1935) has published several novels; among them: *La cruz invertida* (Buenos Aires, 1970); *Cantata de los diablos* (Barcelona, 1972); *Refugiados: crónica de un palestino* (Buenos Aires, 1976).

13. Mario Satz (born 1944) published with Noguer, in Barcelona, the novels *Sol*, 1976, *Luna*, 1978, and *Tierra*, 1978, in addition to several books of poetry.

14. *Rómpase en caso de incendio* (Caracas, 1975). Although best known as a playwright, Chocrón has also published several novels: *Pasaje* (Barcelona, 1956); *Se ruega no tocar la carne por razones de higiene* (Caracas, 1970). Of particular interest for this topic is also *Pájaro de mar por tierra* (Caracas, 1972). For a sample of his plays, see *Teatro* (Caracas, 1974), selección y prólogo de Francisco Rivera. Long conversations with him, his relatives, colleagues and friends, in Miyo Vestrini's *Isaac Chocrón frente al espejo* (Caracas, 1980). Another Venezuelan writer who should be considered for his treatment of some of these motifs is Ben Ami Fihman (born 1949), author of *Mi nombre Rufo Galo* (Caracas, 1973), and *Los recursos del limbo* (Caracas, 1981).

15. *Las genealogías* (Mexico City, 1981).

16. With few exceptions, little is known about the precise national context of these genealogies. Margo Glantz is aware of this exclusion from her works and is currently writing a series of "historical genealogies." Such a work on the period of Lázaro Cárdenas will be published in the September 1983 issue of *Hispamérica*.

17. *La morada en el tiempo* (Mexico City, 1981). Also, *Diálogos con el cuerpo* (Mexico City, 1981). This work can serve as an indicator of the "idealization" of writing that is produced within an ahistorical framework.

18. *The Fragmented Life of Don Jacobo Lerner*, trans. from the Spanish by Robert S. Picciotto (New York, 1976). In *De Chepén a La Habana*, jointly published with Cuban poet José Kozer (New York, 1973), and in *Hombre de paso/Just Passing Through*, trans. from Spanish by I. G. and David Unger (New York-Hanover, NH, 1981), Goldemberg continues to develop the relationship between his Peruvian-Indian and Jewish ancestry. See, for instance, his poems "Hageadah," "Lesson," "Elegy for Hershel Gosovsky," and the series of "Chronicles."

The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America

New Studies on History and Literature

Edited by
David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr

Garland Publishing, Inc.
New York and London

THEORY IN THE MARGIN: LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE JEWISH SUBJECT

Edward H. Friedman

In the title essay of *The Essential Gesture*, Nadine Gordimer laments, to a degree, at least, that the circumstances of her writing prohibit the creation of art for art's sake: the pleasure of the act of writing per se, of playing with words, of relishing the artist's role. As a white Jewish woman living in South Africa and dedicated to suppressing apartheid, she cannot divorce her social and political commitment from her writings; she does not have the luxury of disengagement. Like the Yeatsian dancer and the dance, aesthetics and ideology are intimately linked, barely separable. Analogously, Latin American literature—and, one might add, its criticism—is difficult to read without a cognizance of its political dimension, of its peculiar rhetoric, in the multiple sense of the term. The writer/activist is hardly a rare phenomenon in Latin America, where the intimacies of life and art, of self and circumstance, make their way into literary texts. For that reason, David W. Foster, in *Alternate Voices in Contemporary Latin American Narrative*, cautions against reliance on "dominant models" (xiii) and misleading dichotomies: ". . . in terms of modern theoretical postulates and in view of the need to see Latin American literature apart from Western priorities, the distinction between literature and nonliterature, between narrative and nonnarrative, between narrative and political tract, is a tenuous one that does not significantly contribute to our estimation of writing in Latin America" (xv). There is, as is logical, a difference here, a difference to be reckoned with. Experiments in magical realism, the foregrounding of alterity—the exaggerated presentation of otherness—and the particular self-consciousness of Latin American narrative demonstrate the compatibility of fiction-making and the political agenda. One might add to the list what Djelal Kadir, in *Questing Fictions*, calls "an acute awareness [on the part of Latin American literature] of its own belated status" (105). When we speak of such topics as writing—and living—in the margins, erasure of margins, an aesthetics of the periphery, omissions from history, and of the problematical status of the latecomer, we may find that the Jewish subject in Latin American literature is, for better or for worse, a fruitful example.

Addressing questions of identity—of the search for the "true self"—Wayne Booth, in *The Company We Keep*, notes that

> critical alternatives to such rampant individualism have been offered for more than a century: by various Marxists, including Marx himself; by various Hegelians; by behaviorists; by social psychologists; in [the] account of a "personal" knowledge pursued by scientists who necessarily live convivially; in [an] account of how the self can fill its responsibility to itself by aspiring to be a different self; in recent defenses of liberalism; by Jacques Lacan in his accounts of how the Subject remakes itself in encounters with the Other; and by—but once we begin with deconstructionists, the decenterings of the so-called subject become innumerable. All these and many others have tried to teach us once again what ancient philosophy, classical rhetoric, and traditional religion took for granted: the isolated individual self simply does not, cannot exist. Not to be a *social* self is to lose one's humanity. As Aristotle insisted, we are "political animals" precisely in the sense that we become human only in a polis. (237-38)

There seems to be a direct relation between self-identity and inscribing oneself into society, into history. No individual nor group would wish to be left dangling outside the historical or geographical space that defines one's place in the world—an exterior, exclusionary space occupied, at times, by the figure of the Wandering Jew, in search of a home, a homeland, a sense of self, social acceptance.

A project of the "New Historicism" is to redeem a forgotten past, to incorporate defeat into history, to acknowledge the other side of the story. H. Aram Veeser comments:

> Health is power, as Nietzsche rightly observed. Triumphalist history must—to survive—disfigure or hide the history of subalterns. . . . The "New Historicists" anecdotes and violations (of causality and chronology) already operate a disruptive terror, necessarily disfiguring to the mainstream histories of the victors. New Historicists may need to adopt a subaltern stance vis-à-vis their jaded contemporaries and circulate the social energies stored so plentifully in the discourses of nationalism, ethnos, gender identities, and class-consciousness. . . . The New Historicism gave itself a mandate to show how the narratives of Enlightenment and humanism ultimately serve oppression and class domination. It is time now to show that the aesthetic space goes beyond the marketplace, in that ideas as well as interests come into play. But even as its stand today, in recognizing the deformity of a history written by the victors, New Historicism has developed a rhetoric of deformation that liberates us from the constraints of imperial deportment. (11)

A common motif of Latin American Jewish narrative is the rewriting of history, that is, the emendatory encoding of the Jewish subject into history. Among the most masterful—and most ironic—treatments of what we may refer to as "the new inscription" are the works of Mario Szichman, notably *Los judíos del Mar Dulce* (which Edna Aizenberg has called "Parricide on the Pampa: Deconstructing Gerchunoff and His Jewish Gauchos") and *A las 20:25, la señora entró en la inmortalidad.* If *Los judíos del Mar Dulce* is a companion piece to *Los gauchos judíos*, Isaac Goldemberg's *Tiempo al tiempo* may complement Vargas Llosa's *La ciudad y los perros.* In a more subtle fashion perhaps, Goldemberg's earlier novel, *La vida a plazos de don Jacobo Lerner*, incorporates four distinguishable modes of discourse in order to demonstrate, perhaps, that none matches the official discourse, the discourse of the State (Friedman). The structure and the strategies of Latin American Jewish writers are, of course, different, but in each case the medium is the message. Artistic and ideological concerns are intertwined, as are the practice and theory of writing.

Writing in Latin America—specifically, writing by Jewish authors—and theoretical polemics in the United States lead, in a manner of speaking, parallel lives. That is, the practice and the presuppositions about writing of the artists are replicated in the self-justifying strategies of the theorists. Both groups focus on the underprivileged position. Poststructuralism has given the marginal a prominence it had never before enjoyed—a precarious prominence once it becomes the center of discourse, thus relegating the previous center to marginal status. There is, in poststructuralist theory and criticism, an artistic flourish, a flair for the dramatic, as it were. Theory is art; art, theory. Deconstruction is not merely a method, a concept, but also a lexicon, a creative rhetoric, often a puzzle to be solved and almost always a performance. We learn from the poststructuralist enterprise how to seek the posture behind the postulation, the motive behind the metaphor. Everything is constructed in a discernible fashion—and is, therefore, ripe for deconstruction, demystification. The poststructuralist paradigm, as it were, calls on us to question the dominant institutions, to expose the hierarchies upon which society and historiography are founded—arbitrary hierarchies that pose as absolute—and to graft onto the official version of history—to redeem—those elements that have lost their former authority or those bereft of

power from the beginning. Deconstruction is—if we employ its neo-rhetorical dicta for affirmative purposes rather than to justify, as some would have it, a type of New Wave nihilism—a reconstructive venture. Revisionist history looks to the gaps, the interstices, the traces, the unwritten—in short, to the margin. Proponents of the system will argue that what we can know of the "whole story" will enrich earlier approaches to history; opponents will say that the reconstructed history will distort—negatively prioritize—the minor aspects of the story.

As would follow, we see the new canons "to the Left" being challenged by the forces of the Right. Those who choose to undermine the stability of word and meaning—"the assiduous proselytizers for the Gospel of Indeterminacy," such as David Lehman, lose their verbal authority when they forget the reigning presuppositions and elect to speak of facts and accurate readings (Lehman 1991, 28). Their enemies, who trust language if not their neighbors, can belittle them and their documents with relative ease. A legacy of the Reagan era is what Walter Kendrick calls a nostalgia "to revisit Ozzie-and-Harriet Land, where values were clear, critics knew their place, and all that loathsome stuff about black power and free love hadn't yet happened, never would" (33). Somewhat paradoxically, literalists use symbols, like the flag, to make their point, while their counterparts, who view all signs as symbolic, corroborate the insufficiency of the word. As the world gets curiouser and curiouser, one may not want to undervalue the simple word or the rhetoric of the short attention span. These are the times in which Zsa Zsa Gabor gets three days in jail for hitting a police officer, Jim Baker gets forty years for misusing funds, and Oliver North gets rich; in which enforcers of the law may "innocently" extract confessions, against procedure, and in which health care workers may not speak of abortion; in which people seem to care more for form than for substance and to care little about who stands a heartbeat away from the presidency. There is coalition on the Right—a convincing combination of clever discourse and "big stick" aggressiveness —and there is highfalutin debate—sophisticated infighting, leading only to further discourse—on the Left. Politically and intellectually, this translates into the dreaded I-word: irrelevancy. Lehman contends that "for all its vaunted ambition, academic literary criticism as it is currently practiced occurs at the farthest marginal remove from the texts of our lives, without an audience other than the captive one of colleagues and paying students, without a subject, without even a compelling raison d'être that may be articulated to parents, alumni, and the general public" (Kendrick, 33; Lehman, 32). As members of the academy, we have taken part in, or witnessed, some important battles, but we have let ourselves become spoiled. Unlike our colleagues to the south, we have been able to amuse ourselves—and to engage our students and whatever audience our published work attracts—with words and with ideas. This is not to imply that we do not take ourselves and our work seriously—for we tend to do just the opposite—but that we have not, in any real sense, been fighting for our lives. The very theoretical models that have made us reexamine our operating premises and those of our disciplines—and that have brought us to the summit of self-consciousness—threaten to do us in. There may be some perverse poetic justice in the fact that we are now in the margins, better able to read those texts—literary, social, political, historical—which originate in the periphery.

Gerald Graff, in *Professing Literature*, notes that, certainly up to the midpoint of the century, "prejudice against critics was reinforced by prejudice against Jews and any other group suspected of bohemian leanings" (154). As quoted by Graff, Karl Shapiro remarks that "the present generation [of scholars] has forgotten the moral constraints of the forties, the monogamic imperative, the lofty anti-Semitism of English professors, the prudishness, the watchfulness, the conformity" (154). What is significant here, among other things, is a multiple process of self-justification, with ties to the experience—and to the artistic experiments—of the Latin American writers. Jewish academics—and members of other minorities, as well as women—were conspicuous by virtue of their group identity. Their past—their intertext, as it were—predefined them and made their ideas, and their interest in ideas, suspect. The framers of literary language—masters of language—used their skills in the art of exclusion. Those belonging to the underclass, on the other hand, had to prove themselves on various levels—as academic professionals, as independent and original thinkers, as individuals—which called for a balance between integrity and practicality, ethnic identity and personal achievement. Being a Jewish teacher and scholar is not the same as being an African American or woman teacher and scholar. The first may choose—to the extent possible—to "wear" his or her identity, to proclaim it inseparable from the public persona, while the second, of course, does not have this choice. Similarly, Jewish writers may select the way in which they wish to inscribe their "Jewishness" into their texts. The numerous dramatic and narrative works of Isaac Chocrón, for example, operate in the margins—even a play ostensibly about Simón Bolívar—but relatively few, including *Animales feroces* and *Rómpase en caso de incendio*, explore marginality from a Jewish perspective. The Jewish characters—like social and political "outsiders" in other texts—are means, devices, through which to explore the structures of a culture and to examine the self through art. Naomi Lindstrom, in *Jewish Issues in Argentine Literature*, cites several writers whose presentation of a "Jewish outlook" is dependent upon the time of composition of a given work or the status of the author (e.g., 160). A crisis at home may inspire ethnic loyalty, for example,

while writers in exile—distanced from censorship and perhaps from fear—may dare to treat politically or intellectually sensitive topics. And in exile—ever the Wandering Jews—their religion may play a special role.

By drawing an analogy between the scholar/critic in the United States and the writer in Latin America, I do not mean to suggest that there are not significant points of contact between the so-called Jewish American novel and corresponding texts in Latin America. I would argue, however, that, in general, Jewish writers in the United States have tended to use the trope of synecdoche (the part for the whole) as a psychological rather than as a political device. The individual or collective psyche and an accompanying angst find their way into literature through sociocultural markers. Philip Roth is an example—extreme, perhaps—of the writer who treats Jewish American questions from a clearly subjective point of view, who reaches the depths of introspection while being perceived as representative of a group. We find in *Zuckerman Unbound*, to cite one case, a parody of the notoriety of *Portnoy's Complaint* and of the author's struggle with success. Democracy—warts and all—frees the writer to deal with personal matters, with what might be termed "luxury"—though not necessarily light—issues. Problems of assimilation and preservation of the faith have not had the immediacy or the intensity here that they have had in other countries. The difference lies, I believe, in the circumstances of writing.

In an essay entitled "Latin American-Jewish Writers: Protecting the Hyphen" ("*el guión protector*," in the Spanish version), Saúl Sosnowski observes that

> in Latin American countries that have faced unparalleled repression, survival—perhaps *the* major motif of all Jewish literature—has also occupied a central role. For individuals, as such or as members of a persecuted minority (not the Jewish minority, but the broad-based spectrum of the opposition to a repressive regime), survival has become an everyday struggle that has filtered through literary explorations both inside the countries and in the new exile communities. And it has also been within these parameters that Jewish elements surfaced as means to interpret a reality to which centuries of persecution had already accustomed the Jew of the past. (303)

Repression impedes assimilation and ironically inspires people to keep the faith, that is, it promotes survival. Sosnowski notes that

> when Judaism cannot be affirmed solely on the basis of a national territory, and when religion is challenged within its own parameters in a refusal of formal observances or probing disbelief, Jewish identity in literature must per force acquire an aura of ethnicity as a defining feature. But it can also acquire, as it has, an exaltation of human values found in Judaism, an internal code of ethics that rises above history's latest atrocities. Ethnicity and heterodoxy are the signs of Judaism's lay incorporation into Latin American literature. (305)

Poststructuralist theory—not the first to do so—admonishes us to look at the rhetoric (and at the rhetorical strategies) in which ideas are cast, with the implication that, if we work effectively, we will have the need to revise certain assumptions about the texts under scrutiny. The *difference*—a key term in the argument against logocentrism—lies in the expansion of parameters, in the incorporation of the peripheral, in the decentering of images, in the deconstruction of authoritarian structures. Poststructuralist theory—again, arguably, not the first to do so—attempts to bridge the gap between rhetoric and ideology, sees rhetoric as ideology. The margins explain and expose a victorious center, of prime interest to the New Historicism. Borrowing from structuralism the concept that every presence bespeaks an absence, theorists and critics *in* and *of* the margins turn their attention to absent perspectives, to unwritten words and texts. The anecdote is important as synecdoche, but also as a remnant of the lost discourse, of lost battles. The works of the talented seventeenth-century Spanish writer María de Zayas y Sotomayor, for example, presently are enjoying great critical interest, in part because the "exemplary novels" follow a major literary tradition, but in greater part because the author is a symbolic presence, chosen almost by default among secular writers to define the feminine—and, if one is fortunate, the *feminist*—point of view. The so-called *marrano* poets in exile, studied and anthologized by Timothy Oelman and others, form another Golden Age fringe group whose works acknowledge the forces of exclusion.

The Jewish subject in Latin American literature is the product of a commitment to historical process. The notion of "escape fiction" smacks of irony in this context. There is a panorama of vantage points: ties with the Old World, the encounter with the New, the literary legacy, the trials of adaptation, new forms of persecution, the dialectic of custom and assimilation and of faith and activism, the conflict of national allegiance and allegiance to Israel, generational conflict, the writer in exile, questions of aesthetics. Judaism is everything from a code of ethics and a way of life to a dormant memory, from sacred texts and holy ceremonies to token culture, but—to a degree, due to its enemies—the Jewish reli-

gion (as signifier, as signified) stands as a testament to the power of endurance and as an identifying mark of the Chosen People. When Latin American Jewish writers make their marks—on the page and on the world—they cannot help but inscribe themselves into the realm of theory, which itself is ever more an art form. For me, an ideal vehicle for the fusion of creation, theory, and history is the false chronicle, of the sort conceived by Mario Szichman, to name but a single author. The blatantly misguided—and preposterous—rewriting of history, and of the family tree, by a rogues' gallery of characters allows us to see the desperation and the limited options of the outcast, of people without a home, of belated members of (as Djelal Kadir reminds us) a belated culture. Szichman duplicates the quasi-historical quest of his characters by fictionalizing the act of recuperating history. And he operates from the periphery, by foregrounding the Pechof family and by relegating Evita Perón to the pretext. The author makes the survival of his characters a function of their ability to reinvent themselves. *A las 20:25, la señora entró en la inmortalidad* ends with the recognition on the part of the would-be historian "que su lucha por librarse de una historia sin futuro debía comenzar nuevamente desde cero" (286). That the history without a future is a long history, linked to a resistance to the threat of extinction, cannot be lost on the reader. Szichman uses the motif of the "*verdadera crónica falsa*" (with its Cervantine, or quixotic, resonances) to illustrate that art is capable of projecting the truth—through its own recourses, through its own resources. It would be hard to imagine a more "accurate" (or more artful) description of what it is to be a Jew—in this case, "a Jew and/or a Peruvian"—than that presented by Isaac Goldemberg in *Tiempo al tiempo*, as the answer to a question posed in an imaginary radio contest:

> Veamos: Ser judío y/o peruano es:
> Un Ser:
> Un Estar:
> Una Ester:
> Es pertenecer a un país de contrastes:
> Es al traste con el país:
> Es provenir de Mame Judía:
> O de Jodida Mamá:
> Es prevenir de una Madre Judía:
> Es pertenecer a una raza:
> Es rezar por las pertenencias:
> Es buscar una orientación espiritual:
> Es encontrarse un espíritu desorientado:
> Es un pueblo:
> Es una religión:
> Es poblar una región:
> Es una integridad de razas:
> Es arrasar con la integración:
> Es Sionismo:
> Cinismo:
> Nonismo:
> Es un desatino:
> Un destino:
> Una necesidad:
> Necedad:
> Una Historia:
> Una Histeria:
> ¿Qué es? (132-33)[2]

While one applauds the creative skills of Latin American Jewish writers—as well as the scholars, translators, and publishers who have brought them to the attention of the literary community at large—it is crucial to remember that ingenuity here is mixed with bravery. Writing in the margins has a purpose, and a price. Liberally oriented scholarship—in the left margin, one might be inclined to say these days—may be a bit esoteric, given the calculatedly rhetorical "plain speech" of the competition. In an essay on "The New Historicism and Marxism," Tom Lewis lists some of the achievements of the New Left:

> It shortened the Vietnam War, thus contributing greatly to the development of the "Vietnam syndrome" that helped to curtail large-scale U.S. military adventures for twenty years. It had the good sense to follow rather than to attempt to lead African Americans in the civil rights

[2]Let's see: To be a Jew and/or Peruvian: / A being: / To be: / An Esther: / It is belonging to a country of contrasts: / It is to undo the country: / It is having been born of the Jewish mother: / Or of the Damned Mother: / It is to forewarn of a Jewish Mother: / It is belonging to a race: / It is to pray for one's belongings: / It is to seek a spiritual orientation: / It is to find one's spirit disoriented: / It is a people: / It is a religion: / It is to people a region: / It is an integrity of races: / It is to overflow with integration: / It is Zionism: / Cynicism: / Non-ism: / It is a blunder: / A destiny: / A necessity: / Nonsense: / A History: / A Hysteria: / What is it?

> movement, and it did much to advance knowledge and awareness of national liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. (14-15)

He argues, nonetheless, that

> the legacy of the New Left remains preponderantly negative. It shepherded many good activists straight into the academy, where, like pieces of museum Dada, they quickly went from radical to radical *chic*. Forget the patient organizing, the rallies, and the marches; forget the economy and revolutionary politics as well. All *that* would follow effortlessly in the wake of "signifying practice." After the intellectuals had published enough books and essays on "Althusser-Lacan-Barthes-Derrida-Foucault-Irigaray-Cixous-Deleuze-Kristeva Thought," the masses would rise up on cue and seize the television stations! And, of course, leadership would belong to the intellectuals and the new professional-managerial class who understood *différence* and high-tech. (15)

Sheltered in the academy, we need to be reminded that complacency—even in the critical act—is out of place. Through the courage of their convictions, those who write of the Latin American Jewish experience make history: recording it, revising it, redeeming it, combining theory and practice, and flaunting the ironies of survival.

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TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Reflections on Latin American Jewish Writing

EDITED BY
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STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS 1993

Introduction II: The Authors Speak For Themselves

NORA GLICKMAN

THE SEVENTEEN ESSAYS that compose this book analyze the work of a selected number of contemporary Latin American Jewish writers. Some deal with a particular aspect of their fiction, others treat the entire *oeuvre*. In order to present a more comprehensive picture of these writings, I have asked each of the authors represented in the essays that follow to provide a brief answer to two questions:[1]

1. What does it mean to you to be a Jewish writer in your country?
2. How is Judaism expressed in your own writing?

My purpose in asking these questions was to gain insight into the authors' views of the world. The answers I received are as diverse and individualistic as the authors themselves; and yet, beyond their particular styles, there are some common ideas and themes that give coherence and unity to their responses.

All these writers share a tradition of multiple exiles and migrations, and all are fully acculturated in the countries where they live. Thus, many of them have double or even multiple identifications, which might extend to being a Latin American, a Jew, a woman, a fighter against oppression, and so forth.

These multiple identifications can be both exciting and frustrating, leading one to be pulled in different directions. Ricardo Feierstein, an Argentine novelist, uses the word *mestizo* to refer to the dichotomy which the people of his generation suffer when attempting to bridge the past with the future generations. Manuela Fingueret, an Argentine writer,

1. Clarice Lispector (Brazil) and Jacobo Fijman (Argentina), who are the subject of two essays, are deceased.

speaks of a movement of oscillation—like a pendulum—between the ties to an ancestral past and an attachment to the local lifestyles of her native country. And Ariel Dorfman expresses the desire for a homeland and for a sense of belonging: he observed that the experience of uprootedness from one's native land, coupled with the subsequent return to one's country, may result in the fear of not fitting in anywhere anymore. All these writers have an awareness of sharing in the unique experience of living on the fringes of history, alienated and alone.

The sense of cultural estrangement is sharpened for writers living outside their native countries, who have chosen to continue writing in their mother tongue. Gerardo Mario Goloboff, an Argentine who resides in France, sees these writers' multiple foreignness as part of a common tradition of permanent exile, of added-up diasporas.

Coming from countries with a dominant Catholic majority, the reception of their work is a matter of importance to these minority writers. Samuel Rovinski is concerned with the way he is perceived by others. He is made to feel proud for his ability to reproduce the most typical speech of the Costa Rican native, although he is a stranger in his own land because of his foreign-sounding surname. For Moacyr Scliar, being a writer in Brazil presents a paradox. His writing presents an enigma to Brazilian readers who have a stereotypical image of the Jew. Scliar's characters do not fit that image, as they are not real people; they are hybrids. And this is precisely what Scliar and the rest of the writers represented here seek to demonstrate: that they have created a space between different worlds, the Latin American and the Jewish, the Indian and the biblical, the secular and the religious, the rational and the mystical. That space is the realm of the writer and his or her imagination.

Some of the authors welcome the different sources of inspiration for their fiction and especially express their debt to the richness of their tradition: Luisa Futoransky, for example, blends the vein of Jewish humor with magical realism, and deals in this particular way with injustice and oppression. Moacyr Scliar, looking at Brazilian history through Jewish eyes, focuses on discovering the Jewish condition as it appears in the "New World."

A number of writers reject any sort of categorization, as they point out that a search into one's identity in itself could be construed as discriminatory. José Kozer asserts that he writes not because he belongs to a certain group, gender, nation, or color, but rather in spite of belonging to all of them. Similarly, Luisa Futoransky resents being singled out for the uniqueness of her condition as a Jew, just as she opposes being singled out as an Argentine, a writer, or a woman. And yet, in response to the stated pressure to define herself, she turns her resentment into an advantage by capitalizing on her distinctiveness. The case of Angelina Muñiz is similar. Rather than assuming her Mexican, Sephardic and Ashkenazic origins as "a schizophrenic burden," she welcomes these as a source of satisfaction and as yet another distinctive trait of her "typical" multiple Jewish background. Mexican novelist Esther Seligson, who characterizes her writing as deriving from a "double source/spring," searches there for "the roots of the human condition, the Universal Being, beyond all particulars."[2]

Some of the writers attest that, while they lacked a formal Jewish education—or, as in the case of Margo Glanz, the Judaism of their childhoods was of a folkloric nature, sensually alive in ritual and practice, yet detached from written theology and history—still they find in their adult lives that they have adopted a Jewish consciousness that is present in their texts. For writers like Toker, Gutman and Scliar, a sense of being Jewish was nurtured by the Bible and by works of Jewish authors, such as Sholem Aleichem, Kafka, and Babel, which were important to their intellectual and artistic development. A number of them recognize the power the Holocaust played in awakening an awareness of their Jewish identity.

Some of these authors express their Jewishness consciously and directly. In the writings of the Mexican Angelina Muñiz, for example, Jewish symbols, motifs, and themes are always deliberately present. In the prose of Gerardo M. Goloboff, Jewishness is an essence that can be perceived in his depictions of reality, history, and language. José Kozer notes the Jewish tonalities in his poetry, but Judaism is mainly manifest in his choice of major themes, like the Bible, the Kabbalah, the rabbinical tradition. And Samuel Rovinski, from Costa Rica, contends that Jewishness simply cannot be denied—it is expressed consciously or unconsciously because it is inherent to one's cultural background.

Frequently, Jewish consciousness entails a political commitment. Ariel Dorfman's main concern is to inscribe his literature into a philosophy of political liberation. Manuela Fingueret, in response to the violations she witnessed under the Argentine military rule in the late seventies, sees writing as an act of defiance, as another way of opposing authoritarianism. And Argentine dramatist Ricardo Halac draws his lessons from his own experience of persecution and intolerance and links it, in his plays, to that

2. See interview with Esther Seligson, p. 58 of this book.

of the Jewish past—the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

In translating the responses of these sixteen writers, I have attempted to preserve as much of the original style as possible. This sometimes meant sacrificing English idioms in order to convey the rhetorical embellishments that typify Latin American literature.

MARCOS AGUINIS, Argentina

Translated by Nora Glickman

I am tempted to respond with questions. What is specifically Jewish about it? How could I know? Is it perceived in the themes, the language, the form, or the context? The residual and irritating Jewish custom of answering with questions!. . .What is interesting about this often repeated fact are its motivations. I will point out some because—whether I want to accept it or not—they are articulated in my life and in my literature.

To answer with another question, in some way, is to disobey—to rebel. Jewish history is filled with vigorous rebellions, many of epic proportions. It is filled with rebellions that enrich anecdotes and nourish humor. There is also a secret rebellion, quite stubborn, that colors the grey periods of submission.

To answer with questions implies a rejection of dogmas, an adherence to a certain kind of skepticism. The truth is not as clear nor as apprehensible as it seems to be. It evades man. The Talmudic texts prove this awareness: they are a perpetual torrent of questions that lead to further questions and to conflicting opinions. This is also why the Talmud was fanatically burnt for centuries.

To answer this way is a gesture of personal dignity, of proving an equivalent dialogue. It is not a vertical, but rather it is a horizontal link. It is a fluid process, of going back and forth. This binds the relationship; it crumbles the thin wall. To answer with another question helps one to distend. It often helps to smile.

On the other hand, it is a cheap antidote to pathological narcissism. When you answer with a question you say: "I don't know," or "I am not omnipotent." Dangerous omnipotence is wisely displaced towards the unteachable, towards God. It implies a frequent juggling of modesty that helps one to survive, especially during difficult times.

It occurs to me that answering with a question is a gregarious feature, because it links and sustains the union. It is like a melody that escapes the fading of the final chord. It keeps the interlocutors united in the suspense of an unfinished dialogue.

Finally, intelligence and mystery. Both infinite. The more they continue to grow, the more the potential for growth.

I will stop here. I am changing the course of my writing.

And now I will go on. I went on a roundabout way to point out some roots, some influences; I might add certain obsessions: a visceral rejection of an attachment to justice, a solidarity with the weak, a respect for people, a love of life. In order to avoid confusion I will add that I don't consider myself a saint. Moreover, I recognize that I admire the prophets—their way of acting, their way of speaking.

With all this in mind, am I answering the question?

And if I really answer it, am I not contradicting the initial paragraphs? It wouldn't bother me. It's just another Jewish feature.

SABINA BERMAN, Mexico

Translated by Nora Glickman

What does it mean to be a Jewish writer in Mexico?

Each person is a unique hybrid, not reproducible, of her or his circumstances. To be a Jew has meant, historically, having a sharpened consciousness of partaking of at least two destinies. I am Mexican and I am Jewish, and I am Jewish-Mexican and Mexican-Jewish. I am Mexican by decision and following many years of studying what it is to be Mexican; I am also Jewish by choice and by faith.

As to the question regarding the Jewish presence in my literature, I believe that if I have affected in any way the Mexican readers of my work, it is by impressing upon them that Mexico is a country formed by a Catholic *mestizo* majority, and various minorities—the indigenous minority and the descendants of immigrants who arrived in Mexico during this century. Such has not been a conscious decision, but a natural consequence of my particular condition.

ARIEL DORFMAN, Chile

For many years I did not feel while I was writing that my Jewish identity was in any way at the forefront of what I was trying to express, perhaps because being Jewish has—at least seemingly—not been particularly important in my life. This may have been due to the fact that my parents were not (and are still not) practicing Jews, or that I never had the chance to become part of any stable Jewsih community due to my own

eculiar history of exiles and migrations (born in Argentina, left for the tates at age two, went to Chile at age twelve, forced into exile twenty ears later, lived in France, Holland, and presently the U.S., still struggling ith ways of going back). The truth is that I always consider myself a hilean and Latin American writer above all, profoundly interested in the ays in which my literature might inscribe itself in the efforts of the people my adopted country and in my native continent to achieve liberation nd consciousness.

Although I am aware that such a desire—to assimilate and to belong— a radically Jewish experience, I did not, at least in the surface of my ind, live it as such. The main Jewish character who managed to slip his ay into my fiction, David Wiseman in *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero,* onsiders that the foundational experience of his life was the moment the eople of Chile elected Salvador Allende as President on September 4, 970—the coming out of exile of those oppressed and marginalized serving s a metaphor for his own coming home. David is not quite my alter ego, s some critics have suggested, but his words in that context do have a trong autobiographical resonance. If that dream of David's (and mine) f fusing with a people and a revolution had turned out the way we xpected, who knows what my literature would be like. What followed ere years of wandering. Instead of a sense of belonging, an exploration f a living, immediate community that I had chosen as my own, my life urned with a fierce longing to be back where I though that things would ave once again a meaning, an order, a center. It is possible that this xperience of distance and rejection, of desire for a homeland, has helped me to understand what could well be termed the Jewish component of my fundamental obsessions. My many returns to Chile in these years—some in my imagination, some with this body of mine getting off and on places—have revealed to me that I do not quite fit in the country I had constructed for myself in exile, that perhaps I never did fit there—or anywhere.

Is this Jewish? Is the ethical strain that stubbornly crisscrosses my literature another product? Once you start asking questions of this sort, it can be endless: Is it a coincidence that my first novel starts with a Jewish detective in Auschwitz trying to find out who is killing the prisoners before they can be gassed? Is the presence of a man without a face and without an identity who steals features from others (in my novel *Mascara*) a Latin American version of Kafka, as several reviewers have written, or is there a more penetrating and recondite relationship with a culture of alienation that both Kafka and I belong to by virtue of our birth and the looks that others give us? Is *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero* a book imbued with messianic figures, its meditation over the sacrifice of sons by fathers, its search for a common humanity (and story) we can all tell? Is my obsession with the "disappeared" only to be understood from a Chilean or Third World perspective, or is it fueled by another sort of mourning and sadness, another sort of struggle to remain and appear and be heard?

If the answers to these questions reveal Jewish themes and passions behind my work, I would not be surprised. That still would not change why I write, and for whom I write, nor would it situate in a different context the reasons why I write or deny the specific place my work has in Latin American culture that is, after all, a hybrid woven from so many cultures and traditions.

RICHARDO FEIERSTEIN, Argentina

Translated by Nora Glickman

Jewish writers born in this part of the world share two characteristics: a cultural *mestizaje* and an unevenness with history. I am a product of both.

I am a cultural *mestizo*:[1] A bi-frontal being, with two heads oriented simultaneously to both the Jewish and the Latin American consciousness; to the birth of Israel and to the feats of American liberation; to the European Holocaust and the genocide that resulted from the Argentinean military dictatorship. I am in the fringes of history: I was born at a strange moment, amidst the coughs of Hiroshima and the take-off of the electronic and the computerized era. I remained in the middle. A generation of the wilderness: neither a slave in Egypt, nor an inhabitant of the land of milk and honey. Condemned to wander, as in the biblical parable, amidst half-realized dreams. Ours—the youthful sixties—were years of hope and of an alluring uprootedness.

I was born in Latin America. I was not part of that European Judaism that saturates the senses: of the magic of Yiddish, of rabbis riding donkeys, of the *heder* rod, of the taste of herring. I was too late for that date with history.

I belong to the first native generation in Argentina. I love my country, whose idiomatic and vital codes—those of my childhood—are my "portable" land. The landscape of my port-city neighborhood is the substance of which my dreams are woven.

Although I have a limited historical memory and received a traditional religious upbringing, my Jewish condition deepened at that time. My

1. Ethnic, and by extension, cultural mixture.

mestizo identity included a familiarity with River-Plate slang as well as a passion for soccer, up to the years that I lived in Israel. There I expressed myself in Hebrew, at a Kibbutz in the Golan Heights.

Jewish and human components appear together in my literature in variable proportions. They share a temporal asymmetry: the more alive the Jewish element, the less I write about it, and vice versa. There are stages for action and others for reflection: what they have in common is their intensity.

Whatever one writes is autobiographical. The difference—as Andre Malraux points out—is that the writer believes he can turn his experience into destiny. I have displayed in four consecutive novels—*Entre la izquierda y la pared* (Between the Left and the Wall), *El caramelo descompuesto* (The Broken down Candy), *Escala uno en cincuenta* (Scale of One to Fifty), and *Mestizo*—the Jewish and historic saga of my generation.

The theoretical journey begins in the sixties in Latin America. It travels through the Israeli experience, then it re-enters Argentina in the era of the Argentinean military dictatorship and the return to democracy in 1983. The dichotomy about being a Jew and a Latin American is critical to those of us who live in a continent that is also *mestizo,* where we attempt through our fiction to bridge past generations with future ones.

In my novels I have attempted to build the character as well as his identity. The graphic synthesis concludes with the design of a tree: the roots, trunk, branches and fruits nurture a continuously enriching landscape. Each one transmits his essence to the other, and reinforces the central idea that each narrator, each reader builds his own tree with his life.

The difference lies in embodying the search for identity through the body itself. The Jewish and American condition "built" through daily actions and through being engaged with reality. It isn't passed on through blood or religion. Existence determines consciousness.

The English translation of my stories and poems is entitled *We, the Generation of the Wilderness* (Ford & Brown Publishers, Boston, 1989). This area of my literature includes essays and journalistic articles, which are not limited to Jewish matters, but integrate them as essential components of my writing.

MANUELA FINGUERET, Argentina

Translated by Nora Glickman

How does the Jewish element appear in your literature?

In my personal history, Judaism is part of certain zones of marginality, which constitute an expressive memory that lives within me. When I attempt to recreate my sense of difference in my writings, it sometimes causes me pain and sometimes pleasure. According to the circumstances in which my expressive voices develop, Judaism will appear either explicitly or tangentially as one of the masks that compose my identity.

Although I may perceive writing as a permanent construction, all the elements that form the kaleidoscope of myself, including Judaism, are the result of constant reinterpretation, which I attempt both in my poetry and in my prose.

I am a link in the history of a people that is forever writing a book. In this unending time, my literature is permeated by real and imaginary dreams.

What does it mean to you to be an Argentine-Jewish writer?

The term "Jewish-Argentine" only emphasizes this oscillating feeling, in which my Judaism is the product on the one hand of the people of Buenos Aires and on the other of my Argentine identity, which is given substance by the ancestral histories that make me who I am.

For me it also meant a way of opposing authoritarianism and death at a moment in which diversity was a dangerous and clandestine activity under the governing dictatorship. Since the return of democracy, the understanding of this indissoluble link between the nature of being Jewish and Argentinean is an essential task in a country that is still struggling to grow as a nation.

It is not a task I am forced to accomplish. I simply believe that this current that flows and feeds off itself keeps alive the wandering word—a vital expression of the lights and the shadows that run through me.

LUISA FUTORANSKY, Argentina, France

Translated by Nora Glickman

What does it mean to you to be an Argentinean-Jewish writer residing in France?

I will tell you of an experience I had during a recent congress, where one of the topics of discussion was one's experience of liberation, writing in a language other than one's native tongue. After reviewing my resume and those of the other Jewish participants, the organizers of the conference identified us solely as Jews, while the faith of the other members was not singled out. This event occurred during the Persian Gulf war. I felt compelled to confront the organizers. I had been singled out as a Jew.

It bothers me that we still categorize ourselves according to our origin, our profession, our faith, our nationality. Our work should speak for itself. If I am to call myself anything in my work, that is my choice; that others

hould do so disturbs me. Such an act reduces me to a label. I have ncountered this behavior for nearly fifty years and convinced myself that t enriches my writing. I capitalize on such feeling in my work.

How do Jewish elements appear in your literature?

We should consider other distinctions: in my case, there are many lements to my identity. I come from a periphery: I was born in the village of Santos Lugares (Holy Places) at the periphery of a large metropolis, Buenos Aires, and I moved to another Holy Place—Jerusalem, the terrible, he celestial. My comings and goings seem to be between Holy Places. Some days I would like to follow the path of exile of my grandparents and of my own exile as well. I have moved from Jerusalem to China to Japan, and now reside in France.

To be a Jew was always to be other. It lay in our gestures, our daily routines, our tastes that persisted—even if Argentinean nutrition drowned us in opulence when we were children—in memories of our singing, our living, our fears, our games of hide and seek. We Jews have another way of experiencing fear, which contributes to the mosaic of our lives. And all this constitutes our personal palette—the archetype of our memory. What's essentially Jewish colors our palette. I am me and all of this as well.

MARGO GLANTZ, Mexico

Translated by Nora Glickman

These kinds of questions leave me perplexed. I tend to look for the answer in others: almost always turning to Walter Benjamin, the writer I admire the most. Like myself—*toute proportion gardée*—but under very different circumstances, he was born, according to Gershon Sholem, in a golden ghetto. Only mine was the golden *"churrigueresco"*[1] of a Jesuit church, while his belonged to a humanistic Europe where culture unified men and sought to put an end to exile. Nazism ungilded Benjamin's ghetto and defined mine: I began to feel Jewish when, back in 1944, I watched in a newscast at a local cinema how some young girls identical to me were taken—numb, what other way?—to a concentration camp.

This strangeness had antecedents, but they were mainly anecdotal: I had felt it violently in 1939, during a pseudo-pogrom——of a size proportionate to an underdeveloped country—in which my father was almost lynched by a band of local fascists. Much earlier, my consciousness of Judaism, which was comparative, would awaken during Wise King's day: the children of my neighborhood opened their toys simply because they were Christian. The marvelous Easter Saturdays of my childhood gave me a very disquieting feeling: the great papier maché Judases burnt with much noise, were the living image of those evil ones who had crucified Christ; in the middle, a delicious image, my trashy Christianity at the hairy hands of a priest, like in my dreams of King Kong; and then the sumptuous breakfasts that an aristocratic lady prepared to celebrate my first communion, with masses of white leather, very pure wax candles, tamales, chocolate, and pirate editions of the martyrs of Christianity. To even things up, there were traditional festivities: Pessach, above all, and Chanukah, in which my uncle, the baker, would give us a real silver peso; the false fasts of Yom Kippur and a fascination and complex obsession with the Kol Nindre sounds, or the tenor-like voice of my father singing Ukrainian songs while my mother served a delicious dish of gefilte fish.

To be Jewish-Mexican was, by all appearances, a natural thing, but of a folkloric nature. Its dimensions were outlined with some precision in my book: *The Genealogies*. There I outlined an adventure into the interior of a woman waiting to produce three of my main attributes: the feminine one, and my double identity. Curiously, my genealogic adventure had, as it should have had, sequels. Several texts of this kind have been published in Mexico since 1981, the year in which I published mine: they are by women, some are also by Jewish women.

Under these conditions the word integration sounds, at the least, equivocal. The feeling of exile, which is typical of the Jew, has followed me just the same—whether it is an exile from God, from the Promised Land or from oneself—as was the case with Walter Benjamin. But the needle is tenuous, weak, almost sweet, a little coarse. The integration produced *avant la lettre* and by *interposita persona*, in the immigrants' ship in which my parents travelled. My mother tells me of her experience: I understand that since her exit from Russia she protected herself against exile through a slow process of finding her roots in my father. Now that he is dead, she has territorialized him definitively. He, or rather his voice, had the effect of launching, and with extreme unction, a Yiddish poet; he turned Russian into the language of exile and of love, and communicated with the other world, that of his chosen country, in Spanish. We, his daughters, born in Mexico, assumed his design and stayed anchored in the third language, sprinkling it with hebraisms, like the chicanos who speak English truffled with mexicanisms.

Don't think I have an Oedipus complex. It is rather a portable, messianic sense, discolored and very precarious. That messianism, which does not dare confess its ambiguity, opposes, in a literal sense, the

1. Exaggerated baroque, following the style of Churriguera, a Spanish architect.

complacency of having become territorialized, with certain reticence, in a minor literature:[2] the Mexican.

GERARDO MARIO GOLOBOFF, Argentina, France

Translated by Nora Glickman

What does it mean to be a Jewish writer in France today?

I suppose my case must seem somewhat atypical, since I am not a French Jewish writer who resides in France, but a Latin American—an Argentine, to be precise—and that entails an additional dimension of trans-territoriality and of estrangement.

As I view my situation in terms of double or multiple foreignness, I have to acknowledge that the primary thing for me was exile, having to leave my native land, and being unable to return. I became, through an unforeseen turn of events, a sort of zombie who wanders around cities and unknown streets and sidewalks, amidst unfamiliar people and histories, carrying within him another history, other peoples and other streets.

Before leaving Argentina I had started, somewhat belatedly, to acknowledge my Jewish condition and to accept it in all its complexity. But during those years, Argentina's social and political problems were so pressing and so pervasive that they imposed themselves on me with a weight of their own, creating boundaries and a prioritization of concerns. Given this, I realize that these realities, and quite probably my own immaturity, which was also part of reality, must have intervened in the development of my Jewish identity.

In France, on the other hand, I learned everything slowly, painfully, but also more calmly, with a space, and with direction. I also experienced similarities, affinities, origins with other beings, whose blood was mingled with mine; who over the centuries were driven from their houses and their lands, who were forced to wander, like myself, through foreign places, and probably in worse circumstances than my own. How could I fail to recognize myself in them—an insignificant carrier of a trait that marked our common essence? In treasuring my own language and in hearing another that sounded, if not strange, foreign to me, how could I not rediscover the tremors of those lips that whispered only in Yiddish the truths that were closest to my own heart?

2. "Minor" in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari use the term, when they speak of Kafka: "A minor literature is not the literature of a minor language, but rather the literature that a minority produces within a major language."

I believe that all that is, more or less, what it means to me to be an Argentinean writer and a Jew in France: someone who adds up diasporas and who interweaves stories in his original Castilian to which he adds, I don't know in what order nor to what degree but I guess very intensely, the languages resulting from exile.

How do you integrate the Jewish element in your literature?

The Jewish element is not an addition or an adjective that should be pointed out or underlined. It is a substantive way of being and feeling reality, history, my own personal history, the life and death of loved ones, love, friendship, the whole world. And naturally, the word and the writing, the book, all that is what verbal imagination (and Jewish verbal imagination) have contributed to human culture. That's why I make an effort so that what's Jewish in my writing should not be present, or that it is only slightly present. It should not appear in my literature through idioms, words or anecdotes, but rather in the most interior possible way; like an essence, like writing itself.

I would like to believe that Jewishness is felt and sensed in my literature at each instance. It is a world in which what's Jewish is present, secretly present, which is how everything that is really important should, in my estimation, manifest its existence in a work of art. To say, to speak, to name, to number is, in the final analysis, an easy habit. To work with silence and with sensations, with the spaces that the voice and the word leave behind, seems to me more adventurous and more risky. But it's what makes working with language and writing all the more fascinating.

DANIEL GUTMAN, Argentina

Translated by Nora Glickman

How is Jewishness reflected in your literature?

The influence of Jewish heritage on my literature up to this date has been weak. I lack a Jewish education; I didn't come from a home which kept the traditions and rituals of the Jewish calendar. Nor did I, as a child, hear my elders speak Yiddish or Hebrew. Neither have I preserved on my own the thousand-year-old yearning to return to the Promised Land.

Coming from Argentina, where a laicism of agnostic character has always prevailed—barely tainted by some family dinners on the occasion of Rosh Hashanah or Pesach—I did not feel my connection with Jewish people until adolescence, when I discovered Jewish writers.

Through the reading of poetry I arrived at Ibn Gabirol, Heine, and the King of the Psalms. Through fiction I met Kafka and Proust, Bashevis Singer and Amos Oz, Cynthia Ozick and Saul Bellow. And thanks to

my excursions as a reader through the gardens of philosophy and linguistics, psychology and anthropology, I came to Freud and Maimonides, Josephus Flavius and Marcuse, Baruch Spinoza and Bergson.

I admired all of them, and many others, long before knowing that we belonged to the same people. And thanks to the influence of their work I began to take a growing interest in the history of the Jewish people and what it means to be a part of it. That is why I often say that my Judaism is more a task of my present and my future than a gift from my past.

With "Erosion," a long poem published in 1989, I attempted a Jewish theme for the first time. I have several writing projects that will continue along those lines, and I hope to be able to turn a dream I had in Florence many years ago into a novel, as prefiguring a fantastic story about the prophet Elijah.

What does it mean to you to be a Jewish-Argentine writer?

A writer, a Jew, an Argentine—these three words refer to three possible identities: Each one presents a challenge, a project implying the step from adjectivity to substantivity. These are identities in process, activities of becoming that never achieve a state of being. Thus, there is no conclusive definition for any of these identities, and nobody can finally assert what it means to be a writer, a Jew, and an Argentine. The task of forging a human identity is the art of maintaining unity while avoiding rigidity and stagnation.

Therefore there are various ways of being a writer, a Jew, an Argentine. These are not crystallized identities but rather identities in progress; their greatest yearning is to find definitions and to throw their light and darkness on new, unedited speculation and propositions. Finally, I can only speak of my particular way of being an Argentine Jewish writer, in terms that may not work for others.

If, on the one hand, I feel as a Jewish writer protected by a vision of reality that consecrates the verb as being the texture of the world, and which understands the world as an event of verbal nature, as an Argentine writer I consider myself the beneficiary of my Hispanic heritage and of the great Latin American creations; that is why I carry on an internal dialogue between these two traditions, by my choices of style, theme, and vocabulary.

My identity as a writer, a Jew, and an Argentine flows as a dialogue among those three fields of the human experience. I have often felt—and illustrious examples testify I am not the only one—the temptation to eliminate one or other of these three great tributaries. This is understandable, since a dialogue is easier when only two partake of it.

The third presents a threat of exclusion to the other two, and if one is excluded, its jealous resentment is bound to increase. But I have always resisted, and will continue to resist the temptation to suppress a problem when it is not fully understood. I leave to my writing the responsibility for giving testimony about the development of that dialogue. I am also prepared to have my books judged as proof of the maturity of this difficult process of communication. Let my poems and my novels answer for me, and let justice be tempered with mercy.

RICARDO HALAC, Argentina

Translated by Nora Glickman

In what way does your Jewish origin appear in your work?

The reading of the Bible, which I was encouraged to pursue since I was a child, leads me above all to a philosophical answer; I feel a need to fight against injustice, just as the great prophets teach us. Arthur Miller, one of my mentors, fought an unrelenting battle against injustice, especially in his early works. The criticism of social inequality that appears in my last work of Open Theatre, entitled "Ruido de Rotas Cadenas" (The Clamor of Broken Chains), can be traced back to my first production "Soledad para cuatro" (Solitude for Four), where I defend the controversial idea that there is no true love between a couple when their love is built on abundance on one side and deficiency on the other. The analysis of intolerance and religious persecution in "La cabala y la cruz" (The Kabbalah and the Cross), and the denunciation of "the dirty war" crimes in "Lejana tierra prometida" (Far Away Promised Land)—which was the first Argentinean work to open even under the military regime and the first to include a reference to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo—further exemplify the iron-like morality in which I was brought up.

But this philosophical answer doesn't take us very far. Other cultures have demanded a similar sacrifice from the artist. "It can be costly to defend a just cause," Sophocles warned. "The artist should not side with those who make power, but rather with those who suffer from power," Camus said. I believe that a review of my daily past could provide you with a richer answer.

If we accept, as Sartre says, that "we are what we make of what other people do to us," then what is fundamental—what made me into the person I am—is how I was treated as a child, and the situation that led my parents to be so overprotective and worrying. I was an overprotected child, held very tightly to my mother's bosom; she had come from very far away—Syria. I saw the insecurity with which my father walks on

this land—he also was an immigrant from Damascus. I heard strange languages spoken in my successive houses in Buenos Aires—Arabic and French. The first was the intimate language of my parents; the second was used when they did not want those who were present to know what they were saying. My father had financial difficulties. He admired immigrants who had made money (which I thought loathsome). And then there was his love for culture, in spite of all his confusion. I remember the crisis my father went through while riding in a tram—I am sitting next to him when he opens "La Prensa" and discovers, at the end of the Second World War, the existence of concentration camps, which makes him tell me, while crying, a phrase that will ring over and over in my head the rest of my life: "You have to be ready my son. We Jews will soon have to leave this place and shall always live with the possibility of having to be on the move again and again." In addition, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1949 changed the traditional image of the Jew—gradually in my parents, and decidedly in my whole generation. The image of the Jew—bent over in prayer, the aquiline nose, the usurer—gave way to the new image that comes from the Middle East: a Jew who loves to work the land, but who can also be an implacable soldier.

All this reinforces and explains the 'atmosphere' in which my works have developed: some relations between mother and son, and with others, which I leave the readers to infer (namely, what I made and what "they made of me"). However, one should not overlook a deep and primordial integration into Argentine reality (present throughout my plays), which I believe provides the basis for my writing: My knowledge of man, and my real link with culture.

JOSÉ KOZER, Cuba, U.S.

How does Jewishness appear in your work?

Desire and immediacy propel my writing. This writing, always in the form of poems, is jumpy, shifty, unfaithful. I have but one allegiance: poetry. This poetry seems to have but one allegiance: memory, revulsive, springing forth through present stimulation. Such stimulation is varied, changing, perhaps whimsical and superficial, perhaps superfluous, as I may be superfluous and disposable, and so my poetry.

Yet, in spite of oscillation and constant displacement, in spite of shifting structures and references, I seem to favor certain themes: the family, a voracious need for totality, a spiritual quest, a Cuban identity which is solid and dubious, a preference for elegant poverty, a need for the narrative in poetry, a search for the moral and rabbinical self, a desire to reach a transcendental and transfigurative space, a will to tranquility, the exploration of Oriental philosophy (Confucianism and Zen Buddhism, Taoism) and, last but not least (on the contrary), the Jewish reference, the exploration (through poetry) of my Jewish self, its dolorous and odorous way of manifesting itself, in continuity and oblivion.

In continuity, for the Jew in me is always there, a constant, a permanent affliction, a wound. A wound? Look, the Jew has received a command. And under such burden he labors, acts, errs, struggles, cries. Poetry is my command. At one point, rather early, I must have reacted to the command that the Jew receives (and hears, as a voice from above) by making poetry my vessel, a vessel where the Order, and a chaotic sense of order, is poured. What is poured is, in part, not only referentially but, above all spiritually Jewish. A moral sense, a deep sense of the poverty of self, an awesome regard for the Mighty and for all that is above (and, of course, its perversion: the Below); a need for words, to express, explore, attempt. What is particularly Jewish about this? Nothing is particularly Jewish about this. It's just that I happen to be Jewish and thus the manifestation has in me, in my poetry, that particular and specific tone, hurt (festering), obsession and referential material (the Bible, the rabbinical tradition, Kabbalah; and certain gestures, certain tonalities in the writing: the versicles, for instance) that makes a Jew precisely that—a Jew, an ineffable concept.

In oblivion, also. For I am Jewish and my work conveys it, as something natural, perhaps not very important, perhaps so simple and synthetic that it "almost" doesn't exist. And so I forget. I forget that I am Cuban or Jewish or an old monk whose fate was to live in the world, wishing not to have to participate.

What does it mean to be a Cuban Jewish writer living in the United States?

1. Not much. Another way of dealing with one's death through some sort of a device called creativity, poetry.

2. I see no significance in national, racial, religious, sexual identity in terms of intimacy and the ultimate. I see no greater gain in the institutionalizing of identity. Moreover, it is in detriment of creativity, poetry, to put too much weight on this business of identity.

3. To put it differently, I am what I am (whatever that may be or mean, if anything at all) in spite of being writer, poet, Cuban, Jewish, living in this country. Which does not mean that I am not a writer, poet (perhaps), Cuban (for sure), Jewish (for sure) living in the USA (perhaps). I don't want to sound facetious, nor do I want to deal with this issue tautologically, say in a negative or positive sense, but I do want to stress that this business

of being of a certain species, gender, number, group, nation, or pigment has become so overly and overtly stressed that we are all being shortchanged and taken for a ride by critics, professors, bureaucrats, and politicians.

4. Or rather: I do not write, after all, because I am Cuban or because that Cuban is combined chemically with a Jew, and because the combination became uprooted at one point and moved to a place called the United States; the city being New York; the borough, Queens; the neighborhood, Forest Hills (used to be very Jewish). I write because I do not know where I am, where (or why) I live, who talks to me or instead of me, to what purpose the Voice, and all those voices inside me, in twelve different tongues, ten different tribes, four different seasons, seven different stations of the Cross, five different holy books, and God knows how many sutras.

5. Someday I will write a beautiful and heartfelt poem about being a Cuban Jew writing and living in the United States.

6. Will it be a slip of the tongue?

ANGELINA MUÑIZ, Mexico

Jewish motifs in my literature:

Jewish motifs have always been a feature of my work, since my first book, *Morada interior.* I am especially attracted by conflictual situations, such as relations between Christianity and Judaism, mysticism and heresy, the pure and the impure. Some of my characters are cabbalists, alchemists, monks or nuns in search of a divine experience from a very worldly point of view. Even if they attain the *unio mistica,* their personal emotional involvement is such that they can be considered as holy sinners. They usually have historical roots, but are not closely bound by them. Some of my fiction is biographical, providing a reinterpretation of the lives of real people.

The holocaust theme appears in a few of my short stories, as in the books: *Huerto cerrado, huerto sellado* and in *De magias y prodigios.* A symbolic and figurative approach permits me to break with traditional genres and, once again, to utilize history as a kind of rupture with general norms.

My relationship with Judaism is chiefly concerned with exile, which is my inspiration in life as in literature. As a child of exile by my double origins (Spanish Civil War, and *Marrano* tradition in my mother's family), it is this special circumstance that drives my creative work. In fact, all my characters are a product of exile: they are all in search of undiscovered worlds.

But themes and forms are not so important to me as the use of language, which is the key to my work. As a kind of cabbalist, I attempt to find new meanings through my use of words, phrases, rhythm and punctuation. I try to blend genders and to break rules, maintaining throughout an overall harmony. That is why I make no distinction between my poetry and my prose.

Being a Jewish-Mexican writer:

In fact, I have no nationality as a writer. Due to my complex origins, I appear in anthologies, in dictionaries and in histories of literature as Spanish, Mexican, Spanish Mexican, Jewish, but never as French (although I was born in Provence). I have recently been included in anthologies as a woman writer, which has been, perhaps, a kind of nationality.

From everything I have said, mine is a very typical Jewish background, which instead of being a schizophrenic burden, is a great source of satisfaction.

SAMUEL ROVINSKI, Costa Rica

Translated by Nora Glickman

What does it mean to you to be a Jewish writer in Costa Rica?

I was born in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, in 1932. I hardly speak any language other than Spanish, my mother tongue, the language spoken in my neighborhood, with which I express not only my childhood memories but also my knowledge of my homeland. So much so that some of my works are studied in schools and universities, as the literary expression of being Costa Rican.

The play "Las fisgonas de Paso Ancho" (The Buffoons of Paso Ancho) marks the beginning of national popular theatre in Costa Rica, and has been published and staged uninterruptedly since 1971.

The novel *Ceremonia de casta* (Kindred Ceremony) offers vignettes of San José during the first seventy years of the century and focuses on the experiences of one family, representative of the coffee producing Costa Rican oligarchy.

The people who know my work respect me and place me among the most prominent Costa Rican writers, but when the time of praise comes, they make me feel a stranger in my own land. I would rather be less distinguished and have more of a sense of belonging in my world.

Why should they admire my great knowledge of popular speech, or of my characters, and the way they think and act, when they don't see me as one of "them"?

Why do they have to question my surname, and trace my origin? Are we two separate beings, my surname and I?

Should I resent it, when there is no malice in the questioning, just a naive attitude? Or should I accept that, indeed, there is a difference? The fact is that I continue writing, with the same spirit as thirty years ago, when I began my profession. It is a vital imperative that has a will of its own.

I have convinced myself that the problem of difference, on account of being Jewish, is also other people's problem.

How does Jewish identity appear in your literature?

The Jewish element in my writing appears mostly in my fictionalized autobiography, *Cuarto creciente* (Fourth Crescent), in the collection of stories *Cuentos judíos de mi tierra* (Jewish Stories of My Land) and in the play *La víspera del sábado* (Sabbath's Eve). It is not obvious in the dialogue itself, but the characters, the themes, the expressions, the messages, and some words in Yiddish and in Hebrew, do correspond to Jewish experiences in Costa Rica.

What is Jewish about the rest of my work? Possibly a particular view of the world, a moralistic background, and a conception of individual and social justice.

After all, the emotions and the ideas I acquired in the midst of a Jewish family closely linked to the Costs Rican Jewish community must have had an influence on the development of my values and on my particular social and philosophical attitudes.

Now, as I am aware that this possible influence on my literature is inherent in my own cultural identity, and therefore expressed in an unconscious manner, it is not my place nor should it be to bring it to the surface and make it conscious.

Moreover, is it so important or necessary to know it?

MOACYR SCLIAR, Brazil

Translated by Nora Glickman

What does it mean to be a Jewish Brazilian writer?

This is a difficult question; there are not too many of us, so I don't have many opportunities to discuss this question. In any event, sometimes I think of myself as a Jewish writer who, by chance (our Wandering People!) was born in Brazil. At other times, I see myself as a Brazilian writer who happens to belong to a very special group, with a very special history and tradition. It is, more or less, the old question of the chicken and the egg: which came first?

The result is that to my readers I am an enigma. Many Brazilians have stereotypes about Jews, so, for them my books come as a surprise: "I never imagined that Jews could be like the characters you portray." Nor did I. The characters I deal with are not real Jews (nor real Brazilians; or for that matter, real people...). They are kind of hybrids. Centaurs. (By the way, *gaúchos*, the people of Rio Grande do Sul where I was born, are called the "centaurs of the pampas," because they are cowboys, cattle-raisers.) But in them I see the synthesis of two rich cultures, Jewish and Brazilian. *Ningun* and samba. Stories of the Bible and Indian legends. The ethical impulse of the Old Testament finds an appropriate object in the injustice that has so long visited the poor of South America.

Is it difficult to belong to two worlds? Yes. But then, between these two worlds lies a wonderful space for a writer. A space teeming with mysteries, waiting to be discovered.

How do I integrate the Jewish condition into my literature? First, historically. Jews are witnesses to history. They came to Brazil with the Portuguese discoverers, as *Marranos* or New Christians; they were the first entrepreneurs, doctors, writers, poets. More recently, they came from Eastern Europe, to the lands provided for them by the Jewish Colonization Association, or to the towns, as peddlers, workers, shopkeepers. So I try to see Brazilian history through Jewish eyes, and I also try to discover the Jewish condition as it appears in this new (and strange) world.

Secondly, through the Jewish literary tradition: the Bible, the Sephardic poets, Scholem Aleichem, I.L. Peretz, Franz Kafka, Isaac Babel...

Thirdly, through Jewish humor. Ours is a people that laughs at itself. Laughter, to the Jews, is a kind of protection against despair. I think that Jewish humor blends in a wonderful way with magical realism, so characteristic of Latin American writers. In both cases, we are dealing with injustice and oppression. Military governments were, in Latin America, the heirs of the Inquisition which persecuted the Jews.

The Jewish condition is yet another very important component in the literatures of our Latin American countries.

ESTHER SELIGSON, Mexico

Translated by Nora Glickman

What does it mean to you to be a Mexican-Jewish writer? How does "Jewishness" appear in your literature?

I would rephrase both questions and reduce them to one: "What does it mean to you to be a writer, and in what way do Mexican and Jewish elements appear in your literature?"

Ever since I can remember, to write and to read were for me inseparable acts of a search for belonging and of continuity—quite ruthless, to be sure, from adolescence until I managed to assume freely my Jewish condition in the meeting with my spiritual roots (Ashkenazi as much as Sephardic), some ten years ago. Consequently, my sociohistorical context—as a Mexican—acquired reality.

Thus my writing, today, springs from a double source—temporal in its Judaism, spacial in the Mexican culture—in whose waters I search for the sources of the human condition, of the Universal Being, beyond all particularism.

ELIAHU TOKER, Argentina

Translated by Nora Glickman

Some critics have observed that a substantial part of my poetry is imbued with an intense Jewish atmosphere that is not always implicit.

A certain underground river, they say, runs through most of my poetry, carrying to the attentive reader a life of Jewish experience, which is strongest when less manifest. I believe this subterranean current stems from the source that nurtures my words and from the concerns that feed it.

Most important is the Yiddish language. Although I was born in Buenos Aires, Yiddish was my first language; it was the mother tongue that impregnated my secret childhood memories, which in turn, impregnated it. But Yiddish was not just the language of my childhood: during my adolescence, when Spanish was established as my major language, the discovery of modern Yiddish poetry was one of my first links with *the Poetry,* and to translate it to Spanish was one of the first literary challenges.

Next in importance, *the Bible.* My adolescence was a time for great poetic revelations. I was then studying at the "Hebrew Teachers Seminary" and I discovered the voices of the prophets—Isaiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Micheas—who, in the same way as I read and enjoyed Genesis, Job, The Song of Songs, and other biblical texts in Hebrew, provided me with a permanent lesson in poetry, commitment, and expressive synthesis.

The third major influence on my writing is my interest in *origins,* in the *past,* in *memory.* Perhaps in reaction to a Jewish and Argentine-Jewish tendency to deny and forget our own past, my parents, their relatives and their native towns in Eastern Europe are prominent in my poetry.

Finally, I am concerned with the strange place in which I find myself as a *Jew, an Argentine, and a secular man* who is pulled by these various forces that make me into what I am: living while observing the connections and interactions among these different parts within me.

My mission as an Argentine-Jewish writer is a commitment to which I became dedicated well before I realized that I was doing it. It began when I became a translator into Spanish and an anthologizer of Yiddish poetry and of biblical, Talmudic, and historical texts, for a group of Argentine authors committed to their Jewish condition. It was a task that finally took on an institutional character, through a series of half-yearly encounters with Latin American Jewish writers.

To summarize, to be an Argentine-Jewish writer means for me the challenge of discovering and expressing what is Jewish in the Argentine condition, and what is Argentine in the Jewish condition, all of it viewed through a Jewish secular lens. And furthermore, to include something no less important or simpler to understand, which is the place of Israel in the world and in my own thinking—a lifelong endeavor.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Reflections on Latin American Jewish Writing

EDITED BY
Robert DiAntonio and Nora Glickman

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS 1993

1

Jewish Latin American Writers and Collective Memory

LEONARDO SENKMAN

UNTIL RECENTLY, LITERATURE WRITTEN by Jews in Latin America has not dealt with the subject of collective memory.[1] There is something paradoxical in this statement. The children of those Old World chroniclers who immigrated to Latin America chose to become known in their respective national literatures by their preoccupation with the present and the future, almost never for the past. The most talented among them focused upon the genre of the American Utopia, many being in the vanguard of this movement. In the Promised Land of the "New World", having survived pogroms, these immigrant Jewish writers have been the creators of Utopian visions. It is not surprising that it was Jews who pioneered the American Utopia; this space-other, refuge, and land of asylum for Europe's persecuted, America became *terram utonicam* in the imagination the Jewish emigrants who dreamed of finding a new possibility, a *novum* latent in the reality of another place.[2] Just as the utopian island of Brazil was the alternative ideal envisioned by the anarchist colonies in the state of Paraná, for Jewish peasants who arrived at the agricultural colonies of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, the promised land became the archetype of utopian space. From Alberto Gerchunoff's *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) and *Madre América* by Max Dickman (1934) to Stefan Zweig's *País de*

1. This article forms part of a book in progress on *Memory and Jewish Writing in Latin America*. Some fragments were read at the Third International Congress of Jewish Latin American Writers organized by *Shalom* and by the International Association of Spanish and Portugese language Jewish Writers in São Paolo, August 1990.

2. See a new approach to the use of utopia in literature in Fernando Ainsa's *Necesidad de la utopía* (Montevideo and Buenos Aires: Nordan Guion Tupac, 1990).

futuro, (1941) the focus is the land of the future, and not the memory of the past.[3]

One generation later, Jewish writers concerned about social, political, and cultural upheavals in their own countries replaced the theme of these utopian dreams with one of social reality. The need to accept responsibility for one's country, with all its dense contradiction, refers to the country neither as new place of refuge nor as a mythicized promised land. These themes characterized the work of Judeo-Argentine writers like Bernardo Verbitzky, David Viñas, Pedro Orgambide, Humberto Constantini, and Andres Rivera. The loss of this reality as a result of experiencing the trauma of exile and violence decimated an entire generation in Southern Cone nations, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. It left these nations transformed beyond recognition to Jewish writers, and sent them back to search for their religious and cultural origins. It is possible to establish a correlation between, on the one hand, the deconstruction of national identity—the substance of many Jewish writers during the forties, fifties, and sixties—and the lack of interest they had in expressing the conflicts between their Jewish and Latin American identities. This fissure takes place as the writers find themselves surviving in nations that are transformed into something unrecognizable. They incorporate the anguish of death into their work, sensing that something very personal has been broken. Among the ruptures and the debris emerge the writer's courage to see in themselves a *Galut*-like interior as banishment. For these writers, calling forth memory has become a way to mark the disenchantment that has uprooted them as citizens, but which simultaneously permitted them, as writers, to also be Jews. This is, in fact, autobiographical literature—a rediscovery of family histories.

The majority of these writers investigate memory as an act of individual and collective identity. They share the trait of *anamnesis,* which is the effort of remembering by one who has forgotten for a long time, as Yosef Haim Yerushalmi mentions in his incisive reflections on the crisis of forgetting.[4]

What is the discourse of memory in Latin American Jewish writers' works? Who have they forgotten? Is the knowledge erased from the conscience of their fictional characters? Of what substance is oblivion made in their novels and stories?

3. See my analysis on the role of the land in Gerchunoff's literary strategy in Leonardo Senkman, *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina,* (Buenos Aires: Pardés 1983), chapters 1 and 2.

4. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory,* (London and Seattle Shocken,) 1982.

Several books written during the 1980s respond to these questions, texts written by authors living in Argentina (Ricardo Feierstein, Humberto Constantini, Pedro Orgambide, Antonio Brailovsky, Sergio Chejfec,) Brazil (Moacyr Scliar,) Spain (Mario Staz, Marcos Ricardo Barnatan, Arnoldo Liberman,) France (Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, Gerardo Mario Goloboff, Ana Bronfman Vasquez) the United States (Isaac Goldemberg, Mario Szichman,) Mexico (Margo Glantz, Angelina Muñiz, Esther Seligson, Gloria Gervitz) and Venezuela (Isaac Chocron, Elisa Lerner, Alicia Freilich.)[5]

This study focuses upon two representative Jewish authors, Moacyr Scliar of Brazil and Margo Glantz of Mexico. Notwithstanding the varied causes behind the crises of forgetting that give birth to each of these authors' texts, they are unified by a shared and irresistible need to remember.

Rafael Mendes, the protagonist of Moacyr Scliar's novel, *The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes*[6], can free himself from the crisis of forgetting that is depressing him only through a dramatic twist in his professional and private life, when he unexpectedly discovers the language of his father. This brings him to an encounter with his forgotten family history. A businessman suffering financial difficulties and anguishing over the disappearance of his daughter, Rafael is completely ignorant of his past, and never suspects being the twelfth descendant of an illustrious family

5. See Ricardo Feierstein's trilogy, *Sinfonía Inocente,* (I: *Entre la izquierda y la pared,* Buenos Aires, 1983; II: *El caramelo descompuesto,* Buenos Aires, 1979; III: *Escala uno en cincuenta,* Buenos Aires, 1984). See parts of Humberto Constantini's last and unfinished novel, *Rapsodia de Raquel Liberman* (unpublished) in *Noaj,* II, 2, Jerusalem, 1988, 76-82. Pedro Orgambide called his trilogy "Novels of Memory": *El arrabal del mundo,* (Buenos Aires, 1983), *Hacer la América* (Buenos Aries, 1984), and *Pura memoria* (Buenos Aires, 1984). Antonio Brailovsky, *Identidad,* Buenos Aires, 1980). Sergio Chejfec, *Lenta biografía,* Buenos Aires 1990. Moacyr Scliar, *A Estranha Nacão de Rafael Mendes,* Porto Alegre, 1983. Mario Satz, *Sol,* Barcelona, 1976 and *Luna,* Barcelona, 1978. Marcos Ricardo Barnatan, *El laberinto de Sión, 1971, Barcelona 1973 and Una mirada al principio,* Raíces, Madrid, I, 1 (1986), 43-45. Arnoldo Liberman, *Las inquisiciones de la nostalgia,* Madrid, 1988 and *Grietas como templos: Biografía de una identidad,* Madrid, 1984, and *La fascinación de la mentira,* Madrid 1986. Gerardo Mario Goloboff, *Criador de Palomas,* Buenos Aires, 1985; *La luna que cae,* Barcelona 1988; and *El soñador de Smith,* Barcelona 1990; Ana Vasquez Bronfman, *La maldición de Ulises: exilio latinoamericano,* Paris, 1988. Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *L'Arbre de la Gitane,* (French,) Paris, 1991. Isaac Goldenberg, *La vida a plazos de Jacobo Lerner,* Hanover, 1979. Mario Szichman, *Los judios del mar dulce,* Buenos Aires, 1971; *La segunda fundacion de Buenos Aires,* unpublished, and *Botín de guerra,* unpublished. Margo Glantz, *Las genealogías,* Mexico, 1981. Angelina Muniz, *Huerto cerrado. huerto sellado,* Mexico, 1985, and *Morada interior,* Mexico, 1972. Gloria Gervitz, *Yiskor,* (poems) Mexico, 1987, and *Migraciones* Mexico, 1991. Esther Seligson, *La morada en el tiempo,* Mexico 1981. Isaac Chocrón, *Rómpase en caso de inciendo,* Caracas, 1975 and *Clipper,* (play) Caracas, 1987. Elisa Lerner, *Mi vida con mamá,* (play) Caracas, 1980. Alicia Freilich *Clapper,* Caracas 1987.

6. Moacyr Scliar: *La extraña nación de Rafael Mendes,* (Barcelona: Sirce, 1988). Hereafter all quotations are taken from this Spanish version.

expelled from Spain and Portugal. This new birth of Rafael Mendes takes place dramatically as he reads some paternal manuscripts secretly transferred to his safekeeping by Samarkand, the genealogist and magician. From the old teacher's hands the son receives the "First and Second Notebook of the New Christian" written by his father. The son confines himself to his study until he has finished reading the Mendes family chronicles. Here we have the true subject of Rafael's forgetting: a family history that goes back to the mythical origins of Jonah, to Habakuk ben Tov, a member of the Essene sect of the Dead Sea, to Moses ben Maimon, the Jewish philosopher from Córdoba, and to Almoravide and Saladin. Rafael regains his identity in the most Jewish of ways, acquiring knowledge by reading a text. From this moment on, he knows he is equal to the profound meaning inherent in the transmission of this genealogical knowledge, so as to prevent collective history from being forgotten. This paternal legacy was written, however, paradoxically: as a family chronicle where the details of the mythical genealogies are the least important element. What most anguished the father was the fact that his son would not know how to decipher the sign of his roving, skeptical ancestors, a perplexed people who, having inhabited the four corners of the earth, were nevertheless incapable of finding serenity—anywhere.

Maimonides' *More Nevuhim*, or *Guide to the Perplexed*, becomes emblematic of the Mendes family's ancestry. Expelled from the Iberian peninsula, they survive the crossing to the "New World," there discovering a place where they could survive through apostasy, cleverness, and simulation. *Ahasverius*'s curse will accompany the Mendeses as the mark of the Wandering Jew, a fugitive of Palestine, Egypt, Spain, and Portugal before arriving, finally, in Brazil. In the tropical lands of America, the tenth descendant of the Mendes family recovers the collective memory of his people once he discovers the family genealogy. This recovery of a glorious and dramatic past does not reveal family nobility, because from the earliest moments of the discovery and the conquest of America the presence of the Mendes New Christians conceals the mestizo condition both in colonial and in independent Brazil.

The first Rafael Mendes in the New World was Columbus's cartographer; the second one was a victim of the Inquisition, the third Rafael Mendes had himself baptized a Catholic to obtain the right to survive in a continent declared *Judenrein* by the Spanish and Lusitanian crowns. The fourth Rafael lived as a free man in Dutch Recife and enjoyed the friendship of the painter Franz Post; the fifth Mendes was involved in Maranhão's uprising against the Portuguese occupation. The sixth escaped and was taken prisoner by black fugitive slaves. Later, after the

end of the slave republic under the leadership of Zambi de Palmares, another Rafael Mendes found refuge in Rio de Janeiro. In Brazil's northeast the Mendeses come to know the sugar trade, gold mining in Minas Gerais, and the commercialization of mineral wealth in Rio. They live through the war of the Andrajos and meet General Garibaldi. And after years of this exodus, the Mendeses finally know happiness and well-being when they put down roots in Rio Grande do Sul—in Santa Catarina and in Paraná—becoming wealthy through their business in rural property.

In this narrative of the recuperation of personal identity through coming to know one's collective memory, one of the most moving moments is when Rafael, enlisting in Garibaldi's expedition, disobeys the legendary Italian revolutionary's orders and, responding to his reprimand, says that he was only searching for his father, "that man of the Nation." "Being of the Nation" was a saying folklorically repeated in his family, but Rafael Mendes is ignorant of its most profound meaning. The narrator says, "He sings without knowing that it is that Ladino lullaby: 'Duerme, duerme mi angelico/ Hijico chico de tu Nación' " (252). (Sleep, sleep my little angel/ Small child of your Nation.) The entire history of the Mendeses is a false one, reflecting an ignorance of their past, repeated by the lullabies, which is the past of belonging to the *Nation*. The Hispano-Portuguese nation was shaped by dispersals and escapes, by simulation and by flight, and was remembered by the crypto-Jews through very strong bonds among family members scattered over Calvinist Amsterdam, Lutheran Hamburg, Anglican London, Catholic Ferrara, Bayona, Burdeos, and the Luso-Hispanic empire in the "New World."[7] The narrator says that "Rafael Mendes knows that he is of the Nation, but of Judaism he knows almost nothing" (214). This ignorance, or camouflaged forgetting, is transformed into knowledge thanks to a recuperated collective identity, at the same moment that the twelfth Mendes, descendant of the nation, decides in 1973 to put an end to the escapes and the mockery. This is an act both of memory and of conscience, because he does not want to continue escaping as his ancestors have. Rafael Mendes desires to live out his newly discovered Judeo-Brazilian identity, without the perplexity of the marrano. The dream with which Rafael Mendes concludes helps him to recover the double collective memory of the nation and serves as a metaphor for the

7. For more about this historical and ethnic concept of the Hispano-Portuguese nation, see Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, Oxford University Press, 1989. See also Anita Novinsky's comprehensive study *Cristão Novos en Bahia*, São Paolo, 1972, and Jose Antonio Gonsalves de Mello, *Gente da nação*: judeus residentes no Brasil holandés, *1630-1654*, Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico, e Geográfico Pernambucano, Recife, 1979. Sclar himself explains the subject somewhat in his essay "A condição judaica," Ed. Marc Chagall Institute, 42, Porto Alegre, 1985, 40–42,

founding document of his new civic and ethical identity, the meaning of which extends even "between the branches of the Tree of Life" ("entre las ramas del Arbol de la Vida") (342).[8]

Margo Glantz's *Las genealogías*[9] shares with *The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes*, and with the Argentine Ricardo Feierstein's *Mestizo*,[10] the necessity of jolting family memory to unfold the history of one's ancestors and to trace the itinerary of one's exiles, travels, migrations, and resettlements in the "New World." But this wandering is accomplished with a conscious awareness of the branches, the trunk, and the extremities of the family tree, and in the full consciousness of Glantz's ethnic and cultural past. These memories do not emerge from a crisis of forgetting as in Scliar's novel, and even less from a violent amnesia. The tone of these reminiscences is jocular and filled with a humor that reveals the significance of her Jewish-Mexican identity. And although the narrator of these genealogies confesses to some temptations by Christianity during her adolescence in a homogenous, Catholic city, she knows perfectly well that she is Jewish and the daughter of the respected Yiddish poet Jacobo Glantz, a man connected to the cultural centers of his people in the United States, Europe, and in Israel. Deeply integrated into Mexican cultural life, this book is narrated through the voices of her parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. It straightforwardly creates a story using the collective voice of a filial memory turning into fictional discourse. To that end it does not need to use the metaphorical imagery of lineage to re-signify the perplexity of Scliar's Mendes family, nor does it attempt to fictionalize life-histories as a way of reconstructing, from scratch, the identity of a victim of amnesia. Testimonial discourse in Glantz's text is masked by a fictional character who narrates the stories told to her by her parents, her father Nucia (Jacobo Glantz) and her mother Lucia. Imperceptibly the voice slides from third person narrative to the first person. She is expressing a knowledge incorporated since time immemorial, perhaps since before birth.

The narrator of *Las genealogías* not only knows what her parents remember and what they have forgotten; she is also familiar with the time in which what happened took place. This sensation of a lengthy time is

8. See Albert von Brunn's study of Scliar's novel in his book *Die seltsame nation des Moacyr Scliar: Judisches Epos in Brasilien*, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, 97–110, and for a historical approach to the novel see David Schidlowsky, *Historische Roman und Judische Geschichte: "A Estranha Nação de Rafael Mendes" von Moacyr Scliar*, M.A. dissertation presented to the Freien Universitat Berlin, Berlin, 1990.

9. Margo Glantz, *Las genealogías*, Martin Casillas Editores: Mexico, 1981. Hereafter all quotations are taken from this edition.

10. I have written a full-length study of this novel which will appear at a later date.

"gelatinous, contracted, and inclined to be summed up in one topic with multiple variations and *codenza*," the narrator says. "It coincides with the life of my parents and with the repetitive conversations from which suddenly a spark bursts, illuminating some event neglected by the ideal chronology that history wants to make us swallow." ("...gelatinoso, contraído, y dispuesto a resumirse en un tema con múltiples variaciones y codenza. Coincide con la vida de mis padres y con las conversaciones repetitivas de lo que sale de repente una chispa que ilumina algún evento descuidado por la cronología ideal que la historia nos quiere hacer tragar") (p. 42).

The testimonial fiction of *Las genealogías* ignites itself with these illuminating sparks and confers an aesthetic standing to these stories recounted to us in the intonation of *maises*—popular Yiddish tales. For this reason the stories do not need to be identified contextually, nor do they need a story structure organized around a central semantic focus that absorbs other parts of the seventy-one chapters of the book.

It does not matter that the narrator knows neither Hebrew nor Yiddish; these are the languages that organize the melodic substance of her unconscious; nor does it matter that she does not know how to celebrate the Sabbath or how to observe the dietary laws. Her Judaism was nursed at home with Jewish Russian parents and secular poets who bequeathed her the hidden movements of a language written from right to left, one which modulates the tones of her Spanish language. The narrator defends certain paradigmatic Jewish objects in her house: a *shofar*, a *menorah* for nine candles. She does not feel that her identity is degraded by the Judeo-Mexican cultural mixture (*mestizaje*) that has come together in her workroom: an antique candelabrum from Jerusalem next to a few popular icons, replicas of pre-Hispanic idols along with a votive offering, the monsters of Michoacan among which one can find Christ's passion with his devils.

This memorable Jewish narrative voice is capable of identifying every Warsaw shoemaker and every child from the *heder* accompanying a bearded old man from Wolonin; Glantz startles herself by seeing the image of her *zeide* Osher and her paternal uncle and aunt, Moishe Haim and Ilushe, while she continues to light the Christmas tree in her Mexican house.

What does matter is the narrator's disposition to confess without shame that "everything is mine, and you should know, nevertheless, that it is not." ("Todo es mío, y sepa, sin embargo, que no lo es.") What matters, too, is that she says "I appear Jewish and I don't," and that to understand

this profound contradiction she has decided to jolt her family's memory and write down her genealogies. The first family genealogy brings out her pride in being the daughter of the Yiddish poet Jacobo Glantz and granddaughter of prosperous and respected Ashkenazis from the Ukrainian Steppes of Bielorussia and Podolia. Her maternal grandparents lived in areas of beetroot plantations crossed by rivers where they fished for sweet-water carp. Later *zeide* moved to Odessa where he was able to join an import/export firm. The narrator's mother tells her of the elite secondary school education she received in a prestigious *gimnasium*, and evokes the various occasions in which she met the great poet Haim Nachman Bialik and his colleague Rovnitzki. For his part, the father remembers his antecedents—rough agriculturalists from the rural colony of Kricog Rog—his longing to be able to study in the *heder*, and the pride of having participated in a self-defense group along with Jewish students who wanted to repel the hooligan gangs' attacks, which decimated the Jewish peasants.

The daughter's narrative voice transforms her father's youthful Russian memories; Jacobo Glantz's pride at having participated in literary bohemia during the Russian Revolution becomes in her narrative both an inheritance and her lost family lineage. The friendships and encounters with well-known figures who are mentioned (Lunacharski, Radek, Babel) not only constitute the paternal artistic lineage that his daughter inherits from the best Jewish cultural tradition of the Russian revolution, but also represents the credentials with which the immigrant Jacobo Glantz became a welcome member of the cultural bohemia in Mexico. He frequented literary cafés and the artistic soirées of muralists such as Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco, and writers like Gonzalez, Martínez and Mariano Azuela. The facial similarity between Glantz (unmistakable because of his small, pointy beard) and Leon Trotzky was something more than the visible pretext for fascists from the Mexican nationalist group *Camisas Doradas* to attempt to lynch the Yiddish poet in 1939 (122–123). Glantz contained in his personality and in his work a trait insufferable to Mexican anti-Semites: he was the vessel of the great Judeo-Russian revolutionary tradition at the time that a pluralistic, Jewish cultural project was being initiated, a project repulsive to Mexican nationalism.[11] It was inevitable that the narrator, in order to be able to write *Las genealogías*, found it necessary

11. For a historical account of the fascist organization called *Camisas Doradas* and their attempt to lynch Jacobo Glantz, see Alicia Gojman Backal, "Minorías, estado, y movimientos nacionalistas de la clase media en México: Liga anti-China y Anti-Judía." In *Judaica Latinoamericana*, Amilat, Jerusalem, (1988), 174–191.

to shift to the European landscapes recalled by her parents.[12] Margo Glantz wrote her book in Mexico, Leningrad and Odessa. Here is the other dimension of this novel of memory: She takes the opposite path of the one her parents took when they immigrated to America. To the majority of immigrant Jews, an Eastern-European past is confusing and cruel, because their villages were buried and their loved ones disappeared,[13]

In contrast, for Glantz this pilgrimage to her origins constitutes not only a trip to times past, but also a test of her knowledge of that Steppe geography, the familiar coast of the Black Sea that was recalled in her Mexican home, a cartographical game of luck with the memory of the land of her Russian ancestors, her "motherland" (229). The narrator is less interested in the hazardous fortunes of her relatives and in the crises of values and mores transmitted from generation to generation all the way to America, than she is in the pleasure of conjuring up her uncles, aunts, and cousins from all branches of this family dispersed the world over—those who were murdered in the Holocaust as well as those who immigrated to Philadelphia. Her mother's high-school friends also appear in these conjurings: neighbours from Moldavanka, the Jewish neighborhood where Leibl, the gang king, kept both the Jews and the police of Odessa under constant threat, much as Isaac Babel described in his tales (236).

The topography of immigrant memory in Mexico traces the outlines of the urban locations in the "New World," where the Jewish colony in Mexico established its residence and population: the street of Jesus María la Corregidora, Tacubo Soledad, Mesones, Regina; old colonial houses with extremely high ceilings; huge patios overgrown with flowers; pushcarts belonging to vendors selling socks, bread, soap, and ties; and the permanent presence of the "Merced's" Market, "La Lagunilla," and its beggars. The genealogies of Mexican artists and writers who frequented Carmel, the restaurant where they were served tasty Ashkenazi dishes made by the narrator's mother, are not absent from this urban landscape. There they ate *varenikes* and *borsht*, strudel and blintzes, dishes for which exiled Russian prince Dolgornki had a weakness (162).

This investigation of both the visible and the hidden elements of family memory unfolds a geography that is separated by oceans and seas and

12. The topography of Russian Jewish immigrant memory has been analyzed well in José Itzigsohn, *Tras las huellas de Ashkenaz*, Buenos Aires, 1989, 291–314.

13. See the series of oral histories and testimonies of Jewish immigrants to Argentina in Sara Itzigsohn, Ricardo Feierstein, Isidoro Niborsky, Leonardo Senkman (eds.), *Inmigración y marginalidid, Buenos Aires, 1985.*

is written by a narrator who cedes the words of her story to her parents. The author accepts from the beginning that her book of life histories will be spoken in the voices of her ancestors. It follows, therefore, that the Spanish of this daughter of immigrants is the jubilant celebrant of memory, and the language of *Las genealogías* is spiced with her father's Yiddish and Russian—despite the fact that the narrator confesses to barely understanding the colloquial Yiddish of meals and scoldings (185). Also in the adventurousness of her language does this sort of Judeo-Mexican Telémaco seem to walk in the inverted footsteps of the paternal Ulysses. When "all of a sudden Jacobo writes poems and begins to dream them in Spanish" ("de repente Jacobo escribe poemas y empieza a soñarlos en español") (169). Margo herself dreams in Yiddish about those Hispanic texts in which she writes about Jacobo's intellectual coexistence with North American Jewish poets (including Bashevis and Yehuda Singer, Leivik, Opatoschu, and Niger). It is the same with the culinary art of her mother who prepares "Mexican stews Kosher-style" in her restaurant, Carmel (160). We can imagine that she dreams in Yiddish the autobiographical story of her adolescent temptations by Christianity[14] (217–220). There is no doubt that the parodic allusions to the "mixed" relationships of her romantic life come alive in the Yiddish of her father's condemnation (148). Perhaps this linguistic disagreement between father and daughter creates the most moving utterance of the book, when Glantz confesses that memory "comes back to itself and maybe this can also be said about forgetting" ("Se porta a sí misma y quizás esto se aplique también a los olvidos" (171). One of the "forgettings" told in the book is the story of the daughter incapable of satisfying the father's desire that she translate into Spanish his long Yiddish poem—a poem inspired by Columbus (146). More conflicted, even, is the occasion when her father writes another epic poem in Yiddish, *Nisayon* (Attempt) dedicated to me when I betrayed my people." It was translated in the fifties with *Songs of Absence and of Return*. There I appear as the black sheep, and later maybe also as the Prodigal Daughter," (" 'Prueba,' dedicado a mí cuando traicioné al pueblo. Fue traducido por los '50 con *Cantares de ausencia y de retorno*. Allí aparezco como oveja negra luego quizá, también como Hija Pródiga") (147).

Glantz's collective memory is recovered in untiring trips through time and space, the purpose of which is to evoke her origins, her ancestors, and the languages of her dreams and nightmares. The narrative voice of *Las genealogías* in the end is uniquely Mexican, not only because it contains allusions to Columbus (her love of adventure) but also because the book was published in weekly segments in the magazine *Unomasuno* (13). For the first time in Mexican literature, a descendant of Russian immigrants has the courage to confess[15] to the reading public at large that her love for trips "and expeditions abroad is always a sign of explorers and as always and for a change I am Columbus, who just like my grandfather Osher or my grandfather Mikhail, presides over the navigations" ("... y expediciones tierra afuera es siempre una marca de descubridores y como siempre y por variar soy Colón, quien al igual de mi abuelo Osher o mi abuelo Mikhail, preside a las navegaciones") (229). In addition to the profound significance of the genealogies that Glantz takes upon herself publicly in a cultural environment that only accepts the prestige of a noble European lineage, we have the testimonial vocation of the writer who, sincerely and with humor, shows an equal interest in embarking upon internal investigations inside the land of Mexico, as she does in writing with pride about her Jewish heritage.[16]

(Translated by Noga Tarnopolsky).

14. See about Margo Glantz's temptation with Christianity in her short story "Blanca Navidad," *La Jornada*, México, (December 24, 1988).

15. Jorge Aguilar Mora wrote about the difficulties Mexican authors face talking about intimacy; "en México hablar de las formas que adopta nuestra vida es una impudicia que no se tolera o que no se perdona... La intimidad no es de uso corriente en una sociedad católica donde los secretos se trasmiten en el confesorio, y es de uso menos corriente en una sociedad que se sigue viendo a sí misma como un pequeño clan o una estrecha familia..." See "Primero una novela y al final un ensayo" in *Hispanoamérica*, no. 50, 3.

16. Interview with Margo Glantz, São Paolo, August 1990. Forthcoming, to be published in *Noaj*.

The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America
New Studies on History and Literature

Edited by
David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr

Garland Publishing, Inc.
New York and London

OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS: BRAZILIAN JEWS AND THE DISCOURSE OF ALTERITY

Nelson H. Vieira

> "[T]hey were talking about Jews during that Christmas supper. . . . [T]here was the whole universe, the others and he, experiencing the same clichés, and the same insoluble contradiction." [Samuel Rawet, "Christmas Without Christ," *Diálogo*, 1963]

Alienation represents the estrangement that many Latin American Jews repeatedly experience when their ethnic and religious differences are compared to the culture of the larger Catholic population. Positioned dialectically as being in contradiction to the dominant society and culture, the Jews of Latin America consciously or unconsciously develop an enlightened perception of the dominant other, as well as themselves as others, that will be referred to here as "alterity." If alterity evokes the perception of being other or different, then it relates to identity by communicating that which is not solely the subject. In *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze views the other as "initially a structure of the perceptual field" (Deleuze, 59). This perspective reaches beyond the ego, thereby making perception more broad and encompassing. Since alienation surfaces as one of the overriding themes in fiction by Latin American Jewish writers, alterity frequently emerges as the optic used by many writers to express or dramatize their understanding of difference and contradiction.

This focus upon alterity relates to the role that difference plays in Latin America's ethos and cosmos because it illustrates how Latin American or, in this case, Brazilian identity, is constituted historically and socially by cultural conflict and contradiction. Fernando Aínsa points to Latin America's cultural make-up as one based upon antinomies, an interpretation pertinent to an understanding of how Jews in Latin America are positioned in society and literature. According to Aínsa: "The characteristics that make Latin American cultural identity single and diverse belong to a history of creativity that founds cultures that are new, different, in a state of permanent transformation, but above all marked by antinomies structured around two pairs of opposites: that of the center and the periph-

ery [constructed in space], and that of tradition and modernity [elaborated in time]" (9).

Primarily applying the dialectic of center and periphery as it reflects the *internal* dynamics and differences within Brazil, this study will point to the manifestation of dichotomies in Judeo-Brazilian literature as exemplified in the fiction by Samuel Rawet (1929-84). For Latin American literature in general, this approach reflects Aínsa's view that these dialectics of space and time are "easily identifiable in the best pages of fiction" (9). However, if dichotomies and contradictions are so reflective of the Latin American experience, then it follows that Latin American nations respectively represent diverse cultural forms of conflictual multiplicity or hybrid interchange within their constitutive national ethos. On the other hand, in view of Latin America's hierarchical and nationalistic societies structured from patriarchal paradigms that historically have pivoted center against periphery in the struggle for maintaining an institutionalized nationalist discourse, it is evident that cultural hybridity does *not* constitute social pluralism. Ergo, the reason to consider the literary voices from the Jewish diaspora in Latin America as contributing to a discourse of alterity which aims to affirm difference by acknowledging the existence of a cultural periphery and the experience of others who too often have been expected to be silent. The selection of Samuel Rawet as the Brazilian example to express this discourse stems from not only his literary representation of alienation and alterity but also from his acute awareness of the cultural silence that Jews have intermittently practiced in Brazil. Ironically, the theme of silence dramatized in his fiction also reverberated in the critical silence that overshadowed most of his work, owing in part to his image as an immigrant Brazilian Jewish writer whose narratives appeared, to the larger Brazilian public, to be thematically inaccessible, disconcerting or strange.

A Polish Jew who immigrated to Brazil at the age of seven, Samuel Rawet resided in Rio de Janeiro until he was invited in 1957 to join the NOVACAP project that was to build Brazil's futuristic capital, Brasília. With an engineering degree and a talent for making the calculations needed to produce reinforced concrete, Rawet moved to Brasília where, living mostly in solitude, he was to spend most of his life, except for occasional stays in Rio and one trip of several months to Europe and Israel. Recognized today as the writer who launched Judeo-Brazilian expression with his 1956 collection of stories, *Contos do imigrante* [Tales of the Immigrant], Rawet primarily wrote short fiction that centered upon the conflictual experience of Jews in modern postwar Brazil. In a dense style evoking conflict and collision, his stories dramatize the difficulty of overcoming ethnic prejudice when its manifestation is insidious and oblique. The epigraph for this study is taken from his provocative story "Natal Sem Cristo" [Christmas Without Christ] which first appeared in 1963 in his second collection of stories ironically entitled *Diálogo* [Dialogue], a volume depicting man's dialogue with himself (his silence) rather than his actual dialogue with others. The story conveys the silent perspective of a Brazilian Jewish insider who is treated as a Jewish outsider. This story is thus an appropriate starting point for discussing the perception of otherness or alterity implicit in the oxymoronic "outsider/insider," a theme and position repeatedly voiced in fiction by Brazilian Jewish writers who, interestingly, also address the perception of "otherness" often beyond the scope of Jewish ethnicity. Whether motivated by sentiments emanating from immigrant alienation, racial discrimination, or psychological estrangement, the experience of alterity surfaces powerfully in Brazilian Jewish narratives where the stance of the "other" invariably emerges within and/or outside the self.

In addition to Rawet's stories, obvious examples of dramatized alterity by Brazilian-Jewish authors appear in the works of Moacyr Scliar, particularly, *Os deuses de Raquel* (1975) [*The Gods of Raquel* (1986)], *O centauro no jardim* (1980) [*The Centaur in the Garden* (1985)], and *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (1983) [*The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes* (1987)]; in narratives by Clarice Lispector such as *Laços de família* (1960) [*Family Ties* (1972)], *A legião estrangeira* (1964) [*The Foreign Legion* (1986)], *Onde estivestes de noite* (1974), and *No exílio* (1948) [In Exile]; as well as in the fiction of lesser-known Jewish writers such as Eliezer Levin, Carlos Stein, Fischel Báril, Paulo Wainberg, and Francisco Dzialovsky. An interesting political variation on the theme of alterity, from the viewpoint of a Brazilian Jewish protagonist, is treated by Carlos Heitor Cony in his 1967 novel *Pessach: a travessia* [Pessach: The Crossing] which links the hero's repression of his Jewish identity with the self-repression of his political radicalism. In this novel's treatment of alterity, the reader also sees otherness in the context of the society's deep-rooted authoritarianism.

With the above introduction, this study proposes to examine alterity via the diasporist outsider/insider perspective in Brazilian Jewish fiction via Samuel Rawet's story "Christmas Without Christ." Dealing with Jewish alienation within the Jewish diaspora of Brazil, this story underlines the theme of difference in a them-versus-us frame between Gentiles and Jews. In its exposure of ethnic and social differences within Brazilian society, this story questions the monolithic view of seeing Brazil as one cohesive culture, and by extension, Latin (South) America as one coherent continent. The literature expressed by the Latin American Jewish diaspora thus becomes a fertile terrain for uncovering and affirming the cultural dichotomies and multiplicities rampant within and across Latin American nations. As an aesthetic, diasporism furnishes the writer with a life

experience that affords multiple views. For example, Diasporism becomes an artistic mode of creation for the North American Jewish painter, R.B. Kitaj, who translated his diasporist life experience into a diasporist art in *First Diasporist Manifesto*. Here, Kitaj transposes his exile insights, gleaned from his own diasporist experience of an American residing in England, into a diasporist aesthetics for painting. This manifesto underscores issues and themes that frequently emerge in the writings of Latin American Jewish writers. In describing Diasporist painting, Kitaj indirectly evokes the plight of the Latin American Jewish writer: "Diasporist painting, which I just made up, is enacted under peculiar historical and personal freedoms, stresses, dislocation, rupture and momentum. The Diasporist lives and paints in two or more societies at once" (19). The simultaneous bi- or multiculturality alluded to here stems from additions and fractures involving some form of exile—geographic, social or psychological—a position voiced by Kitaj in a provocative manner that communicates uncannily with Rawet's fiction and experience: "A Diasporist picture is marked by Exile and its discontents as subtly and unclearly as pictures painted by women or homosexuals are marked by their inner exilic discontents" (96-97).

In addition to employing the critical approach manifested in alterity and Diasporism, this study also proposes to examine the outsider/insider perspective in Jewish-Brazilian fiction in the context of Brazil's non-exclusionist image of "racial democracy," a national myth actively promoted by one national ideology that fosters the notion of spontaneous conviviality and sincere equality among all peoples, groups, and races residing in Brazil. The myth of racial democracy has long been contested by many Brazilian scholars and Brazilianists, particularly since the landmark research and writings of the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes. This Brazilian myth, based upon Brazil's history of racial mixture and promoted in the 1930s by the famous sociologist Gilberto Freyre with his Luso-Tropicalist theory, lost some credibility when black activists such as Abdias do Nascimento challenged its application to the Brazilian reality. In the same vein, another aspect of Brazil's national character, the "cordial man," complicates the above myth even more by contributing a specious notion of liberal humanism, often exemplified by the Brazilian assimilatory and envolving proclivity to be with others, implying an inherent sense of community along with a unique ethos of non-discrimination.

The concept of the Brazilian "cordial man" is developed in Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, *Raízes do Brasil*. Hollanda attributes the term to Ribeiro Couto, the writer and diplomat who was one of the active participants in Brazil's modernist movement. Recognizing that cordiality can be used in a negative as well as positive context, Hollanda strives to clarify Couto's definition by underscoring

the Brazilian tendency to flee solitude and to gravitate toward others, toward intimacy:

> In the "cordial man," life in society is in a certain way a true liberation from the fear that he feels in living with himself, in supporting himself in all of life's circumstances. His manner of expansion toward others reduces the individual more and more to the social peripheral fragment which for the Brazilian—like any good American—tends to be what is more important. This way of being is above all else a living in others. (108)

It is interesting to compare this definition with alterity as an expanded field of perception (106-112).

Not to be seen as veneer, but rather as a personal expression of emotion, sincerity, and intimacy toward others, Brazilian cordiality, however, should not be interpreted as an example of social or racial democracy. While this seemingly liberal and communal behavior may be evident in the everyday social comportment of Brazilians, it is important to ask—behavior, cordiality or, rather, equality toward whom? For Brazilians, it is clear that there does exist a personable and expansive manner in the daily treatment of ethnic and racial others but just how selective is this treatment and to what degree is it practiced? Moreover, from the viewpoint of a literary dramatization of racial and social differences, this personable manner is seen as contributing to the familiar Brazilian practice of non-confrontation and little overt discrimination. In reality, this behavior places one in the elusive and subtle shadowland of attitudes that, if negative, may be readily denied and therefore difficult to challenge, let alone prove.

Considering Brazilian Jews as outsiders and insiders in relation to Brazil's ideological approach to racial democracy and cordial man, Samuel Rawet's story "Christmas Without Christ" serves as a compelling resource because, though "cordially" invited inside a Christian home for Christmas supper, the protagonist Nehemiah Goldenberg is nonetheless insidiously degraded throughout this repast for being the Jewish "intruso" (Rawet 1956, 56), intruder or outsider. This intensely introspective story employs interior monologue in a third-person narration that occasionally slips into a first-person voice or point of view, especially during moments of mounting rage, thereby opening up the perceptual field. Beginning with an initial paragraph that lasts for three pages, the story is framed by the protagonist's pent-up tension of a "stigmatized" man overtly conscious of his perceived role as an interloper. This "stigmatized" outsider possesses an "undesired differentness," sociological terms which Erving Goffman deftly dis-

sects in his study *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Goffman, 3-5).

Interspersed with a series of conversational statements that are more subtle jibes and accusations than cordial dialogue, the body of the story reflects the protagonist's introspective replay and retrospective (silent) reaction to the biting sarcasm emanating from the various members of the host's Christian family. As the interior monologue progresses, Nehemiah silently acknowledges with increasing intensity his experience and perception of alterity, of being seen and treated as the other. This perception leads him to adopt a behavior of guarded silence, a stance not unfamiliar to many Jews in Brazil and throughout the Latin American Diaspora. [This silence is evocative of the silence that many New Christians maintained as they simulated being Christians while practicing their Judaism in secret.]

Albeit reminiscent of the proverbial immigrant experience of alienation which is enacted in Rawet's story "The Prophet," the sense of alterity conveyed by the protagonist Nehemiah in this un-Christian Christmas story, underlines the special circumstances related to being Jewish (whether immigrant or native) in a nation dominated by Christian people, culture, ideology, and doctrine. On the other hand, the stories in the collection *Diálogo*, presenting a Brazilian gallery of monological characters and immigrants who are often monological Jews carrying on interior monologues of angst and alienation, do not suggest that alterity is relegated solely to the Jewish experience. The unspecified ethnic, marginal, or immigrant status of protagonists in other stories implies a broader depiction of alterity beyond the scope of Jewish ethnicity. Nonetheless, as a collection dramatizing other social marginals in general, Rawet's *Diálogo* does at the same time call attention to the Jewish condition in Brazil because in these stories about ethnics, marginals, or immigrants, the only ones named ethnically are the Jews. The Jews thus serve as a provocative example and reminder of the targeted outsider who is, to a certain degree, the unacknowledged insider. Moreover, since the Jews of Brazil comprise less than one percent of the nation's total population and represent a highly mobile group on the socio-economic scale, the "low-profile" socio-political strategies practiced by many contemporary Brazilian Jews call to mind the experiences of the past in Jewish history when Jews became scapegoats in lands where they had been vulnerable minorities. Also, in light of contemporary Brazil's series of economic crises, the low-profile strategy gains particular relevance when one considers the high percentage of kidnappings attempted upon wealthy Brazilians, many of whom happen to be from affluent Jewish families. Prior to using Rawet's story for furthering our exposition on the

outsider/insider phenomenon, other Brazilian cultural references and theoretical considerations warrant discussion.

In Brazil, given the presence of an elitist and nationalist ideology with a proclivity toward sameness, as expressed by Roberto Schwarz in his deconstruction of the myth of national authenticity in his essay, "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," it is not surprising to find the Jews of Brazil proceeding with caution as they deal with non-Jews. Schwarz analyzes the illusory tendency, especially on the part of Brazilian elites (the traditional oligarchy), to search for and to define an authentically national Brazil by eliminating or subtracting Brazil's supposedly alien or "outsider" elements. According to Schwarz, this nationalist mindset fails to recognize that, given the veritable mobility and advancements of today's modern and postmodern cultures, it would be virtually impossible to ever have a totally "harmonious and auto-centered national culture" (85). Schwarz also calls attention to the elite's historical and consistent disregard of social inequities along with its low regard for diversity among the populace but, paradoxically, its simultaneous "high" regard and need for advocating selective and, what it considers to be, prestigious foreign (European) attributes. Invariably these are regarded as progressive socio-political ideals, even though these may be incompatible with the country's social reality. Schwarz interprets this behavior as originating historically from a "malaise of the dominant class, bound up with the difficulty of morally reconciling the advantages of progress with those of slavery or its surrogates" (89). In other words, in a culture of rigid social stratification, the drive for cultural homogeneity stems primarily from a powerful ruling or dominant economic class which looked to imitation and cohesion as a bourgeois ideal. Using a hierarchical scale to indicate what was presumed to be an "authentic" part of the national culture, this position of homogeneity was adopted irrespective of aliens, marginals, or "low." In short, these elites developed cultural blind spots by becoming insensitive to the human panorama of social differences representative of the country's complex diversity.

It is within this paradoxical arena of Brazilian cultural politics where one may witness, in literature, the emerging role of the other, the marginal or the low via the expression of alterity, contradiction, inversion, fantasy, parody, and hyperbole. The most popular contemporary Brazilian Jewish writer, Moacyr Scliar, employs hyperbole through images of excess in his novel, *O centauro no jardim*. In this novel, the images of bodily excess and mythical fantasy are dramatized as a means of expressing forms of social transgression that override a national concept of an idealized sameness or a standardized normality. In several of his other narratives, especially *O terreno de uma polegada quadrada* (1969) [The Land of One Square Inch], Samuel Rawet draws upon such transgressive

issues as sexual deviance as well as obsessive and excessive behavior to create moments of defiance and disorder with the aim of challenging conventional views of social norms. Nevertheless, sporadic outbursts of defiance are usually confined to literature and not to the everyday life of a socio-political scene which invites serious caution and guarded behavior.

The myths and prejudices against Jews in relation to the socio-economic situation in Latin America are another issue that this Jewish diaspora confronts regularly in its interaction with the larger non-Jewish population. Other issues and problems are directly tied to unjust stereotyping or imagined stigma based upon religious, socio-political, and cultural grounds that may eventually result in what Erving Goffman calls a "spoiled identity," a view entertained by the dominant group. For example, the Brazilian folklorist Luís da Câmara Cascudo offers an intriguing observation about the popular attitude that many Brazilians manifest toward Jews: "O povo ainda vê o judeu pelos olhos quinhentistas" [The populace still sees the Jew with sixteenth century eyes] (93). Here, one sees the need and yet the pitfalls for distinguishing between attitude and behavior or prejudice and discrimination toward Jews and others. For Brazil, since attitudes and prejudices are not viable evidence for initiating formal or legal defense, discrimination is often not addressed. Although hardly identical, there exist parallels between Brazil's attitude toward Jews and its prejudice toward Afro-Brazilians where, for the sake of social appearances, behavior toward blacks "appears" to be the same as toward many whites and others. Regarding the Jews of modern Brazil, there seems to be no overt discrimination. However, perceived differentness usually takes the form of articulating some "discrediting" attribute, such as with Rawet's protagonist Nehemiah Goldenberg who at one point in the story is treated as a heretic linked to the crucifixion of Christ. Therefore, lurking beneath the surface of social appearances, conventions, and amenities, Brazilian Christians may harbor attitudes of apprehension, hesitation, suspicion, distance, even discrimination, commonly based upon popular cultural myths that posit Jews as the non-Catholic "different." Rawet's story suggests that for the most part these attitudes are usually expressed in a covert manner. Ergo, the reason to practice or cultivate a guarded or low profile.

Even though this study does not debate the existence or non-existence of anti-Semitism in Brazil, it does demonstrate how the literary voice of Jewish alterity can be revelatory of the insidious ambiguity of Brazil's approach toward the Other. Here, the focus on Jewish alterity rests with socio-cultural and historical circumstances of difference emerging in Brazilian Jewish narratives which depict the modern social reality of the Brazilian Jewish diaspora. In this arena, degrees of otherness are painfully perceived, even to the point where they do not

appear to exist. Despite all claims to there being "no Jewish problem in Brazil," one must remain mindful of the elusive nature of ambiguous attitudes and "soft" despotic or prejudicial positions toward the other which are deeply rooted in the social psyche. Drawing upon Guillermo O'Donnell's term "socially rooted authoritarianism," Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro attributes the continual existence of a microdespotic, hegemonic, and authoritarian mentality in Brazil to systems of hierarchical domination implanted by the dominant classes. According to Pinheiro, systems of hegemony have repercussions for socially peripheral others in Brazil because such systems are constant since they exist prior to, during, and even after military dictatorships. Thus these systems are regularly reproduced with the assistance of forces of oppression, criminalization, and political opposition along with mechanisms of ideological control exerted over the majority of the population. Since racism and prejudice can be seen as institutions of force maintained by such ideological control, Pinheiro considers this phenomenon to be a form of "violence douce" (45). And it is this climate of "soft" repression—not overt ostracism, segregation, or discrimination—which Samuel Rawet re-creates in order to enable his discerning protagonist Nehemiah Goldenberg to perceive the subtly "soft" but undeniable violence directed at his culturally Jewish sense of self.

Owing to the realities of assimilation or acculturation, many Brazilian Jews may have affirmed their heritage and felt Jewish more as a fact of birth and culture than of religious conviction. Yet, on different occasions, these same Jews, even if for a mere moment, have felt obliged to hold back their Jewish identity as a socio-cultural forethought or precaution, as if their social identity would somehow appear to be "spoiled" in relation to a preconceived homogeneous national identity or what Erving Goffman refers to as "normative expectations" (2). Related to this thinking is Jean Starobinski's cogent essay, "The Inside and the Outside," where he signals the importance of understanding the ever-changing relationship with the concept of the Other which in many instances calls for self-control, a behavior Rawet's Nehemiah Goldenberg displays despite his feelings of humiliation. This self-control is crucial to one who comes into contact with the outside culture (which in this case is the dominant one) and its possible aggression and threat toward one's well-being or survival. Starobinski argues for recognizing humankind's ability and need to devise codes, language, and techniques in order to accommodate to the various situations that dictate one's mutable and constantly shifting reference points: "between himself and the malignant outside, he must wedge his own activity, his technique" (344).

In Rawet's story, Nehemiah not only illustrates self-control but also the ability to carry on a silent monologue of rage while behaving with appropriate

decorum. Such behavior is justified if one entertains the following commentary by Starobinski: "because man has come to acquire technique, he can brave the most inclement environments and colonize the outside. Thus, for having had to endure the condition of an *outcast*, man has won powers that make him the supreme *invader*" (344).

In his situational exile during that Christmas supper, Nehemiah's self-control becomes his heroic image of restraint, tact, and wisdom in which he demonstrates the ability to dissect the prejudicial subtleties and hypocritical commentaries articulated by his host's guests who become his verbal persecutors as the following statements demonstrate: "Jews are very charming, very charming. . . . Great financiers and entrepreneurs! . . . . But weren't the Jews the ones who killed Christ, papa?" (58) and "Mister Nehemiah, you don't seem Jewish. You enjoyed the roast pork so much" (59). Since Nehemiah decides to hold his rage within, he makes a conscious decision which he believes is appropriate for the situation. Starobinski describes this type of behavior as wise: "He is fully human who can avail himself of the means best suited to the circumstance, whether it be violent action, speech, or silence. In every case, wisdom consists in stifling the irrational impulse, in not letting loose the word or gesture that would spell disaster by giving one's external enemy the upper hand" (345). Starobinski interprets hysteria and neurosis as the parody of this restraint and suggests that neurotic behavior indicates the inability to confront the outside. Here, Nehemiah manifests his skill in confronting the outside by becoming a silent insider dealing with the outside reality of Brazil's dominant cultural ideology. Jewish history and civilization have continually shown the Jews as being situated on the outside as well as on the inside where they have developed the wisdom of restraint. Starobinski's premise and examples illustrate the relevancy of the insider/outsider position and its application to the Brazilian Jewish experience when he describes the perennial situation of the outsider's active cultural struggle with his milieu. In so doing, Starobinski underscores one of Judaism's overall contributions to the human condition: "all reflect the importance of Judaism, by selective inhibition what passes from the outside in, and the from the inside out" (345). In other words, the Jewish experience of "selective inhibition" may be considered synonymous with the concept of "selective ethnicity," where one chooses to foreground, or not, one's ethnic origin. Above all, "selective inhibition" is in communion with the phenomenon of "process" itself, affording one a sense of interiority and alterity as well as a sense of self via a capacity to deal with the external by internalizing it.

"Christmas Without Christ" is a narrative which dramatizes the distinction between prejudice and discrimination from the viewpoint of a specific Brazilian cultural context. If prejudice or attitude is understood as some form of predisposition toward an individual or group considered to be different, then discrimination becomes the overt action or behavior taken against the "different" one. Rawet's story illustrates the fine line of distinction between these two and, furthermore, points to how verbal prejudices function to reveal deeply-rooted feelings of discrimination. Attention to this distinction in Brazil surfaced during the congressional debate surrounding the Afonso Arinos Law of 1951 (Dzidzenyo, 23-42) which, according to Anani Dzidzienyo: "appears to be more concerned with prejudice than with discrimination" (34). As a result, this law has been criticized because it lacks substantial legal application since it becomes more difficult to prosecute on attitudinal grounds of prejudice than on concrete or physical manifestations of discrimination. Besides, how can a Brazilian be accused of discrimination if s/he openly socializes with blacks, Asians, or Jews? The answer lies partly in Samuel Rawet's story.

Nehemiah Goldenberg, a history teacher, is invited by a Christian colleague to his family's home for Christmas supper. This home belongs to Ana Castanheira de Miranda Campos, known as Nani, an aging matriarch who, amid the other members of her family, takes the place of honor at the Christmas table. As his biblical namesake, Nehemiah, the religious reformer who preserved the identity and continuity of the Jewish people, Nehemiah becomes an ironic evocation of this figure since he manages to preserve his identity, albeit silently, via his unvoiced perceptions of the others. His interior monologue becomes a discourse of alterity wherein perception becomes crucial to an accurate assessment of his insider/outsider situation. The story's exceptionally long first sentence of more than 160 words captures this guest's angst-ridden reaction to the not-so-subtle prejudicial comments being made about his Jewish origins. The interior monologue narrative represents a rethinking or replay—an immediate flashback—of the impact of these comments upon Nehemiah. This replay also reviews his observations of the matriarchal hostess and her family, all of whom represent examples of the Establishment in the form of a traditional and wealthy family of the Brazilian oligarchy, exuding authority, convention, and self-assurance.

Interestingly, R.B. Kitaj describes his sentiments at being a diasporist painter in a manner that approximates Nehemiah's own emotions at that Christmas table:

> The Diasporist in me is impatient with host-art. I feel like a guest in the house of art, guilty if I don't perform up to snuff, anxious to leave the table (and table talk) as early and politely as I can. That's how I make my pictures, diasporist pictures—feigned politesse, anxious

> resolve barely revealed. The older I get, closer to the end, I look to more candid, x-rated designs upon painting" (65).

Kitaj's expressed anxiety and feigned politeness find a common bond with Nehemiah as a Brazilian and Latin American Jewish Diasporist.

The story's first sentence distills Nehemiah's visceral anguish by revealing his feelings of rage about being stigmatized. Also, his ironic stance suggests how traditionally the Jews have been mistreated by powerful groups: "and from the ashes of his bones consumed in wicked holocaust, let there be no vestiges, neither in the air, nor in the earth, nor in the water, nor in the fire which precipitated them, nor in the remembrance of who made these ashes from his bones" (55).

In assessing the tension at the table by developing a conscious strategy, Nehemiah opts to control the scene with his silence and his review of what has just transpired. In so doing, as the outsider who has become the perceptive "invader," he maintains a better grasp of the underlying motives behind the prejudice articulated at that supper table. Instead of attacking his "enemy" which he imagines as a powerful current rushing downstream, Nehemiah philosophically ponders over his strategic behavior of silence: "Never to swim against the current, but to contain its impetus, to subdue it, and to turn its course upstream" (56). Nehemiah's interior monologue, which enables the narration to entertain more than one perspective, becomes a means for the outcast/invader to understand, survive, and bear witness to the callous attitudes and behavior of "his" others. With eyes transfixed on the old matriarch Nani and her obvious indifference to what was being said by the other members of the family, Nehemiah focuses upon her insensitivity, her lack of cordiality, her hidden hatred, and her authoritative and regal demeanor in demanding more wine but, above all, her sense of utter absoluteness. Interestingly, Nani's posture for demanding more wine also evokes, somewhat ironically and indirectly, the biblical Nehemiah's early role as cup bearer to the King of Persia, prior to his becoming a religious reformer.

Pitted against this spectrum of members from the Brazilian Establishment, Nehemiah pictures this scene as a microcosm of the world and sees himself as being treated as "other," a perception of his alterity which mounts as the narrative develops his more acute awareness of being an other. As the intolerant head of this traditional family, Nani is portrayed as a cold authoritarian figure, inflexible in her cultural hegemony. Although the description of Nani centers upon her character and behavior, the scene's effect aims to synthesize and deconstruct social indifference, a stance practiced by an elite, perceived as socially

tyrannical and unaware of the cultural blind spots they incur as they exercise their authoritarian chauvinism. Nani's character becomes a springboard for denouncing a homogenized view of the world which allows no room for divergence or differentness:

> He sees in her that historical continuity which does not concede a willingness to accommodate others, that already-formed conscience, inflexible, not allowing for revision or doubts, insensitive to the most concrete signal of its omission, because she possesses the absolute truth. There exist in her fingers reminiscences of medieval intolerance as well as the determination of the most rigid contemporary politics, and in her thumb the impulse of tetrarchs facing the vanquished in the arena. Nehemiah knows that words will mean nothing when she lowers her thumb. And Nani continues to sip her wine (60).

Seen as the autocratic ruler condemning her victims to slaughter in the arena, Nani's behavior reminds one of the martyr's violent fate under a despotic ruler. Thus it is not surprising when Nehemiah turns to the crucifix on the wall and wonders if the answer or end to all of this oppression will come from this biblical figure who was a Jew.

Comparing the circumstances of the Jews and the Christians at the time of Christ's persecution and crucifixion, Nehemiah addresses Christ directly (via the crucifix on the wall) and emphasizes the eternal symbiosis of Christ's fate and that of the persecution of the Jews: "You and I live perpetual death and resurrection throughout the centuries" (61). Nehemiah also notes that the more zealous the Christians become in their faith, the more the Jews suffer —an indirect allusion to the religious and cultural impact of the Judas figure in the popular Christian mindset. However, even when there are less seemingly prejudiced Christians who receive Jews with comparable good will (an implication of modern Brazil's generally accommodating reception to Jews?), Jews still undergo a form of cultural ostracism as other: "When others more gentle, their tenderness not veering from the hyena's or the ruffian's, receive us benevolently: we live marginally, hated and feared, even though in our hand the only arms we bear is the last coin from a booty stamped with approval by someone who offered it in your name" (61). Here, Nehemiah captures the sense of Jewish alterity by underscoring how he and his ethnic brethren are seen and treated as marginals and stereotypes by the unstigmatized or the "normals," to use another of Erving Goffman's terms.

As he stares more intensely at the crucifix on the wall of that Christian household, Nehemiah reflects upon the overriding focus on Christ's agony and death as the symbolic basis for Christian faith. While thinking of this biblical moment, he draws upon the presence of Jews in that story and explains how Christ's perpetual death and persecution as a Jew are linked to the real and symbolic persecution of Jews throughout history. The symbiosis of these deaths and circumstances lies in the need for Christians to bolster their own faith and identity (at the expense of the Jews) as well as to assuage their guilt, since they believe that Jesus died for man's sins. And as Nehemiah notes, the Jews were always there to serve as a palliative. In other words, Nehemiah considers how the Christians understood their own guilt via the Jews whose presence could ultimately and conveniently serve to relieve them of that guilt. Furthermore, Nehemiah's use of "nós" [we] for humankind, Jews as well as Christians, compounds this symbiotic view.

Arguing another point, Nehemiah stresses the irrefutable historical presence of the Jews prior to Jesus's life on earth, as documented by the Prophets (in Deuteronomy, 2nd century BC). Nehemiah reinforces his observation by stating that the Prophet Jeremiah's lament antedates the Sermon on the Mount as the Prophet Amos's libel antecedes the answer to the rights of Caesar, thereby implying the obvious—that Judaism preceded Christianity and that Jesus was ethnically Jewish: "And why are we to blame if when they seek you out in your most authentic form, in your original clothes, they always see us?" (61).

By juxtaposing Christian logocentrism with Nani's authoritarianism, Rawet (via Nehemiah) also re-creates a modern rendition of the crucifixion scene, where at a Christmas table "without Christ," that is, divested of humane or "Christian" spirit, another Jew is crucified, albeit socially and metaphorically. In this story, Rawet dramatically subverts the positive image of the personable Brazilian "cordial man" and his need for intimacy with others. Moreover, this narrative points to how the cordial man's supposed "living through others" can also be interpreted as his "living at the expense of others," especially when these others are marginal to an idealized Brazilian ethos. Pertinent to the question of ethnic differences, the image of the cordial man is further discredited toward the end of Rawet's story when the strong presence of Nani's authoritarianism is reiterated and reinforced by figuratively showing the calamitous end-result of an absolutist posture, one behaving selectively in its disposition and treatment of others who are viewed as being outside a circumscribed zone of approval. Continuing his historical Judeo-Christian thesis and its relation to Christ's agony on the cross, Nehemiah makes the following commentary as he continues to address the figure of Christ on that crucifix: "and even those who no longer remember

that agony, seeing us, remember that on account of it many times we die: and so they kill us. And from this misconception, procreated over a thousand years, when will we be released, you and I?" (61). By blaming the Jews to appease their own conscience, according to Nehemiah, Christians have created a prejudicial situation not only without solution, but one continually being reproduced in our day and age.

As an unequivocal observation on the ambiguous facade of Brazilian race and ethnic relations, in this story, Samuel Rawet deconstructs the shibboleth of "Brazilian racial democracy" by using his own cultural roots and ethnic resources, via a double perspective gleaned from the experience of alterity, to dismantle a practice that deceptively "accepts" yet insidiously "rejects" peoples marginal to the idealized national code. The third-person narrative accommodates this discourse of alterity because it enables the author to reveal the perspectives from the inside as well as the outside.

In conclusion, the outsider/insider perspective of Brazilian Jewish alterity, as dramatized in Samuel Rawet's story, demonstrates how the Brazilian cultural inside may be perceived vis-à-vis the Jew as an outsider and, in turn, how Brazil as the outside may appear to the Jew as an insider within Brazilian culture. In each case, a double perspective emanates, affording the insider/outsider more resources for understanding the attitudes and behavior of the dominant group. Certainly the manifestation of each perspective on the part of Brazilian Jews, such as Rawet's Nehemiah Goldenberg, suggests that as insiders and outsiders they are keenly attuned to the possibilities of being the censured representative of differentness and otherness. Thus, it is evident why diaspora Jews in Latin America are sometimes obliged to practice "selective inhibition" or the aforementioned "selective ethnicity"—to be or not to be silent about their Jewishness—that is, to respond accordingly when it is convenient or inconvenient to be Jewish. In this vein, it behooves us to consider the potential importance of literature in understanding the phenomenon of alterity and the elusive but perhaps not-so-ambiguous attitudes that nationals manifest toward the Other, particularly when these others are dramatized as dually perceptive outsiders and insiders.

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Jewish Writers of Latin America
A Dictionary

Edited by
Darrell B. Lockhart

Garland Publishing, Inc.
New York and London
1997

Introduction

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To consider Jewish writing as a subdivision of Latin American literature raises a series of complex questions regarding issues that range from the theorizing of identity, both individual and collective, to canon formation. Any approach to the subject of Jewish literature in general must take into account a number of theoretical, methodological, and ontological interpretive strategies in order to define it as a legitimate socioliterary phenomenon. The debate over precisely what elements contribute to the creation of a text that can be designated as Jewish has been going on for some time and promises to continue well into the future. The forum for these discussions has been dominated primarily by a focus on Jewish literature from the United States, Europe, and Israel. Such debate is fueled not only by differing ideological postures established along the lines of nationality, language, ethnicity, and religiosity, but also by the fact that the forces that guide social and literary criticism are constantly changing. In one of the more recent attempts to pinpoint the nature of Jewish literature Hana Wirth-Nesher, in a clever deployment of reader-response theory, places the bulk of responsibility on the recipient of a text when she states that a text's "characterization as Jewish will depend upon the reader and all of the circumstances of its reception" (5).

It is not insignificant that global debates have excluded Latin American Jewish writing as a viable contributor to the wider corpus of works. Such an exclusion directly signals the double marginalization of Latin American Jewish writers. On the grand scale they are marginalized with the rest of Latin America in both geographic and socioeconomic terms as inhabitants of Third-World nations. Furthermore, they exist on the fringes of a society in which the codes, values and mores of the dominant Luso- or Hispano-Catholic society maintain a strong, often nationalistic, cultural hegemony over alter/native identities that do not conform to the established paradigm. In addition, one can maintain that the Jewish woman writer is even further marginalized as a female, constrained by deep-rooted Latin American and Jewish patriarchal traditions. Likewise is the case for Jewish queer writers. Latin American national identities have traditionally been formed around the ideals of cultural homogeneity in which the collective takes precedence over the individual. Therefore, the dynamics of cultural intersubjectivity, or the way in which the different and often disparate elements

interact, are played out under the rubric of center versus margin. Jews, as ex/centric members of Latin American societies, occupy the position of the Other.

Latin American literature in general did not attract global consideration until the mid-1960s with the advent of the so-called Boom. Such writers as Julio Cortázar (1914-84), Gabriel García Márquez (1928), Carlos Fuentes (1928), Mario Vargas Llosa (1936), and José Donoso (1925) burst onto the international scene and focused the world's attention on the vast literary resources of Latin America. The exception to the previous statement is of course Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), whose works began to be noticed outside Argentina in the 1940s, mainly because of their universal appeal rather than for their regional particularism. Traditionally, the Latin American literary canon has been the domain of such consecrated national writers as those mentioned above. Only recently has the process of canon formation been called into question as critical attention has increasingly turned to the examination of subaltern literary voices. Most prominent in this movement has been the reassessment of women's writing. In the circles of academe there has been a concerted effort to promote Latin American women's writing to an English-reading public—the result of which has been the translation and publication of a large number of individual works and anthologies that have brought well-deserved international recognition to women writers. To a lesser extent, other marginal literatures such as Afro-Hispanic and/or Brazilian, indigenous, and gay and lesbian writing have achieved considerable notice. It is within this polyphonic chorus of marginalia that Latin American Jewish literature is situated, and from where any consideration of it as a valid discourse representative of a cultural identity must begin.

Critic Saúl Sosnowski, who has been instrumental in defining the parameters of Latin American Jewish literature, comments: "When in addition to Latin American one adds the defining term Jewish, it is easy to recall astonished gazes and conflicting images of the accepted and simple cliches for both" (1987; 299). This is a fundamental observation regarding the foundation from which Latin American Jewish literature springs, for it points to the lack of understanding about just how far-reaching and deeply entrenched the Jewish-Latin American relationship is. Nevertheless, it has only been in the past fifteen years that Latin American Jewish studies has evolved into a fully developed academic discipline. This has been achieved by the formation of such ground-breaking organizations as the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA), which has attracted a large world-wide membership and has been instrumental in providing a forum and a network for the advancement and dissemination of research in all areas of concern to the history and culture of the Jewish communities of Latin America. Specific to literary studies, the Asociación Internacional de Escritores Judíos en Lengua Hispana y Portuguesa (International Association of Jewish Writers in Spanish and Portuguese), which publishes the literary journal *Noaj* from its headquarters in Jerusalem, has been invaluable for its efforts to promote Jewish literature in Spanish and Portuguese. University curricula have also begun to reflect the growing interest in this area, as courses in Latin American Jewish literature and history are now being offered, though primarily as special topics courses.

A certain level of familiarization with the sociohistorical circumstances that gave rise to the presence of Jews in Latin America is essential to a comprehensive understanding of the forces that have shaped Latin American Jewish literature over the course of its development. It is not within the scope of this brief introduction to recount the details of the Jewish presence in Latin America, which spans a period of over five hundred years. Suffice to say that the history of mass immigration which gave rise to the present-day Jewish communities from Mexico to Argentina belongs to the twentieth century (see the history section in the selected bibliography). Consequently, the history of Jewish literature in Latin America begins in the twentieth century as well. This is not to say that there are no Jewish-authored texts in Latin America prior to this time. One of the earliest and most significant testimonies of Jewish life in colonial Latin America was left by Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva (1539-91?). He and his family were persecuted and finally condemned by the Inquisition in Mexico for Judaizing—that is, secretly practicing the Jewish religion and customs. The nineteenth century saw the appearance of Jorge Isaacs (1837-95), who became one of the canonical Latin American authors, and whose novel *María* (1867) gained an immediate fame throughout the Spanish-speaking world that continues to this day. Nevertheless, Isaacs virtually stands alone as a nineteenth-century Jewish writer. Moreover, his own Jewish identity as well as the content of his work is rarely noted (see Doris Sommer's essay on Issacs in this volume and her "*María*'s Disease").

The figure of the Jew as literary device and romantic metaphor (Jew-as-object) in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latin American literature precedes the appearance of the genuine Jewish subject in literary texts. Some of the most obvious examples include the novel *La hija del judío* (1849) by Mexican author Justo Sierra O'Reilly (1848-1912) in which the Jewishness of the protagonist serves as a symbolic voice to promote anticlericalism. Latin American Modernism found the figure of the Jew useful for promulgating the ideals of societal advancement and progressive modernization that characterized the movement. Rubén Darío (1867-1916) and Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) both incorporated highly idyllic images of Jews as synedoches to demonstrate the

benefits of programmatic immigration to Argentina (Senkman "La representación del judío").

Other important literary characterizations of Jews by non-Jewish writers sought quite a different goal. In Argentina, several blatantly anti-Semitic novels portrayed the Jew as a dangerous invader by utilizing popular negative stereotypes, informed in large part by the bogus *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Such texts as *La bolsa* (The Stockmarket; 1891) by Julián Martel (pseudonym of José María Miró [1867-96]) and the two-part *Kahal* and *Oro* (1935) by Hugo Wast (pseudonym of Gustavo Adolfo Martínez Zuviría [1883-1954]), director of the National Library, were widely circulated and read. They were primarily based on myths about Jewish schemes to take over the banks, control the stock market, and ultimately gain complete economic control of the country. Jewish conspiracy myths have survived and have informed the ideology of the extreme right in Argentina to the present day (Rock; Senkman *El antisemitismo*). The Jewish poet and dramatist César Tiempo (pseudonym of Israel Zeitlin [1906-80]) wrote a scathing response to Wast's caustic literature published as *La campaña antisemita y el director de la Biblioteca Nacional* (The Anti-Semitic Campaign and the Director of the National Library; 1935). In *El mal metafísico* (The Metaphysical Malaise; 1922) Manuel Gálvez (1889-1950), one of the major figures of the Argentine canon, propagates anti-Semitic stereotypes through the negative portrayal of Jews as poor, dirty, physically unappealing, conniving, morally corrupt, and as usurers.

Throughout Latin America non-Jewish writers have approached Jewish subjects with varying results. Mexican authors Carlos Fuentes and Homero Aridjis (1931) recall the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the precarious existence of the *conversos* in the New World, Fuentes in *Terra nostra* (1975) and Aridjis in his two-volume historical narrative comprised of *1492: vida y tiempos de Juan Cabezón de Castilla* (*1492: The Life and Times of Juan Cabezón de Castilla*; 1985) and *Memorias del Nuevo Mundo* (Memories of the New World; 1988). Critic Seymour Menton found Aridjis's *1492* so authentically "Jewish" as to include it in his analysis of the Jewish Latin American historical novel. *Morirás lejos* (*A Distant Death*; 1967) by Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco (1939) and *Vastas emoções e pensamentos imperfeitos* (Vast Emotions and Imperfect Thoughts; 1988) by Brazilian Rubem Fonseca (1925), are both texts by non-Jewish authors that approach the topic of the Holocaust. Likewise, author Carlos Heitor Cony (1926) of Brazil creates a Jewish protagonist and a Jewishly motivated plot in his 1967 novel *Pessach: a travessia* (Pessach: The Crossing) in which the main character undergoes a type of awakening regarding his Jewish identity. The novel speaks quite effectively to the issue of assimilation and it

parallels the marginal condition of Jewishness with political opposition during a time of military dictatorship in Brazil, both of which run counter to official conceptions of the national character

Finally, as a non-Jewish author, Jorge Luis Borges must be considered as unique among the previously mentioned writers. It is not difficult to sustain the notion of Borges as one of the most Jewish of Latin American authors. His intense interest in and study of Judaica led him to write a significant portion of his literature which is not only thematically, but more significantly is structurally or stylistically Jewish. His emphasis on Kabbalistic thinking, Jewish mysticism and mythology, as well as his focus on the power of the written word, hidden meanings, and textual labyrinths single him out as a Jewish writer par excellence. Various critics have cogently investigated these elements in Borges's works toward a delineation of the writer's uniquely Jewish perspective (Alazraki; Aizenberg; Sosnowski *Borges y la Cábala*; Solotorevsky).

The foregoing observations regarding non-Jewish writers who write "Jewish" texts lead to an important critical question. What is it that renders a text "Jewish?" Certainly, it is not the mere fact that an author can be identified as a Jew. Such reductionist labelling serves little purpose and indeed is counterproductive. It places restrictions on writers whose works as a whole surpass or are not limited to an identifiable connection with Judaic tradition. Furthermore, it seemingly establishes the precedence of Jewish over Latin American identity and transforms the hyphen that joins the two together into an instrument of separation. Some authors do not adhere to a Jewish identity, either ethnically or religiously. Many Latin American Jewish intellectuals have embraced Marxism in lieu of Judaism as a means of mediating cultural identity. This is not an uncommon practice, as Mark Shechner explains with regard to American Jewish writers: "It is not mistaken to regard Marxism, at a certain moment of its penetration into Jewish existence, as a substitute Judaism, endowed with all the powers once possessed by halakhic or Orthodox Judaism for interpreting the world, dictating principles, forming character, and regulating conduct" (8). Uruguayan author and social critic Egon Friedler recently questioned the ideological foundation of this practice among Latin American Jewish intellectuals, particularly as it relates to Jewish identity.

The interpretation of identity is a highly personal one that occurs on an individual level. Therefore, it is for each author to decide what being Jewish means for him or her and how it will be enacted in the process of daily living. Others choose not to incorporate Jewishly defined elements, at least overtly, into their works. Indeed, so-called Jewish texts often form only a minimal part of a given writer's entire *oeuvre*, which more often deals with the complexities of

Latin American reality. Moreover, the Jewish perspective is never separate from the larger social environment, but instead provides for the possibility of a dialogic discourse of alterity. Jewishness, then, is not necessarily a self-evident component of a text. Nevertheless, returning to the question of the author, there is a significant distinction to be made. Non-Jewish authors write *about* the periphery, while Jewish authors are relegated to the position of writing *from* the periphery. So, while Borges or any other may be able to write *like* a Jew in terms of style or theme, they cannot write *as* a Jew. Latin American Jewish authors, on the other hand, write both as Jews and as Latin Americans as they draw on two cultural and historical sources for their writing, each an integral part of their identity.

In spite of the problematics surrounding the characterization of Jewish writing as a subcategory of Latin American literature, one cannot overlook the fact that as a corpus of works, texts written by Jewish authors work in conjunction to forge a Latin American Jewish discourse. As authors bring to the page, and thereby to the scrutiny of the reading public, topics of Jewish concern within a Latin American context, they provide a unique lens through which to view their individual societies. The forces that shape these authors' texts may include, in part, issues pertaining to Jewish identity such as immigration, assimilation, acculturation, religious and ethnic identity, language, Zionism, anti-Semitism, and Judaic tradition, as well as Latin American sociopolitical realities like authoritarianism, economic underdevelopment, and nonpluralistic societies. Each of these topics may be approached from and motivated by different viewpoints and/or opposing ideological stances, but together they constitute the artistic expression of a shared Jewish collective social reality as experienced throughout Latin America. However, one must be careful not to conceive of Latin America as a single geographical space in which the Jewish experience unfolds, even within the boundaries of a single country. The cosmopolitan environment of a city like Buenos Aires informs the Jewish writer's worldview in a way that is substantially different from one who wrote as an immigrant farmer in the interior of the country. Likewise, it is just as dissimilar to the writer in Mexico City, Caracas, or São Paulo, where differences derive from distinct historical, linguistic, and cultural circumstances.

As a vehicle for a culturally specific discourse, though not necessarily a homogeneous one, Latin American Jewish writing constitutes a socioliterary phenomenon that exercises and contributes to the creation of cultural identity. Also, as a social text marked by its decentered marginal status as a minority discourse, Jewish writing serves an important function as a countervoice to official discourse. Latin American Jewish writing, like other minority literatures,

endures as a contestatory response to the hegemonic telling of social history. Jewish writers offer a reversion of events and challenge the facticity and authority of the established canon as the authentic voice of Latin America. This does not imply that they seek to demarcate a new set of truths, but rather to question the process by which accepted truths have been established as such.

Contemporary critical theories associated with postmodernism and postcolonialism readily lend themselves to the analysis of Latin American Jewish literature. It may at first seem contradictory to think of this writing in postmodernist terms inasmuch as this seems to indicate a break with tradition, the negation of the master narrative, and the denial of historical authority, all of which results in the apparent dissolution of textual coherence. Nevertheless, there are convincing arguments for viewing Jewish literature as abiding, at least in part, to the posturing of postmodern textual practices.

Norman Finkelstein has aptly described the influence of postmodernism on several major American and European Jewish intellectuals, and his discussion is equally germane to the situation of contemporary Latin Americans. He begins his assessment by stating that postmodernism has failed to attract what he terms "self-conscious" Jewish writers and intellectuals—those who ascribe to a Jewish identity—because they tend to adhere to history and cultural metanarratives of Jewish tradition. However, this fact, he goes on to state, does not prevent Jewish intellectuals from being affected by the postmodern world in which they live and operate. He utilizes Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* to point out that this fundamental component of postmodernist ideology "speaks directly to Jewish intellectuals' self-conception, their understanding of their obviously vexed Jewish identity and the role they play in the greater drama of culture at large" (15-16). Similarly, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon theorizes postmodern narrative as what she calls "historiographic metafiction," defined as texts that are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). She cogently explicates how postmodern thought has led to a valuing of the margins as a result of the disintegration of the center (see especially chapter 4, 57-73). What these critics have in common and what they share with others is their reliance on Derrida's *différance* as the basis for an advantageous marginal position from which to speak. This concept has most recently been applied specifically to the context of Latin American Jewish writing by Nelson H. Vieira, who relies heavily upon *différance* as the guiding ideologeme in establishing the theoretical framework of his analysis of Brazilian Jewish literature. He relates Derrida's suitability to his study in the following way.

> Derrida's ideas and expositions are especially relevant to my discussion because he demonstrates how Judaic hermeneutics reflect his own stress upon the importance of textuality and writing and how différance relates to philosophy and literature as well as to power, knowledge, and politics. (41)

The privileging of the margins has produced an inversion of the hegemony maintained by colonial Luso- and/or Hispano-centric totalizing discourse. Contemporary Latin American Jewish discourse, then, is fashioned out of the postmodern conception of identity formation based on difference as opposed to conformity. The clarifying term "contemporary" must be used here since early manifestations of Jewish writing operated on the hope of inclusion, before the realization that exclusionary practices would systematically relegate it to a marginal status. Finkelstein, though referring to the subjects of his study, makes an important observation that can equally be applied to Latin American writers.

> Through the assertion of difference, Jewish intellectuals reveal their historical—or better, counterhistorical—aspect. Secular, largely assimilated, they speak of culture and to culture, knowing all the while that culture itself can be understood as a play of differences. Yet they do not dissolve completely into this play of differences [...] They cleave to the narratives of culture, including that of Judaism itself—a narrative of difference from which they are free to speak. (17)

This assessment also signals the role, or one could even say the responsibility, of Jewish authors as creators of culture and keepers of collective memory. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi also seems to ascribe to these notions when he declares "it would appear that even where Jews do not reject history out of hand, they are not prepared to confront it directly, but seem to await a new, metahistorical myth, for which the novel provides at least a temporary modern surrogate" (98). This in turn reverts back to Hutcheon's conceptualization of historiographic metafiction as a means of "rethinking and reworking the forms and contents of the past" (5). In this way many Latin American Jewish authors not only break with conventional modes of literary creation, but they also undertake a process of de/scribing the nature of contemporary Latin American and/or Jewish identity. Jewish writing reveals itself as postcolonial discourse in the way in which aspects of the texts that characterize them as marginal increasingly become superimposed on the values and traits of the center. For example, this is most readily

apparent in works that incorporate multiple linguistic encodements and culturally specific referents that function doubly as the signifier and the signified within a given context. One of the more common narrative strategies employed by authors is to create polyphonic texts by including words, phrases, and expressions in Jewish languages like Yiddish, Hebrew, and Ladino, as well as national languages that signal origin such as Russian, Polish, or Arabic. By doing so, the author resists homogenization by the dominant culture symbolized by the monolingually-restricted canon and the consequent loss of an alter/native identity.

This leads to the characterization of much of Latin American Jewish literature as being essentially dialogic in nature. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic imagination neatly applies to the vast majority of Jewish-authored texts in Latin American literature. The interaction of different narrative voices, languages, points of view, and the semiotic connotations embedded in utterances, all contribute to the heteroglossia of a given text (Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination*). At the core of Bakhtin's theory is the notion that language is the primary motivator of and vehicle for the transmission of ideology, or what Fredric Jameson would call the "political unconscious" of a text. The protagonist of the Latin American Jewish novel often functions as the mediator of multiple voices who may or may not aid the reader in sorting out the myriad layers of meaning that constitute the heteroglossic strata of the text. This textual dialogue between center and margin is one of the defining features of Latin American Jewish literature.

While sociohistorical circumstances specific to individual countries have influenced Jewish writing within national boundaries, as a whole Jewish literature has evolved through a series of basically common stages throughout Latin America over the course of the twentieth century. Any discussion of the development of this literature into an identifiable socioliterary phenomenon as it is today must begin in Argentina with Alberto Gerchunoff (1884-1950). Argentina, as home to the world's fifth-largest Jewish population, consequently produces the overwhelming majority of Jewish literature in Latin America. Two recent bibliographic publications illustrate the enormity of the Argentine Jewish literary community: David William Foster's and Naomi Lindstrom's primary bibliography of works by over three hundred writers "Jewish Argentine Authors: A Registry," and the two-volume biobibliographical source book *Escritores judeo-argentinos: bibliografía 1900-1987* (Jewish-Argentine Writers: A Bibliography 1900-1987; 1994), compiled by Ana E. Weinstein and Miryam E. Gover de Nasatsky, which lists over two hundred authors.

Gerchunoff is generally perceived to be the forefather of Jewish literary tradition in Argentina, and by extension in the whole of Latin America. His 1910

Los gauchos judíos (*The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*), which can be read either as a novel or as a collection of interrelated short stories, is widely considered to be the urtext of Latin American Jewish literature. It was written on commission from Leopoldo Lugones, who encouraged Gerchunoff to provide a specifically Jewish work as part of the cultural festivities in celebration of the Argentine Centennial. Gerchunoff was driven by a strong desire to assimilate into Argentine society and he viewed the nation as a literal Promised Land in which the Jew could find earthly and spiritual redemption from the hardships of Eastern Europe and Russia. He was the first, and one of the few, Jewish writers to gain acceptance into mainstream Argentine literature, and by extension society. His writing—first and foremost *Los gauchos judíos*—has become normalized into the Argentine literary canon to such a point that he no longer represents a problem, as a Jewish writer, within a predominantly Hispano-Catholic literary tradition. This is the case largely because of his engagement in a life-long program of identity formation by which he consciously and energetically sought to forge a nonthreatening identity as an Argentine of Jewish descent. A central part of such a process of self-identification was Gerchunoff's insistence on language—in this case Spanish—as the vehicle by which he constructed his personal and his cultural identity. Although *Los gauchos judíos* endures as his most familiar work, and it is still the most-read work by a Jewish author in Argentina, he wrote over twenty other books.

Contemporary critics such as David Viñas, Saúl Sosnowski, and Gladys Onega have found ample reason to criticize *Los gauchos judíos* for its idyllic, glossed-over representation of the early immigrant experience at the turn of the century. In sum, they reproach the author's motivation for writing a work that would gain him favor with the established conservative literary and political power centers of the country. Naomi Lindstrom approaches the text from a different optic, insightfully analyzing the influence of Eastern European Jewish thought in the author's narrative. Leonardo Senkman and Beatriz Stambler are the two critics who have most thoroughly analyzed Gerchunoff's contribution to Argentine literature. Senkman apportions a significant part of his book *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (1983) to the examination of Gerchunoff's works. He focuses primarily on Gerchunoff's effort to legitimize the Jewish presence in Argentina by recalling the Sephardic past of the Iberian peninsula in literature, language, and culture in the hope of establishing a Hispano-Jewish commonality. Stambler's *Vida y obra de Alberto Gerchunoff* (1985) is the most complete study to date on Gerchunoff's literary corpus as a whole. These different critical approaches and interpretations provide an idea as to the multiplicity

of meanings found in the text and also of the sociopolitical motivations underlying it.

Gerchunoff's influence as an author and journalist has impacted subsequent generations of writers in Argentina, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The first generation of Jewish writers to succeed Gerchunoff included Samuel Eichelbaum (1894-1967), Enrique Espinosa (pseud. of Samuel Glusberg; 1897-1987), Carlos Grünberg (1903-68), Lázaro Liacho (1897-1969), and César Tiempo, all of whom reached a level of relatively lasting fame owed, at least in part, to the door opened to them by the efforts of Gerchunoff. Several authors of this generation, namely Grünberg and Espinosa, continued to seek official acceptance into Argentine society by insisting on the building of the Hispano-Sephardic cultural bridge. Curiously, all of these authors were of Ashkenazic origin with no real ties to Sephardic tradition or culture.

Contemporary heirs of Gerchunoff often portray the Jewish experience in Argentina with a perspective 180 degrees from that of *Los gauchos judíos*. Mario Szichman most readily comes to mind as an author who represents the anti-Gerchunoff figure, with all the parricidal implications the term connotes. His saga of the Pechof family—(*La crónica falsa* [The False Chronicle; 1969], revised in 1972 as *La verdadera crónica falsa* [The True False Chronicle]; *Los judíos del Mar Dulce* [The Jews of the Fresh-Water Sea; 1971]; *A las 20:25 la señora entró en la inmortalidad* [*At 8:25 Evita Became Immortal*; 1981])—depicts a very different reality for the Jews of Argentina. In spite of his (in)version of Gerchunoff's original model, however, *Los gauchos judíos* is incontrovertibly the master narrative that informs Szichman's trilogy.

Generally speaking, Latin American Jewish literature can be grouped into three generational periods. The first represents the generation in which authors focus thematically on the experience of immigration. Feelings of alienation in a new country, nostalgia for the old country, the desire to gain acceptance while maintaining Jewish cultural identity, the depiction of economic hardship and the strife of establishing roots in a foreign land are all common themes to this generation of writers. The second phase is carried out primarily by the children of immigrants who, as first-generation Latin Americans, feel a closer bond to the dominant culture than to the traditions, languages, and religious identity of their parents. Literature of this generation is characterized by interfamilial conflict brought on by issues of rapid assimilation, intermarriage, loss or shunning (depending on the perspective) of traditional values in favor of blending into the dominant society. Second-generation authors also tend to openly confront matters that directly affect them as Jews such as anti-Semitism, and as citizens and full participants in national politics. With the realization that as

Jews they are granted at best second-class citizenship within Luso- and Hispano-Catholic societies, these writers no longer are concerned with not offending those in power. Instead, they boldly assert their alterity and they challenge hegemonic versions of Latin American cultural identity. Third- and fourth-generation writers, almost exclusively secular and completely assimilated, often seek a return to and recovery of Jewish identity by salvaging the remnants of their ethnoreligious heritage through literature. Many write texts based on family genealogy and history in an attempt to preserve and/or restore cultural memory. The narrative of nostalgic remembrance is common, often told through the voice of a child narrator. The literary text becomes an exercise of self-identification as authors attempt to blend their Jewish past with their Latin American present in such a way as to fuse the two elements into a single identity.

The number of works that attempt to give expression to the devastation of the Holocaust is quite limited relative to the enormous quantity of texts that comprise the Latin American Jewish literary corpus. Most provide fictional accounts of how Jewish communities dealt with the effects of the Holocaust and its aftermath specific to the context of Latin American societies. Texts range from the allegorical to fictionalized accounts of survival and endurance. The majority of authors that deal with the topic include it as but one element of a given text rather than as the central theme. Argentines Bernardo Verbitsky (1907-79), Bernardo Kordon (1915), and especially Simja Sneh (1914), a Holocaust survivor, stand out as authors who have given expression to this greatest of Jewish tragedies. Sneh, incidentally, also survived the terrorist bombing of the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina [Argentine Jewish Mutual Association]) building in July of 1994 in which nearly one hundred people fell victim to a virulent act of anti-Semitism. In Brazil, both Zevi Ghivelder (1934) and Eliezer Levin (date unknown) have written novels with significant content relating to the Holocaust.

The Latin American Jewish historical novel is a prevalent form of narrative among contemporary writers. Such works tend to be rather lengthy narrations in which authors combine fiction with historical fact, and often with a good deal of fantasy. Common to this type of text is the reaffirmation of the Jewish presence as part of the ethnic and cultural heritage of Latin America by creating narratives that conform to what Hutcheon designated as historiographic metafiction and what Yerushalmi termed the novelistic metahistorical myth. As counterversions of official discourse these novels represent a direct challenge to the center in their brazen attempt to rewrite the historico-cultural memory of Latin America. They harken back to Sepharad, the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the colonial era in Latin America. Likewise, they are populated by

heroic protagonists who overcome persecution, survive in exile, and maintain the integrity of their Jewish identity. Notwithstanding their focus on the past, many times these novels speak directly to the present. The themes of the Inquisition, persecution, and exile parallel the reality of contemporary Latin Americans living under fascist military regimes. Some of the most exemplary of these texts include *Aventuras de Edmund Ziller en tierras del Nuevo Mundo* (Adventures of Edmund Ziller in the Lands of the New World; 1977) by Pedro Orgambide (1929), *Identidad* (Identity; 1980) by Antonio Elio Brailovsky (1946), *La gesta del marrano* (The Epic Song of the Jew; 1991) by Marcos Aguinis (1935) in Argentina; *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (*The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes*; 1983) by Moacyr Scliar (1937) in Brazil; *Tierra adentro* (Homeward Bound; 1977) by Angelina Muñiz-Huberman (1936) in Mexico; and *Colombina descubierta* (Discovered Colombine; 1991) by Alicia Freilich Segal (1939) in Venezuela.

Israel and Zionism, as a political movement and ideology of the national resurrection of the Jewish people, have had a wide-reaching and lasting effect on Latin American Jews. Zionism was embraced by many as a way to express a nonreligious Jewish identity, and in fact became the religion of the majority of Latin American Jews. It allowed them to demythify their Jewishness in religious terms and align themselves politically as Jews to the new Jewish homeland. This, of course, stimulated a great deal of mistrust against Jews as questions of dual loyalty were raised. Israel and Zionism as literary motifs figure most prominently in the literature of Argentina and Brazil, and to a lesser extent in Mexico. Poetry proved to be the preferred genre for singing praises of Zion and celebrating the creation of the Jewish state, although the themes also appear in narrative and essay.

Theater, as a literary genre and mode of artistic and cultural expression, is able to reach a large number of people simultaneously and directly. Yiddish theater troupes thrived in Argentina during the first part of the twentieth century and enjoyed considerable success in Brazil and Mexico as well, due to the larger populations and the organization of the Jewish communities. Although the heyday of Yiddish drama faded, the tradition of the theater survived through a number of Jewish dramatists who have achieved national and international recognition for their works, and several have been major influences in defining and developing the nature of Latin American theater. They bring to the stage the reality of the Latin American Jewish experience and provide an important medium for the dissemination and continuance of cultural diversity. Samuel Eichelbaum, Osvaldo Dragún (1929), Ricardo Halac (1935), Germán Rozenmacher (1936-71), Jorge Goldenberg (1941) and Diana Raznovich (1943) in Argentina, Isaac Chocrón (1930) and Elisa Lerner (1932) in Venezuela, Samuel Rovinski

(1932) in Costa Rica, and Sabina Berman (1954) in Mexico have all been instrumental in shaping theatrical traditions and form in their respective countries.

Women writers deserve a special mention for their extensive and highly innovative contributions to Latin American Jewish literature. They provide a unique perspective on both the Jewish and Latin American traditions. In Mexico, women writers constitute the overwhelming majority of Jewish authors and their literature ranks with that of the best in the country. Brazilian Clarice Lispector (1926-77) is easily the most well-known and widely read woman writer from Latin America. Although her works do not reflect any overt treatment of Jewish themes, several critics have recently approached her writing as revealing a Jewish sensibility in her style and creative process (Vieira; Wengrover; Schiminovich). Likewise is the case of the controversial Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-72) (Goldberg). Writers like Marjorie Agosín (1955) from Chile, Teresa Porzecanski (1945) from Uruguay, Alicia Steimberg (1933), Silvia Plager (1942), and Cecilia Absatz (1943) from Argentina, Sabina Berman, Margo Glantz (1930), Esther Seligson (1941), Angelina Muñiz-Huberman and Sara Levi Calderón (1942) from Mexico contribute to the making of a Jewish feminist discourse in Latin American literature as they write against patriarchal tradition while affirming a strong Jewish identity.

While the thematics of Jewishness continue to dominate Jewish writing in Latin America, there is an increasing number of authors who are beginning to surpass theme to concentrate on Judaic substance. Put differently, in some instances their writing represents an evolutionary change described by Irving Howe as a "transition from Jewishness as experience to Jewishness as essence" (70); that is, texts that contain Jewish metaphysical content, Kabbalism, a reliance on Hebraic hermeneutics, an emphasis on textual interpretation, Midrashic commentary, Talmudic exegesis, and the power of the written letter and word. This does not mean that writers replicate these styles of writing, but that their literature draws on and is informed by these traditionally Jewish modes of scriptural production and thought. This type of writing, represented by authors like Mario Satz (1944), and Marcos Ricardo Barnatán (1946) adds a new dimension to Latin American Jewish literature.

While Jewish authors have made significant contributions to Latin American literature, they continue to remain on the margins of what is considered to be the canon. Most are not widely read, even within their own countries. The few who have gained international recognition—Clarice Lispector, Moacyr Scliar, Humberto Costantini (1924-87), Isaac Goldemberg (1945) to name a few—represent but a small fraction of the hundreds of authors who have joined voices to produce the socioliterary manifestation of Latin American Jewish identity. When one peruses the many dictionaries, encyclopedias, histories, anthologies, and bibliographies of Latin American literature, one of the most striking features common to them all is the resounding echo of absence created by the underrepresentation of Jewish authors. Their voices speak to us from the margins and challenge us to read Latin America from their alter/native perspective.

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JEWISH WRITERS OF LATIN AMERICA
A DICTIONARY

EDITED BY
DARRELL B. LOCKHART

GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1997

GERCHUNOFF, ALBERTO (Argentina; 1884-1950)

It in no way diminishes the stature of Alberto Gerchunoff in Argentine literature as an essayist, novelist, journalist, and literary critic to judge his collection of stories, *Los gauchos judíos* (*The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*; 1910), as his finest and most enduring contribution to Argentine letters. The hitherto parochial Jew of the agricultural colonies entered upon the Argentine national literary scene and became the focus of a still-continuing debate as to the manner and extent of the Jew's acculturation within the Argentine national identity. Leonardo Senkman calls it a "literary and national baptism" (17). Even as intellectual and cosmopolitan an author as Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) considers it the foremost reflection of Gerchunoff's innermost thoughts and emotions and the core from which his literary work emanates. Since its publication, Argentine literature has frequently and exhaustively debated the interaction of the Jewish immigrant with a national culture—a preoccupation not duplicated in any other American literature, with the exception of the United States's literary explosion of the 1950s with writers such as Philip Roth (1933), Saul Bellow (1915), Bernard Malamud (1914-86), et al. *Los gauchos judíos* acquired an international audience when it was translated into English by Prudencio de Pereda in 1955 and became a movie under the aegis of Juan José Jusid in 1975.

While Gerchunoff's avowed intent was to demonstrate the harmonious integration of the Jewish immigrant with the telluric and ideological nature of his Argentine environment, his literary kinship with Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916) is a function of their shared sensitivity in capturing distinctive Jewish communities in a specific time and space through literary vignettes. As Aleichem immortalized life in the Eastern European Jewish *shtetl* of Karisileve through the eyes of Tevye, the milkman, so Alberto Gerchunoff performed the same function for the Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.) agricultural colonies of Baron Hirsch on the Argentine plains. It may be argued that the contrast between Aleichem's ironic and melancholy vision of the reality of the Jew's precarious existence in Eastern Europe and Gerchunoff's romanticized remembrance of the colonies as an almost biblical re-creation of an Argentine New Zion is sharp enough to invalidate such an assessment. Both authors did, however, recapture for succeeding generations, an era and a lifestyle which were to disappear; the European through fear and hostility; the Argentine, through abandonment of the rural for the urban environment. In addition, their literary vignettes of different areas and periods of Jewish cultural formation underscore the resistance of the Judaic tradition to assault, whether by a hostile European or a more benign

Argentine environment. And finally, while Aleichem's realism contrasts sharply with Gerchunoff's romanticism, both display a melancholy optimism in a Jewish continuum. Tevye reluctantly abandons the familiar, Judaic routine of the no-longer habitable Karisileve for a freer Jewish life in America, while despite hints of local anti-Semitism, Gerchunoff envisions a future Argentina where complete religious and ethnic harmony will reign.

Gerchunoff's image of an Argentine New Zion is fashioned in the first chapter of *Los gauchos judíos* in the sordid and the eternally snow-covered town of Tulcin in Russia. There, before a small boy, the town elders and the visiting Sephardic rabbi envisage a return to the biblical mission of the Jew as a tiller of the soil, fulfilling his traditional destiny on the plains of Argentina. This chapter also enunciates what were to be Gerchunoff's three main literary themes: the heartland/Judaism, the homeland/Argentina, and the Cervantes *academe*/Don Quijote. The Jewish elders of the heartland hail the Argentine homeland as a New Zion, as the Sephardic rabbi prophesies a new Jewish *Siglo de Oro* (Golden Age) in Argentina as had occurred in Spain until the Diaspora in 1492; whereby Gerchunoff became an inheritor, through the Sephardic Hispanic cultural tradition, of the literary fellowship of Quixotism.

The Argentine New Zion became a reality on his arrival at the age of six at the agricultural colony of Moisés Ville, Province of Santa Fe, where he stayed until the death of his father, when the family moved in the colony of Rajil in Entre Ríos. Finding it difficult to cope alone, the widow Gerchunoff relocated the family to Buenos Aires in 1895, where the twelve-year-old Alberto worked at a variety of menial factory jobs, including weaver and cigarette maker, and also as a street vendor, to accumulate the funds necessary to pursue a secondary education. Unable to finish for lack of money, Gerchunoff continued his informal education in the public libraries of Buenos Aires. In the course of such studies, he met Enrique Dickmann (1874-1955) who introduced him to the Argentine Socialist Party and members of the influential inner literary circle, which included Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938), Manuel Gálvez (1889-1950), José Ingenieros (1877-1925), Ricardo Rojas (1882-1957), and Roberto Payró (1876-1928). Payró sponsored his entry to the staff of *La Nación* (The Nation, Buenos Aires's most prestigious newspaper) in 1908, where he remained as a writer of obituaries, columnist, reviewer, and commentator, in addition to working independently as a novelist, satirist, and essayist, until his sudden death in 1950.

Los gauchos judíos, a compilation of articles which began appearing in *La Nación* in 1908, was published at the time of the Argentine Centennial in 1910, against a background of hope and optimism for ethnic harmony. It represents Gerchunoff's blueprint for a successful synthesis of the heartland with the

homeland. The cowed *shtetl* dweller combines with the Argentine prototype, the gaucho, to produce a bold, compassionate, freedom-loving hybrid who incorporates the best of both cultures. Unfortunately, the synthesis does not withstand close analysis. The Jewish colonist was more accurately a sedentary *chacarero* (farmer) rather than a nomadic, *macho*, solitary rider of the plains of Argentine legend. Yet it does reflect what Gerchunoff assessed to be the Jew's best hope for complete integration into the new Argentina. Beginning with the assimilation of the tortured but noble features of the Jewish immigrant with those of the robust, local Argentines through marriage in his early writings and culminating in *Los gauchos judíos*, Gerchunoff traces a trajectory for Jewish acceptance in the Argentine New Zion, which basically advocates total Jewish assimilation into the Argentine body politic and individual. The Semana Trágica (The Tragic Week) in 1919 in which Jewish inhabitants of Buenos Aires were assaulted and their businesses vandalized by bands of roving youths, however, made the continuance of such ethnic myopia difficult to sustain. A hint of latent anti-Semitism had surfaced to disturb some of the idyllic vignettes of *Los gauchos judíos* as in the death of Rabbi Abraham, Gerchunoff's father, murdered by a drunken gaucho (47-49), who (Gerchunoff neglects to state) was beaten to death on the spot by the enraged colonists; the false accusation of horsetheft against a colonist who was prejudged guilty because he opted to pay an unjust fine rather than lose precious harvesting manhours in a court appearance (78-81); and "La lechuza" (The Owl), where the tragic arrival of a bloodied, riderless horse presages the death of the rider at the hands of local bandits to a fearful mother and sister (49-53).

But Gerchunoff did not deliberately or directly challenge Argentine anti-Semitism in print until a prologue to the Argentine edition of a book on modern Jewish thought, *Renacimiento de Israel* (Rebirth of Israel) by Ludwig Lewisohn in 1942, wherein he passionately decries the political, social, and personal humiliations and restrictions imposed upon the Jew in the name of Argentine nationalism, (*El pino y la palmera* 67-81). Other articles dealing with the precarious Jewish situation globally, as well as in Argentina, appeared in 1944 and 1945 (*El pino y la palmera* 135-69, 170-81). But as he admitted to the pathetic incapacity of the Jewish heartland to be fully assimilated into any national homeland, to the point of de-assimilation (as had occurred in Spain, Germany, Romania, Hungary and Italy (*El pino y la palmera* 165), even when it so desired, Gerchunoff persisted in seeking a viable formula. The revised synthesis, rather than seeking total assimilation, now emphasized multiethnicity or multiculturalism. The Jew retained his ethnic identity within the synthesis, abandoning the concept of a *crisol de razas* (racial fusion) to create a new Argentine national entity. The Jew was

no longer simply an Argentine, but now a Judeo-Argentine, primarily, through exclusion and secondarily, by choice.

The Jewish heartland is a continuum in Gerchunoff's work. In *Enrique Heine* (1932), Gerchunoff says Kaddish (a Hebrew prayer for the dead) at Heine's grave in Paris, in response to a Heine lament that no one would say Kaddish for him at his death in a foreign land. Jacopo Botoshansky theorizes that Heine's attraction for Gerchunoff stemmed from his misinterpretation of Heine's statement that he was a German poet, in the same manner as Gerchunoff considered himself an Argentine writer. Botoshansky cites the actual quote reflecting the idea that Heine was actually a poet in Germany, stressing the artist rather than the nationality (150). Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) is remembered in *Los amores de Baruj Spinoza* (The Loves of Baruch Spinoza; 1932), the recounting of an alleged love affair with the daughter of his patron. *El pino y la palmera* (The Pine and the Palm Tree; 1952), a posthumous collection of his writings, chronicles his lifelong preoccupation with the Jewish condition both in Argentina and abroad. Articles abound on specific Jewish figures, such as Maimónides, Rabbi Sem Tob, and others. He evinces surprise that others are amazed at the rapid acculturation of the Jew to Argentina, ignoring the fact that the Jew was simply resuming a language and culture which had been an inheritance from the Sephardic experience in Spain. He further confesses that after a exhausting day in the atmosphere of a totally Christian environment, he draws on the magic of Scholem Aleichem's tales of the Karisileve ghetto to revive his spirits and to gird himself for the next day's battle of survival (31-32, 45-52, 55-66, 103-12).

The cloak of silence which enveloped most Argentine writers during the Perón era also affected Gerchunoff's literary production. With the post-Holocaust years, he became a vociferous supporter of the creation of the State of Israel (a haven he only previously advocated for those orthodox Jews who were unable to adapt to the freedom and openness of a national homeland (cited in *Davar* 31-33 (1951): 77-78), making numerous speeches and appearances on Israel's behalf. His last published discussion of the Jewish heartland appeared in the newspaper, *El Tiempo* (Time) of Bogotá in rebuttal to an anti-Semitic article. Here he expressed his painful solidarity with all Jews who had suffered, simply for being so, and with those who uphold the values of spirituality and truth (*El pino y la palmera* 188-89).

Defense of the Jewish heartland was matched by equal passion for his adopted Argentine homeland. Each discussion of Judaism was echoed by a passionate declaration of the special destiny of the homeland. Argentina was indeed the New Zion despite some defects in her treatment of her Jewish citizens. With assimilation, the Jew would become an Argentine like any other and share in its

glorious future. Even in the grim reality of the Semana Trágica and the anti-Semitic nationalistic atmosphere of 1930s and 1940s, Gerchunoff persisted in the hope that this was a temporary phenomena, imported from abroad, which would be finally and decisively rejected by thinking and sensitive Argentines of good will (*El pino y la palmera* 81). While conceding the naivete of such optimism in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, it should be remembered that Gerchunoff had known no other homeland. The nostalgia for the colonies of the J.C.A., where he absorbed the myth of the gaucho; the camaraderie of the early bohemia of the cafes of Buenos Aires with noted Argentine literary and political figures; the national recognition accorded his literary endeavors; his elder statesman status in the Jewish community, all combined to make Argentina his own particular New Zion, despite its deficiencies.

Los gauchos judíos early affirmed Gerchunoff's deep love for his adopted homeland, a New World re-creation of the historic agrarian biblical heartland. *Las imágenes del país* (National Images; 1931); *Entre Ríos, mi país* (Entre Ríos, My Homeland; 1950); and *Argentina, país de advenimiento* (Argentina, Land of the Future; 1952) are paeans of praise for Argentina's capacity to fulfill her glorious destiny. Cognizant of some imperfections in his beloved's image, he focused his satirical wit on the pseudo-intellectualism of the Argentine middle class in *El hombre que habló en la Sorbona* (The Man Who Spoke at the Sorbonne; 1926). *La asamblea de la bohardilla* (The Assembly in the Attic; 1925), *Pequeñas prosas* (Simple Prose; 1926), *Historias y proezas de amor* (Tales and Deeds of Love; 1926), and *El hombre importante* (The Important Man; 1934), discuss universal ideas within the context of any urban, educated society, similar to that of Argentina. Conversely, *Cuentos de ayer* (Tales of Yesteryear; 1919) and *Roberto Payró* (1919) reflect a specific reality of the homeland. The autobiographical story, "El día de las grandes ganancias" (The Day of Great Gain [*Cuentos de ayer*]) describes Gerchunoff's first day as a street peddler, a job which afforded him the greatest suffering and humiliation of his life (*Entre Ríos* 31). *Roberto Payró* was a plea for the release of his friend and mentor, who had been imprisoned by the Germans during World War I. *La clínica del doctor Mefistófeles* (The Clinic of Dr. Mephistopheles; 1937), returns Gerchunoff to the world of intellectual fantasy and irony, as he assembles historic figures from the past (from Helen of Troy to Savaronola) to discuss the deficiencies of mankind in general and political systems in particular, especially communism and dictatorship.

His only foray into Argentine politics, *El nuevo régimen* (The New Regime; 1918), a political tract highly critical of the government of Hipólito Irigoyen, proved disastrous. Shortly after its publication, Gerchunoff lost the only

political appointment he ever held, the Vicerectorship of the Colegio Carlos Pellegrini de Pilar (Kántor, "Obra y anecdotario de Alberto Gerchunoff" 161). How much of a role this played in his subsequent silence on specific political figures and issues can be debated.

There can be no debate, however, on Gerchunoff's sincere and deep emotional attachment to the Argentine homeland on a par with his love for the Jewish heartland. The Argentine New Zion of *Los gauchos judíos*, even with her image slightly tarnished by anti-Semitism, evokes fervent expressions of devotion. As he states in his autobiography, it was under the incomparable sky of the vast Argentine plains that his existence was marked indelibly by a national fervor which erased his origins and made him truly an Argentine (*Entre Ríos* 26). He does not simply wish to exalt Jewish life, because he is also deeply Argentine, and as such, the homeland has profoundly affected his artistic formation (*Entre Ríos* 36). But his most fervent declaration of loyalty is reserved for his provincial homeland, Entre Ríos. He literally exults, "Soy de allá, amigos míos. . . Entre Ríos, tierra benévola. . . diste fondo a mi alma. . . Amigos míos, soy de allá" (I'm from there, my friends. . . Entre Ríos, beneficent land. . . you gave depth to my soul. . . My friends, I'm from there [*Entre Ríos* 58-59]).

Gerchunoff was no stranger to the hallowed tradition of the Hispanic man of letters to explore the Quijote/Cervantes philosophic legacy. Having established his right to this Quixotic inheritance under the Sephardic umbrella of Judaic fraternity, Gerchunoff hoped to assume the mantle of an Argentine Quijote of the pen. Introduced to Quijote as a youthful factory worker by a gaunt but garrulous Asturian companion (*Entre Ríos* 29-30), the adventures of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, along with the Bible and the tales of Scholem Aleichem, became a spiritual resource at the day's end for a weary or discouraged Gerchunoff. He early announces his Quixotism in *Los gauchos judíos* in the vignette, "Las bodas de Camacho" (The Wedding of Camacho [55-61]), where the "desocupado lector" (idle reader) is reminded of the similarities between Gerchunoff's tale and the Cervantes *bodas*, to underline the bond of a common humanity linking the people and events of the Argentine pampas with those of Cervantes's sixteenth-century Spain (61).

La jofaina maravillosa (The Wondrous Wash Basin; 1924), continues this theme in a series of essays on various facets of the Quijote legend, and emphasizes the importance that Quijote exercises over Gerchunoff's life and work. He is the symbol of our desires, inspires us to live heroically, and is our shield against those whose vision is mired in the dull earth (21). *Retorno a Don Quijote* (Return to Don Quijote; 1951) is a collection of earlier essays on Quijote, with a prologue by Jorge Luis Borges in which he lauds Gerchunoff's

ability to capture the intimacy and magic of Quijote in both the oral and written word. In addition to general essays on Cervantes and Quijote, Gerchunoff comments upon those writers he also deems to have been followers of the Quixotic ideal, to include Voltaire (1694-1778), Erasmus (1466-1536), and the Argentine, Roberto Payró, whose articles on the atrocities committed by the Germans against the Belgian people during their occupation of Brussels, published in *La Nación* of Buenos Aires, resulted in his imprisonment by the German authorities during World War I. In effect, Gerchunoff gave notice that, as a convert to Quixotism, he too would use his pen to focus attention on issues that government administrators and judges would not normally consider to be the province of the writer (13-19).

The contradictions inherent in Gerchunoff's positive vision of the Jew in Argentine society and its often negative reality have elicited equally controversial commentary on the relevance of his writing to the more serious issues in Jewish Argentine literature. Sharpest division exists between the pre-Holocaust and post-Holocaust generations of Jewish-Argentine writers, the latter almost tacitly accusing him of a conspiracy of silence. Pre-Holocaust writers, including such Gerchunoff contemporaries as César Tiempo (pseud. of Israel Zeitlin [1906-80]), Enrique Espinoza (pseud. of Samuel Glusberg [1897-1987]), Lázaro Liacho (1897-1969), Samuel Eichelbaum (1894-1967), as well as later authors, such as Carlos Grünberg (1903-68) and Bernardo Verbitsky (1907-79), assign him the role of elder brother, one who shared the emotional, psychological, and physical trauma inherent in making the successful transition to the national literary scene from the artistically and culturally limited environment of the JCA colonies. Carlos Grünberg hails him as "nuestro sumo sacerdote" (our high priest [57]). Jacopo Botoshansky underlines the fact that Gerchunoff remained a visible and conscientious Jewish presence, even as he pried open the doors for acceptance of the work of other Argentine writers as national literature (150). Enrique Espinoza also remembers him as a precursor who blazed a trail for other Argentine Jewish writers (68). And as a speaker at numerous events in the Jewish community, there can be no doubt of his visible and emotional identification with the Judaic tradition in Argentina.

Post-Holocaust critics have been less tolerant of the social and political tightrope Gerchunoff walked in recording the Jewish condition in Argentina. There is an implication of consorting with the enemy by selling his (Jewish) birthright for a mess of (Argentine) porridge, and maintaining a deliberate policy of myopia toward Argentine anti-Semitism to protect his special status as the accepted or token Jewish writer of the elite national literary circle. David Viñas (1929) ridicules the intellectually-rebellious, nocturnal bohemia of the early days

in Buenos Aires—defined by Gerchunoff as the period in which he and others found themselves as writers (Kántor, "Obra y anecdotario" 152)—as the self-indulgence of a group of young bourgeoisie to sleep late, engage in nightly dilettante political discussions, climaxed by overeating and drinking, and subsequent vomiting in a vestibule the next day. He dismisses Gerchunoff's advocacy of Jewish assimilation as an expedient to avoid the only other options: "irse o el suicidio" (to leave or commit suicide) in order to maintain his elitist literary position. Gerchunoff had willingly become an apologist for the upper-middle class (137, 185, 179). Also criticized has been Gerchunoff's tendency to overstate the compatibility of Christianity and Judaism "to secure for the Jew a firm place in Argentine society" (Lindstrom 11).

Equally skeptical is Saúl Sosnowski's assessment that Gerchunoff's assimilationist attitude stemmed only from a desire to belong to the elitist literary class, and "misdirected sense of gratitude and loyalty to his adopted country prevented him from an accurate reading of the country's ills" (3). Somewhat kinder is Leonardo Senkman, who while agreeing with the negative view of the pastoral, biblical idyll that is *Los gauchos judíos*, does accept as mitigating factors, Gerchunoff's sense of personal loyalty to Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938; Argentine poet and friend and Director of the 1910 Centennial celebration) and the generally optimistic atmosphere of the Argentine Centennial to harmonious Jewish Argentine interaction. In fairness to Gerchunoff, however, Senkman also cites other Argentine Jewish writers who used literature to legitimize the Jew's status in Argentina, including Nicolás Rapoport (1884-1961) *La querencia* (Home; 1929), Samuel Glusberg, *Ruth y Noemí* (1934), José Chudnovsky (1915-66), *Pueblo pan* (1967), Pablo Schvartzman (1927), *Cuentos criollos con judíos* (Native Tales with Jews; 1967), César Tiempo *Pan criollo*, (Home-baked Bread; 1938), and Samuel Eichelbaum, *El guapo del 900* (The Political Bodyguard of the 1900s; 1940); (Senkman 32, 62, 460). Also singled out for criticism has been Gerchunoff's lukewarm pre-Holocaust support for a national Jewish homeland in Palestine, except for the minority of devout or religious Jews unable or unwilling to adapt to any other land (*El pino y la palmera* 77).

As in the affairs of men, the truth undoubtedly lies somewhere between the polarities. Neither a naive, misguided idealist nor a deceitful, guileful tool of the upper-middle class, Gerchunoff undoubtedly eschewed the only possible alternative of the Jew in the pre-Holocaust world—a delicate balancing act which had historically permitted the Jew to survive in equally uncertain environments. Gerchunoff defined traditional Jewish optimism as simply a somber faith in better times for the Jew (*El pino y la palmera* 18). His faith was only a continuum of the Jewish tradition operative at the Diaspora, as Spanish Jews retained

the keys to their homes against their eventual return (a reality achieved only after centuries). The pathetic victims of the Holocaust strain our credulity with their continued faith in deliverance and ultimate survival, even in the despair of the death camps. Yet the State of Israel has become the concrete realization of their hope.

There was no other homeland to which Gerchunoff could escape. Even in the relatively more liberal atmosphere of the United States, the unfortunate Leo Frank was lynched in Georgia in 1915 on a false accusation of rape. As late as 1944, U.S. university professors commenting on anti-Semitism in the United States, advocated assimilation as the sole effective antidote. To counter their perception as a so-called cultural irritant, Jews were counseled against entering over-populated, visible occupations such as public entertainment and to curtail the formation of specific Jewish organizations (cf. Graeber and Britt 98-99, 145-47). Irving Howe's (1920) *World of Our Fathers* (1976), mirrors the daily struggles of the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to integrate into the American mainstream from the ghetto-like slums of New York's Lower East Side. The Dreyfuss case had exposed a sore nerve of anti-Semitism in philosophically ultra-liberal France, which shocked the French Jewish community and the world.

Despite anti-Semitism, its accompanying hostility and humiliations, Argentina had awarded her adopted son a national recognition not previously accorded a Jewish writer in Latin American literature. Gerchunoff's so-called delicate pioneering role as the sole Jewish presence in Argentine literature diminished as other Jewish Argentine authors achieved "national recognition in the arts and humanities" (Lindstrom 11). In effect, Gerchunoff had achieved his personal, if imperfect, New Zion in Argentina. The dilemma of ethnic origin opposed to nationality is still being enacted, as in the example of Jacobo Timerman (1923; editor of the newspaper *La Opinión* [The Opinion] of Buenos Aires), who was imprisoned, tortured, and exiled to Israel by the Argentine authorities in the 1980s (see his *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*; 1981), yet who has returned to live in Argentina after the overthrow of the military Junta.

If a work of art is to be valued solely by its relevance to social realism or political correctness, then Gerchunoff's work may indeed be lacking. If, however, a work of art is also defined as a repository of beauty, uniqueness, expression, thought, and emotion, then Gerchunoff and *Los gauchos judíos* have earned their place in the annals of Jewish Latin American literature. As Scholem Aleichem recreated the Russian Czarist *shtetl* atmosphere in his tales of Karisileve, so Gerchunoff immortalized the adaptation of Jewish immigrants to the joys and hardships of Argentine rural life in Moisés Ville and Rajil. Neil Simon (1927) has done the same for the Jewish community of the 1950s in Brighton Beach

while the Lubavitchers of Crown Heights, N.Y., currently await the coming of their Aleichem.

Even with the pompous, somewhat inflated language and character, obvious biblical parallels noted by critics (Botoshansky 149), *Los gauchos judíos* suspends in time a unique moment in Jewish New World history. Favel Daglach, of the scholarly curls and *bombachas* (wide gaucho riding pants), whether as a caricature or an unrealized, romanticized hope, will forever stroll through Moisés Ville as the ultimate incarnation of a nostalgic desire to reconcile Jewish tradition with Argentine culture. The J.C.A. colonies were a fertile breeding ground for a generation of especially-gifted Jewish Argentine writers, but Gerchunoff has so imprinted his special vision of the Jew's relationship to Argentina upon literary consciousness that no serious discussion of Jewish Argentine identity can ignore his unique contribution. He is Scholem Aleichem on the Argentine pampas, the Argentine psalmist, David, singing his Song of Songs to his beloved (Argentina), the Jewish gaucho *cantor* (minstrel) of the colonies. Even the most skeptical critic would not dispute the sincerity of Gerchunoff's affirmation of his *argentinidad* (Argentinism), Soy de allá, amigos míos. . . . Soy de allá.

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Maggi Salgado Gordon

SCLIAR, MOACYR (Brazil; 1937)

Moacyr Scliar, one of the most acclaimed and widely translated Brazilian authors, was born in 1937 in Porto Alegre, a city which provides the setting for many of his narratives. He defines himself as a cultural mestizo rooted both in Brazilian and Jewish culture, whose deeply entrenched Jewish-Russian heritage gives a special texture to his writings. At the same time, his education in the south of Brazil has imbued his imagination with a distinctive variety of magic realism. Scliar's experience as a public health physician accounts for his naturalistic perspective and complements his approach to literature. His wry, sardonic humor is infused throughout with a gentle sensitivity to human idiosyncracies.

Scliar is the author of twenty short story collections and novels, ten of which have been published in English translation. He is the recipient of numerous literary prizes, among them the Academia de Letras; Erico Veríssimo; Brasília; Guimarães Rosa; Associação Paulista de Críticos de Arte; Casa de las Américas, the Pen Clube do Brasil.

Scliar can be credited with having given expression to the Jewish-Brazilian novel. His artistic roots are as firmly planted in Jewish tradition and mythology, as they are in the modernism of Mario de Andrade (1893-1945), a Brazilian novelist who in the early thirties advocated the development of artistic forms specially suited to the spirit and language of Brazil.

As Nelson Vieira remarks, Scliar's fiction "portrays a kaleidoscopic Brazilian reality through the magical lens of cultural legends, allegory, myths and folklore" ("Judaic Fiction in Brazil" [43]). His own cultural legacy is founded in biblical parables, legendary tales and humorous Jewish anecdotes, while the Jewish themes that inspire him are recreations of his own experience. All but three of his seventeen books deal with Jewish themes. So Scliar's fiction draws upon history and folklore in order to evoke Brazil's paradoxical realities: gauchos drinking *mate* while conversing in Yiddish; biblical stories intertwined with Indian legends; the rhythm of a *nigun* blending with a *samba*.

Although Scliar deals with panoramic, exotic subjects, his stories never escape the restraints of mundane life. He integrates the magical and the fantastic into the real world, even as he combines Latin American fabulism with Jewish humor. But he doesn't want his readers to think Latin American countries and reality are no more than literary inventions (Garay). Placing fantastic fiction at the service of reality, he applies the concept of magical realism, usually employed to reveal the mystery that pervades reality, to the embodiment of the Jewish condition.

At times Scliar's narratives are reminiscent of the humor found in such Jewish writers as Philip Roth (1933) and Mordecai Richler (1931), though his irony and sadness have been compared to that of Scholem Aleichem (1859-1916), the brilliant fantasy of his creatures to that of Gabriel García Márquez (1928), his mordant satire to that of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745); his intellectual playfulness to Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986); his animal allegories to George Orwell (1903-1950), his Jewish mysticism to Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-91). By combining a sense of the absurd with his own kind of Brazilian nationalism, Scliar creates his particular brand of magic to express the marginal condition of being Jewish.

Scliar's style is light, yet incisive. As he sums up his goal as a writer, he considers himself on the one hand, part of the unstable and uneasy Brazilian middle class; on the other, he feels indebted to his Jewish origins for the wonderment that is inherent to the immigrant, and for the cruel, bitter humor that has protected Jews against despair over the centuries. But above all else, Scliar puts his faith in language as a vehicle for aesthetic expression and an instrument for challenging a chaotic world. Scliar tells stories with authenticity and realism. His tales are infused with poetry and ethical substance. His art lies in placing the narration in a perfectly naturalistic setting and then turning the fantastic into something utterly credible.

In 1968 Scliar published his first collection of short stories entitled *O carnaval dos animais* (*The Carnival of the Animals*), which introduces some of his literary postmodernist gallery: animals, comic-strip characters and human beings, all sharing common problems of ecology, sexuality, politics, love, and war. The bestiary that Scliar composes in the manner of Borges, is marked by footnotes and side comments on the text made by the narrator/character. In these fantastic stories animals behave celestially and humans behave bestially, suggesting the Holocaust, which is never far from Scliar's mind.

Scliar's novel *A guerra no Bom Fim* (The War of Bom Fim; 1972), prefigures much of his subsequent fiction in the use of so-called typical Jewish humor and the setting in Porto Alegre. It depicts the rise of a Brazilian Jewish

middle class and tells the story of a youth who grows up in Bom Fim during World War II, eventually enlisting in the cause of Israeli Zionism.

Among his most translated works, *O centauro no jardim* (*The Centaur in the Garden*; 1980) is a picaresque novel of fantastic realism that tells the story of Guedali Tartakowsky, a centaur born of Russian immigrants who have fled the pogroms and settled in one of Brazil's rural communities. This mythical creature is brought up as a Jew—circumcised and Bar-Mitzvahed—with devastating consequences. But he is also so down to earth and so universal, that the reader must believe in him. In this existentialist allegory, Scliar contends one can never be free of one's Jewish condition, which begins with the mark of circumcision.

Guedali personifies alienation; desperately lonely and frustrated, he runs away from the protection of his family. After a series of adventures he falls in love, has an operation that turns him into a man, and settles down in the city to a bourgeois, conventional lifestyle. He does not want to be a monstrous freak, but to be accepted. Only then can he confront himself and undertake the most dangerous journey finding his own destiny. In this voyage of self-discovery, Guedali is a metaphor for the outsider— magical and mythological, yet a sentient being. His constant struggle to hide his true identity is an emblem of his handicapped real life as a child and as a Jew. The centaur can be seen as a caricature of man's dualism. A parable about ethnic, psychic and social differences, the novel is also about the intimate duality of man, a hybrid creature.

Scliar's fabulistic, historical novel *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (*The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes*; 1983), offers a delicate mix of irony, satire, and philosophical speculation. A contemporary story of financial and sexual skullduggery is recounted with a new journalistic matter-of-factness. Rafael Mendes's name is an abbreviation of that of his ancestor Maimonides. Perplexity remains his fate in this tale of misfortune and misadventure. Soon after the protagonist, a successful businessman who professes the Christian religion, learns that his life is in crisis, he discovers a series of genealogical notebooks that allow him to trace his ancestry back centuries.

The strange nation to which the novel owes its title, is on the one hand, the "Jewish nation," a community of people in a continuous state of exile, but it also refers to the Brazil in which Rafael lives as a person in turmoil. From the notebooks, Rafael learns that his ancestors were Jews driven to South America by the Inquisition. Stories within stories provide a magical window into the lives of Sephardic Jews who lived as secret Jews, or as Marranos, to preserve their religion. The wanderings suffered by the Mendes family begin when the prophet Jonah was still inside the whale's intestinal chambers. The novel offers provocative insights on the terrors of the Inquisition, on Rafael Mendes—a cartographer

who sailed with Columbus—and on the early pioneers of Brazil. The second notebook reveals to Rafael that he is Jewish, and links the history of the Jewish experience to his present day life.

O exército de um homem só (*The One-Man Army*; 1973), is a novel about Mayer Guinzburg, an absurd Don Quixote figure who moves from being a major real-estate agent in Porto Alegre to designing a utopian city where there will be absolute social equality. As a Jewish emigré, a Marxist fool who loves Stalin and Rosa Luxemburg, Guinszburg founds the People's Republic of New Birobidjan, to which he recruits a variety of animals and social misfits who listen avidly to his anarchist perorations. Yet Guinzburg dies alone, in an awful retirement home.

Max e os felinos (*Max and the Cats*; 1981), an adventure novella written with the intensity of a short story, shares several characteristics with Scliar's other novels: the action takes place between two countries, Germany and Brazil, during and after World War II; the staging displays convergences of Scliar's typical family, including natives, Jews, Nazis, eccentrics, and pragmatists. Here Brazilian and Jew are joined in the immigrant experience. Although the search for identity is Jewish, the theme is very Brazilian: a young man forced to leave Germany for a new life in South America is shipwrecked on the coast of Brazil. He blacks out in his dinghy, only to find himself sitting next to a jaguar, and subsequently is almost devoured by a shark. When he is rescued by a passing ship, Max does not know whether his meetings were real—since the boat the jaguar was on, which was carrying a shipment of animals for the zoo, sank into the ocean—or whether the entire episode was an hallucination.

The strange felines obsessing Max represent conflictive parts of his personality, struggling to express themselves. They are symbols of beastliness and oppression in human relations. Scliar's characters, like those of Isaac Bashevis Singer, are accosted by indomitable forces and tortured by interior demons. Nevertheless, their fantasies live normally alongside their real conflicts. In this sense, there is a great affinity between Jewish tradition and Latin American magic realism, inspired by indigenous cultures. Max's anti-Semitic education is counterbalanced by his friendship with Harald, a Socialist youth persecuted by the Nazis in Berlin. When Harald is assassinated, Max vows to avenge his death. Brazil turns Max into a more tolerant man. Inspired by the romantic novels of José de Alencar (1829-77), Max marries Jaci, a beautiful Brazilian Indian. Ironically, therefore, when he integrates himself into Brazilian society, he has to confront racism against blacks, Mestizos, Indians and foreign minorities. Max is divided between his identification with Germany, as represented by the jaguar, and his solidarity towards the victims of Nazism. Only at the end of his days

does he learn to tame his fantasies and discovers that if controlled, the bestiality of fascism that resides within himself can be tamed into an inoffensive cat.

Like the rest of Scliar's protagonists, Raquel, of *Os deuses de Raquel* (*The Gods of Raquel*; 1975), is original and wholehearted in her approach to life. Raquel is the daughter of Jewish immigrants who enrole her in a Catholic convent where her identity becomes totally confused. In her search for clarity, she adopts a mentally unbalanced ghetto Jew as her guardian; she marries a Catholic, befriends a Sephardic Jew, and struggles with the gods who tear at her mind, finally taking over.

Scliar's interweaving of tales partakes of a neo-Baroque tradition in Latin America, represented by writers such as Severo Sarduy (1937) and Alejo Carpentier (1904-80). In much contemporary fiction heroes seldom reach their goal, and when they do, it costs them their lives. Scliar's tale *Os voluntários* (*The Volunteers*; 1979) is structured as a journey that succeeds by not coming to its end. Instead, it reworks the effort of the arrival through narrative channels. When the narrator learns that Benjamin, one of his friends, is terminally ill, he and other eccentrics like him embark on a trip to Jerusalem in a tugboat named "Os voluntários." Their mission is to grant the dying Benjamin his last wish—to pray at the Wailing Wall—and in so doing fulfill their own dream. But disaster strikes, with the pilgrims never reaching their destination.

O ciclo das águas (The Cycle of Waters; 1976) offers a natural link between Scliar's background as both doctor and novelist. Here the protagonist tells of an old Jewish woman, now confined to a mental home in Porto Alegre—a victim of the white slave trade from Poland to Brazil in the 1930s—who now recounts her experiences as a prostitute.

One of Scliar's most recent novels, *Cenas da vida minúscula* (Scenes of a Minuscule Life; 1991), is a Brazilian legend that brings together disparate people; ancient Jews (emissaries of King Solomon, sent to find gold in Brazil and bring it to Jerusalem) and contemporary Brazilians. The author explains that this tale is about the crisis of Brazil, and proposes a utopian model of integration as an ideal solution to his country's manifold financial and demographic problems.

Throughout his writing Scliar integrates the Jewish condition into his literature; first, historically and culturally, following the Sephardic and/or Ashkenazi migration that led him to Brazil; second, through the Jewish literary tradition—the Bible, the Sephardic poets, Scholem Aleichem, I.L. Peretz (1852-1915), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Isaac Babel (1894-1941); and last, through Jewish humor, which blends so wonderfully with Latin American magic realism in the capacity Jews have to laugh at themselves.

Scliar's characters remain an enigma. They are neither typical Jews nor typical Brazilians. They are hybrids, like the centaur. But through them Scliar conveys the synthesis of two rich cultures, Jewish and Brazilian. It may be difficult indeed, to belong to both. Yet for Scliar, "between these two worlds lies a wonderful space for a writer. A space teeming with mysteries, waiting to be discovered" (DiAntonio and Glickman 29).

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Jewish Writers of Latin America
A Dictionary

Edited by
Darrell B. Lockhart

Garland Publishing, Inc.
New York and London
1997

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LISPECTOR, CLARICE (Brazil; 1925-77)

Clarice Lispector was born in Techetchelnik, Ukraine, in 1925. Her family emigrated to Brazil where she grew up and studied, having graduated from Law School in 1944. She worked as a journalist, married a Brazilian diplomat, lived in Europe and in the United States with her husband and two sons. After her divorce in 1959, she resided and worked in Rio de Janeiro.

Lispector started to write when she was seven years old. In 1944, the same year she graduated from Law School, she published her first novel: *Perto do coração selvagem* (*Near to the Wild Heart*; 1944). This work already anticipates the dazzling poetic imagination she will display in *Água viva* (*The Stream of Life*; 1973). Lispector's singular world view and unique narrative techniques, which she constantly strove to perfect, are the coordinates of a coherent, ontologically ordered body of work. She focused on the interior life of her characters in order to dynamically portray their private universes.

In 1946 she published *O lustre* (The Chandelier), a novel in which the big city is the context of solitude or confrontation between the fleeting present and an irretrievable past, the contrast between life and death, life in the farm country and the city. In her 1949 novel *A cidade sitiada* (The Besieged City), she attempted to translate a search for an elusive reality scarcely visible to the naked eye. In *Laços de família* (*Family Ties*), a collection of short stories published in 1960, the author portrays middle-class women characters, ranging in age from fifteeen to eighty-nine, in an urban setting. Problems of existence irrespective of class, sex, or age are explored in contrasting situations. Through the plots and internal monologues of her characters, the author questions the conventional roles she assigns to her protagonists. As they move from situation to situation, the characters find themselves in metaphoric prisons, confined by their social roles. The dramatic unity of the stories of *Laços de família* is achieved by internal action, in which a society and its means of coercion are exposed. The characters discover that they are free to conform or rebel, but the options are difficult or problematic. In these stories Lispector challenges conventional roles. The charac-

ters' search for an identity is in conflict with the surrounding environment and brings about rage or even madness. The short stories present the dark side of family ties, where bonds of affection become cages or jails. The women characters in "Preciosidade" ("Preciousness"), "Devaneio e embriaguez duma rapariga" ("The Daydreams of a Drunk Woman"), or in the short story that gives title to the collection, "Os laços de família" ("Family Ties"), and in "Feliz aniversário" ("Happy Birthday") discover that they are free to conform or rebel, even when they know that their options are risky or hazardous.

In 1961 *A maçã no escuro* (*The Apple in the Dark*; 1961) appeared. The novel is divided into three parts, each dealing with the forging and development of a character/hero. Martim, the protagonist of this novel, wants to discover himself and others. He initiates his own life practicing a liberating act: a crime. Through his crime, he liberates himself from family and social ties and begins to conquer the language of his being and to reinvent himself as a man, acquiring an awareness of reality. Martim's experience teaches him his own limits. While fleeing justice he learns the meaning of suffering, his path becomes a symbolic search for language. In this novel, earth, water, and fire reflect an epiphanic writing that questions while revealing inner mysteries of being.

The fifth novel by Lispector, *A paixão segundo G. H.* (*The Passion According to G. H.*; 1964) was successful in blending poetic imagination with subtle and metaphysical experiences. In this novel, the author embarks upon a first-person narrative. The epistemological questions repeatedly suggested in the earlier works are here explicated, though the crystal-clear syntax often has the deceptive simplicity of a Blake lyric. A tightly articulated network of images become the symbol of a woman's confrontation with an ultimate reality. A seemingly trivial incident forms the basis of the plot of *A paixão*. The narrator and central character, named simply G. H., decides to clean up the room formerly occupied by her maid, a girl called Janair, who had quit the previous day. G.H. has hardly entered the room when a cockroach emerges from a closet. She tries to kill it but only manages to mangle it with the closet door. The cockroach, still alive, hangs there, legs and antennae turning while a white mass oozes from its body. Hypnotized by the repulsive sight, G. H. falls into a kind of trance. A set of interlocked images, which have in common the suggestion of a many-layered object (the layers of an onion, the geological layers of the earth, the several floors of the building), points to G. H.'s gradual plunge into her inner self. From the recapitulation of her relationship with the former maid, with her lover, and with an aborted child, the narrator moves on to confront her own self and her own existential anguish. The reader discovers that G. H.'s whole life has been a constant effort to arrange things around her, to frame reality according to

traditional systems. She is also a sculptor, always trying to impose a shape on the material of life. She is reminiscent of Clarissa Dalloway, Virginia Woolf's (1882-1941) character who is also troubled by the compromises she has made in her life and is able to retain the treasure of a private self. Like Clarissa Dalloway, G. H. has almost become the social mask she has created for herself. Her full name is not known, only her initials are printed on elegant suitcases.

The narrative axis of *A paixão* is that of a quest: writing is experienced as an initiatory route across the topography of living, the path taken by the character G. H. in the light of questions. Her relation with the world is made evident by the writing of this book. Like in many of Lispector's other texts one finds in *A paixão* several lessons of wisdom. This novel is a fictional work, a philosophical inquiry, and a mystical experience.

A collection of stories and chronicles *A legião estrangeira* (*The Foreign Legion*), appeared in 1964. This collection offers some illuminating concepts of Lispector's approach to writing. Here she attempts to explain the intuitive threads that weave the texture of her prose style. She discovers the mystical and poetic nature of her work. The first-person narrator and the surrounding universe encounter each other in a suddenly revealed dimension. The quest of writing and living is related to the notion of time and the consciousness of existential anguish and deceptive contradictions. Lispector reveals in *A legião estrangeira* how solitude and silence played an important part in the creation of her narratives.

One of Clarice Lispector's finest novels, *Água viva*, was published in 1973. It is a significant work in which the question of the relationship between modernity and feminism also encompasses questions of the relationship between life and creation, a recurrent theme in Lispector's writings. A flowing verbal monologue, in which discourse on the creative process is closely intertwined with the unfolding of the first-person subjectivity, constitutes the narrative of *Água viva*. It is a novel made of fragments, of impulses, a series of displacements and disseminations that reflect life as a dynamic and constant process. The narrative form of the novel undoes itself in the form of moments, of the division and fragmentation of the instant, a time that resists a linear and orderly chronology.

Água viva proposes a reflection on the construction of a female self and a critical exploration of the relationship between living and writing. Lispector wants her writing to remain in close contact with life but is aware of the difficult task this project entails. French feminist critics like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have greatly contributed to our approaching *Água viva* as a specifically identifiable feminine form of experimentation. The novel presents a narrative erotics—a *jouissance*—that replicates the nature of experience in a nonlinear,

nonhierarchical, and decentering form associated with the writing of the feminine.

In *Água viva* the question constantly raised is "Who lives? Who lives there?" The novel textualizes this conflict between living and writing. The narrator affirms life by putting herself into the text, by writing herself. *Água viva* tries to recreate a woman's inner life, her inner rhythms, in the very moment and movement of the urge to write. The presence of writing becomes a process of inscription in the novel, one of female self-assertion and self-celebration. *Água viva* presents a particular challenge to accepted conceptual dualisms. The novel explores contradictory relations with so-called traditional patriarchal structures of meaning while exposing an unceasing exploration of its own writerly project.

In Lispector's last novel *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*; 1977) the author once more reflects on her role as writer. The questioning takes a more complex turn with the character of Macabea, a pitiable young woman. The novel centers on the story of Macabea, an unskilled office worker who, like many women from the North of Brazil, moves to the big city only to be exploited and victimized. The heroine's name can be associated with the Old Testament. The narrator mentions that the girl Macabea is so ancient that she could be described as biblical. But the relationship with the Bible has only an ironic connotation since Lispector's Macabea is a passive and innocent creature who is deceived by everyone including the fortune teller Madame Carlota. The young woman Macabea seems resigned to her fate, even though she would like to look like Marilyn Monroe. Macabea lives on the margins of society, unaware for the most part of her rights as a human being. She is largely unable to express her own feelings but loves to hear Caruso sing "Una furtiva lácrima." She listens attentively to the talk of a radio announcer and loves the way her boyfriend Olímpico plays with words. The biblical correspondence points to an ironic juxtaposition of weakness and strength. Macabea's misfortunes are painfully moving, her encounter with the fortune teller Madame Carlota will lead the young woman to a tragic end. And yet, when Macabea leaves Madame Carlota she feels transformed hoping to find happiness, but she only meets her death.

A hora da estrela exemplifies most of Lispector's writings, her consistant existential search for self-knowledge and self-expression, her quest of freedom, language, and reality, her interest in the individual and the world. Her plots are usually subordinated to psychological narratives where she transcends the limits of individual experiences into a more complex adventure of being. The poetic force of her prose, the uniqueness of her character's experiences, her new and original way of rethinking tradition, her singular worldview and narrative techniques place her in the mainstream of Latin American writers of the twentieth century. Her originality and strength lie mostly in the way she deconstructs traditional concepts through metaphorical or poetic thinking. The depth and subtlety of her female characters have placed Lispector as an avant-garde writer and also as one of the most representative practitioners of women's writing in Latin America.

Clarice Lispector died in 1977, the same year that *A hora da estrela* was published. After a long battle with cancer she encountered her physical end and was buried at the Cemeterio Israelita do Caju, in Rio de Janeiro.

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1997

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RAWET, SAMUEL (Brazil; 1929-84)

Samuel Rawet was born on July 23, 1929, in the little Polish town, Klimontow, and in 1936 he came to Brazil. His parents were small tradespeople ("luftmenshen") and, according to him very poor. Rawet kept in his mind the picture of a world now no longer in existence, that of the shtetl in its medieval form, which lasted in Eastern Europe through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and came to an end with the Second World War.

His childhood and youth were spent in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, the setting, later on, of many of his tales. He helped his father and his brothers in their work as Jewish hire-purchase hucksters and later as furniture dealers. At the age of twenty-four he completed his engineering degree, while he was already taking part in literary groups, having done so since 1942. His first published book appeared in 1956 with *Contos do imigrante* (The Immigrant Tales). One aspect pointed out among others by literary critics is that Samuel Rawet was the first to give the theme of immigration and the immigrant the amplitude and standing required for it to be included in Brazilian literature.

Rawet's works comprise short stories, novellas, short essays and plays, these last rejected by him, though they revealed the dramatic vein found in his other writings. Besides the *Contos do imigrante*, he published *Diálogo* (Dialogue; 1963); *Abama* (1964), a novella; *Os sete sonhos* (The Seven Dreams) in 1967 which won the literary prize Prêmio Guimarães Rosa of the Fundação Educacional do Paraná; *O terreno de uma polegada quadrada* (The One Square Inch Lot; 1970); *Viagens de Ahasverus à terra alheia em busca de um passado que não existe porque futuro, e de um futuro que já passou porque sonhado* (The Voyages of Ahasverus to a Foreign Land in Search of a Past that Does Not Exist Because of the Future, and of a Future that has Already Passed because It Was Dreamt; 1970), a novella; *Que os mortos enterrem seus mortos* (Let the Dead Bury Their Dead; 1981), a collection of short stories that was published posthumously.

Also to be mentioned are two plays that were never published. The first was *Os amantes* (The Lovers; 1957), based on a story by Dinah Silveira de Queiroz (1917-1982) was staged in the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro by Nicette Bruno and Paulo Goulart's company. The second play, *A noite que volta* (The Returning Night), about a Jew who collaborated with the Nazis in the concentration camps during the Second World War was produced for television in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. *A noite* was later rewritten with its title altered to *O lance de dados* (The Throw of the Dice). Of related interest are the 1970

essays *Consciência e valor* (Conscience and Valor), *Homossexualismo, sexualidade e valor* (Homosexuality, Sexuality, and Valor), *Alienação e realidade* (Alienation and Reality); *Eu-Tu-Ele* (I-Thou-He), in 1972, and *Angústia e conhecimento* (Anguish and Knowledge; 1978). In September 1977, in the periodical *Escrita*, he finally breaks with the Jews in an article entitled "Kafka e a mineralidade judaica ou a tonga da mironga do kabuletê" (Kafka and Judaic Minerality [the remainder is a nonsensical line from a song by Vinícius de Moraes]).

Samuel Rawet entered Brazilian history as one of the engineers who helped to build Brasília. A pioneer, he became disenchanted with the direction the capital was taking. His last years were marked by his isolation and his denial of the values of the Jewish tradition.

In Rawet's literary work there is an ample spiritual and cultural quality, akin to that of a universe of writers and works of the same kind: Martin Buber (1878-1965), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Maksim Gorky (1868-1936), Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky (1821-81), Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), Thomas Mann (1875-1955), Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) are some of the names that make up this universe of correspondences, of affinities with the writings of Rawet.

Hassidism studied by the Austrian Martin Buber at the beginning of the century would leave a profound impression on the life and ideas of Rawet. He referred to Kafka as that man of Prague who almost hid his wretchedness behind a serene and well-balanced prose. In Borges he extolled the erudition and creation. With Machado de Assis he identified himself by the tragic irony. Many times he showed his admiration for the Brazilian northeastern writers of the 1930s, Graciliano Ramos (1892-1953), José Lins do Rego (1901-57) and Jorge Amado (1912). Other Brazilian writers, his contemporary, Cornélio Penna (1896-1968), and of the present generation, Autran Dourado (1926) were important to his literary universe.

Besides these writers, Rawet has his name associated with that of other writers of Jewish origin such as Saul Bellow (1915) and Philip Roth (1933) in the United States who, given their fundamental differences, consider their Jewishness in existential terms. They question themselves about their condition as Jews in its dynamic relationship with literary writing.

The central themes in Rawet's works are the questioning of the solidarity ties that link men together: the disappointments, the frustrations; the underprivileged, the loneliness; the estrangement from and/or the seeking of the Jewish tradition.

The theme of the immigrant, the dramatic misunderstandings, basic in his writings, appear in greater and more tragic dimensions because that is man's plight, detached from circumstantial elements. It is the weariness produced by the unechoed cry in *Diálogo*. The Holocaust is transmuted into a spiritual reality, into the inner hell of the materiality of fears.

In fact, in Rawet's books not all the tales deal specifically with the Jewish theme. Many deal with conflicting family relationships in which lying and dissembling, insolence and submission prevail. In *Contos do imigrante* not all the stories tell us of the Jewish immigrant or of the problems of adaptation. But in all of them we see a tragic vision of the world reflected in the form of the incommunicability of relationships. This in turn brings out the memory of the suffering and exclusion of the Jewish people.

The main point in Rawet's fiction is the character, on whom the writer focuses his world view. He sees man's situation before the world as double-sided: on one side is man absorbed by reality, on the other man trying to force upon circumstances his own ways, his conception of others and of life.

His characters live through strong opposing feelings, that range from love to hate, expressing the violence, the suppressed fight against the world around them. They are almost always the victims of a world of appearances, of lies. Purity of intent butts against an impassable barrier as concerns other beings. Hence the conflict: incomprehension and a kind of bitter suffering, of life wasting itself away in the lack of understanding and fidelity. Spiritual resistance is the sentiment that reverberates from the attempt at assimilation by those characters, from the ineffectual struggle for their identity.

The developing of anguish in Rawet's protagonist results from his position as a foreigner, from his posture, from a particular way of viewing the world and men. He feels removed from them. The realization of this sentiment may come little by little, taking time to shape itself, or it may happen immediately on first contact with the new country. This feeling of separateness generates two situations, both the cause of the conflicts: insecurity, which brings with it a certain disquiet, and fear. These two elements lead to anguish, in its most extreme sense as an emotional state.

Memory brings to the present the events that shape the life of such a character. Time is superseded by experience, and everything is transformed in accordance with the moment that moves the person to the discovery of a new world, unthought of and obscure, which he could not have foreseen.

Rawet's immigrant is a rover, restless, with no definite aim. Two novellas, *Abama* and *Viagens de Ahasverus*. . . illustrate this. Ahasverus, a metaphor

of the Wandering Jew, is someone who roams simultaneously about Brasília, Belém, and Rio de Janeiro in search of himself. Like the protagonist in *Abama*, he lives through the experience of embitterment, exile, and the yearning for redemption.

Solitude is a constant in the lives of the people in Rawet's world. His characters never mix with their surroundings. Their lives are in a continous state of fluctuation. Placed among other people, they detach themselves, they hold themselves apart. Isolation is their main characteristic. The gap between individuals is not only a matter of language, but of institutions, customs, habits, and cultural background.

The attempt of Rawet's creatures to come into contact with their fellow beings is always ineffectual, fleeting. Language no longer serves to nourish the meeting between individuals. The short story "O profeta" (The Prophet; *Contos do imigrante*) is one of the best examples of such a condition. The prophet is a negative Messiah, stigmatized, the ineffectual prophet, who reveals a world's inner and absurd disorder, but cannot envision the Promised Land.

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Gilda Salem Szkl

JEWISH WRITERS OF LATIN AMERICA
A DICTIONARY

EDITED BY
DARRELL B. LOCKHART

GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1997

FEIERSTEIN, RICARDO (Argentina; 1942)

Ricardo Feierstein—Argentine-Jewish architect, journalist, critic, short story writer, novelist, and poet—has taken on the momentous responsibility of speaking for his generation. His credentials: he was born in Buenos Aires in 1942; he was educated there, and along the way became very active in socialist and Zionist movements. He took his family to live on a kibbutz in Israel just before the Yom Kippur war. Later, they returned to live in Buenos Aires. As cultural director for the AMIA (Jewish Mutual Association of Buenos Aires), he directs the Editorial Milá publishing house and *Raíces: Judaísmo contemporáneo* (Roots: Contemporary Judaism), a cultural review.

Since childhood, Feierstein has been very active and highly visible in Jewish cultural affairs. He has written for and edited numerous Jewish-sponsored periodicals, in particular *Nueva presencia* (New Presence) which focuses on human rights issues. His essays on Jewish themes were collected in *Judaísmo 2000* (Judaism 2000; 1988). Feierstein has written in many genres: poetry, short story, novel, journalism, ethnography, and history. His poetry is highly personal. *La balada del sol* (The Song of the Sun; 1969) is a farewell to childhood. *Inventadiario* (Inventadiary; 1972) deals with the poet's sense of self, his home, his family, and his Jewish-Argentine identity. *Letras en equilibrio* (Letters in Balance; 1975) was written after the Yom Kippur War. His poetry is complex yet simple, caustic yet forgiving. Important poems include "Las buenas razones" (Good Reasons), an affectionate love poem dedicated to his wife and "Argentina

1983" which characterizes the hope felt at the time of Argentina's return to democracy.

Feierstein grew up reading works of the two competing, though intertwined groups that dominated the Argentine literary scene in the first half of the twentieth century: the social realist and testimonial literature, "la experiencia vivida," (lived experience) of the Boedo movement (Roberto Arlt [1900-42], Juan Gelman [1930]) and the exaggerated estheticism of the Florida group, (Jorge Luis Borges ([1899-1986], Manuel Mujica Láinez [1910-84]). Much of his work, prose as well as poetry, represents an attempt to synthesize these two diverging tendencies. Social commentary is expressed through explosive images. His poems are characterized by aggressive metaphors and calculated rhythms.

Composed of both realistic and wildly distorted imagery, "Viejos judíos" (Old Jews; published in *Mestizo* 19-21) is charged with emotions that evolve as the poem does. "Viejos judíos" is a harsh poem as well as a hopeful one; it is also an expression of reconciliation. It is Feierstein's most intensely Jewish poem. Buenos Aires's aging immigrant Jewish population, the group that was never able to adapt to Argentine life, is the poem's subject. These Jews yearn for the old country; they are eternally out of place in the new one and often reduced in status and wealth. Late in the poem, the narrator admits to an affection for these lost souls.

In "Nosotros, la generación del desierto" (*We, the Generation in the Wilderness*; 1984), Feierstein turns his attention to those who are about his age and have shared the experience of growing up in a world which did not need them. Self-consciously, these people, born in Argentina in the early forties, feel themselves on the outskirts of history, living in a psychic no-man's land. Great events—the Second World War, the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel—took place far away, and besides, they were too young to really know what was happening. They can glimpse the Promised Land, and that is all. This is a poem of alienation and reluctant acceptance. This lengthy poem is told in the first-person plural. From the first word, *Nosotros* (We), the analysis, self-criticism, memories, and hopes are communal rather than personal. The group includes Jews, but is not limited to them; age and a certain life experience are more important for membership than ethnic background. The poet has taken on the role of bard, that is, the voice of his cohort. Not quite a prophet who condemns, rather he makes public his group's shared successes (few) and failures (many). Stanzas describing important moments in the "history" of this generation are set against key moments in twentieth-century history. The focal point moves through space and time: the European ghetto, a kibbutz in the Galilee, a middle-class neighborhood in Buenos Aires are some of the scenes; childhood, young

adulthood, impending middle age are the times of life recalled. "Nosotros, la generación del desierto" is about getting older without finding meaning or achieving greatness. It deals with a searching for answers in endless, futile discussion with others equally at sea. One's personal past is not useful as a source of understanding; the future is vague and treacherous with death hovering closer and closer.

After all the criticism and self-doubt, the ending of "Nosotros, la generación del desierto" is uplifting. The poet-preacher-prophet praises his generation for its heroic deeds and protests. Its members have been cleansed and purified by their joint experience, and they will serve as an example to future generations. Memories and concomitant nostalgia are often present in Feierstein's thinking and writing, but he is not bound over to the past. Taken together, the poems are insistently positive, even uplifting in their message. In "Como asesinar la indiferencia," (How to Kill Indifference, in *Letras en equilibrio* [Letters in Balance; 1975]) the reader is told that a proper way to approach one's existence is: "Una cosa tan simple: morder la vida" (Such a simple thing: bite into life). In the "Datos" (Facts) section from *Inventadiario*, a group of poems is organized like an old-fashioned Argentine identity document. They are poems of self-discovery. For example, in "Cédula de identidad Número" (Passbook Number), the poet seeks his most basic identity. In "Nombre y apellido" (Full Name), he relates, in rapid fire, the experiences which have taught him who he is. His "Domicilio" (Place of Residence) is none other than the woman he loves.

The trilogy of novels *Sinfonia inocente* (Innocent Symphony; published collectively in 1984) has a complex structure and an endlessly varied style. As the title suggests, the action is ordered as if it were a symphony in three movements; there are rising and descending sections. Point of view shifts from first to third person and even at times to first person plural. Examining a group of people, the novel has no central protagonist. El Lungo, a character loosely based on Feierstein himself, comes closest to this distinction.

Entre la izquierda y la pared (Between the Left and the Wall; 1983), the first part of the trilogy, presents the shared adolescence and young adulthood of a group of Jews in the Buenos Aires of the 1950s and 60s. Much of the novel is organized as a series of linked but not necessarily consecutive paragraphs. The style is "stream of memory" rather than "stream of consciousness." The effect is that of a snapshot album or perhaps the tapes of an oral historian. The memories recorded are in part those of reactions to events which are taking place far from Buenos Aires: Castro, Lamumba, Algeria, the Red Guards, Prague Spring. The novel's time frame shifts backwards and forwards; the perceptions of children meld with those of adults. An Israel Independence Day party, Hebrew lessons, summer trips are recalled. Slowly but surely, El Lungo and his friend El Barbas grow up.

In *El caramelo descompuesto* (The Spoiled Candy; 1979), the second part, the scene shifts to Israel. El Lungo, El Barbas, and a group of Argentinean acquaintances are newcomers on a kibbutz in the Galilee. Transliterated Hebrew words and phrases are so prevalent that it would be difficult to read the novel without knowing at least some of them. The mode of this novel is mostly talk. There are endless conversations, sometimes presented as quasi-dramatic texts. The history of the kibbutz movement, its intellectual underpinnings, its mores are discussed and rediscussed.

The newcomers and the kibbutznikim must try to live together in this isolated hamlet governed by rules far different from anything known in Argentina. El Lungo, his wife known as Ella (She), and their friends try very hard to adjust. But they find themselves humming "Buenos Aires Querido" (My Dear Buenos Aires, a sentimental tango) and feeling themselves out of place. They cannot quite figure out how things operate on the kibbutz. But far more seriously, the ideal of the kibbutz that they grew up with in their Zionist youth movements simply does not exist any longer; the outsiders could not become insiders because they were looking for an "inside" that had disappeared.

When *Escala uno en cincuenta* (One to Fifty Scale; 1984), the third part, commences, El Lungo and company have returned to Buenos Aires. This novel too is highly discursive as the characters talk rather than act. Revolution old and new is debated. Roundtables on Jewish writing are duly recorded. The experience in Israel is rehashed. Meanwhile, the Argentinean political situation deteriorates. Having been away from Argentina, the returnees feel out of touch; they find it difficult to communicate with former colleagues. Moreover, they struggle to reintegrate themselves into a Buenos Aires Jewish community they view as materialistic and self-centered. Gradually, though, old ties are re-established. Now an architect, El Lungo suffers from flashbacks to life on the kibbutz during the Yom Kippur war. He has written two novels about his generation, entitled *Entre la izquierda y la pared* and *El caramelo descompuesto*, and is working on a third one filled with memories and everyday events. The theme of "la generación del desierto" becomes a refrain. At a meeting of the Jewish establishment leaders, El Lungo decries the lack of intellectual production by his contemporaries. He calls for reform in Jewish institutions, values, and identity, nothing less. He maps a future for his transitional generation which would take it from spiritual exile and a search for a new Latin American Jewish identity. The audience attacks him. Near the trilogy's end, the focus shifts back to the innocence of childhood. El Lungo's children are talking. Games and schools are described;

stories are told. The poem "Nosotros, la generación en el desierto" serves as an epilogue.

In his next novel *Mestizo* (Mixed Blood; 1988), Feierstein explores the generational issue in another way. While the term *mestizo* normally refers to those born with both Spanish and Indigenous ancestry, this title refers to those who have two cultural heritages: Jewish and Latin American. Adapting the techniques of oral history found in *Integración y marginalidad: Historias de vidas de inmigrantes judíos a la Argentina* (Integration and Marginality: Life Stories of Jewish Immigrants to Argentina; 1985) which he co-edited, Feierstein weaves much of *Mestizo* from a series of fictionalized testimonial accounts. Jewish life in Poland and immigrant life in Argentina are recounted by elderly Jews; the immigrant voices create a composite picture of the old country. These speakers are survivors who in spite of harsh, even impossible conditions did not perish. They crossed the ocean, worked for a pittance, opened small businesses, and had large families. This time the prose is sprinkled with Yiddish phrases (here translated); Poland is a setting for a Latin American novel. Though *Mestizo* is ostensibly a murder mystery, it serves as a way to explore the origins of David Schnaiderman, the novel's sometime protagonist. Looking for roots, Schnaiderman finds them in the person of his grandfather, Moishe Búrej, a man who in Europe showed great strength and stubbornness, but who could never quite assimilate into his new country. Búrej is an emblematic figure, combining moral clarity with a resistance to change.

In 1993, Feierstein published *Historia de los judíos argentinos* (History of the Jews of Argentina), a comprehensive work in which he traces the Jewish presence in Argentina from the days of the Inquisition to the present. He tells of the farming collaboratives and the urban ghettos, the artistic triumphs and the business empires established by Argentina's Jews.

Ricardo Feierstein sees himself as a mestizo, a mixture of Jewish and Argentine culture. He perceives such a union as fortunate and productive.

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KING DAVID'S HARP

Autobiographical Essays by Jewish Latin American Writers

Edited with an Introduction by
STEPHEN A. SADOW

1979
University of New Mexico Press
Albuquerque

INTRODUCTION

In *King David's Harp*, Jewish Latin American writers speak for themselves about their lives, their work, their Jewish identity, and much more. The anthology includes fifteen autobiographical selections in which noted Jewish Latin American writers discuss their Judaism, their writing, their crucial formative experiences, and the Jewish community in Latin America and in the United States. These writers come from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. About half live outside of their country of origin. Except for Alberto Gerchunoff, who died in 1950, all of these writers are actively involved in creating new literary works.

Many of the authors included in this volume write as members of a minority in xenophobic cultures. While some of them and their coreligionists have prospered or reached important positions, won prizes, worked as graphic artists or editors or professors or even cabinet ministers, most have never felt accepted by Latin American readers. To give one example, Samuel Rawinski, Costa Rica's leading writer, who has an extraordinary command of Spanish style, is begrudgingly and only at times accepted as a member of the country's literary community. Isaac Goldemberg was a world-class writer, whose work was

being discussed at literary conferences, before he was accepted as a Peruvian writer by the Peruvian literary critics.

There is thematic unity in *King David's Harp*. While there are differences of opinion, sometimes sharp, certain basic concepts recur. Obviously, in writing that is both Jewish and autobiographical, memory is of the utmost importance. Memory of the old country, parents and grandparents, arrival and culture shock, growing up, places lived in, "making it in America," artistic, business, or political achievement, anti-Semitism and the Nazis. There is ambivalence about personal and collective memory, a constant evaluation of Jewish identity as a personal issue and in a Latin American context, a mixture of negativism and unexpected expressions of optimism, a mourning of the Holocaust and fervent Zionism. The major Jewish issues of the twentieth century come together in these essays: secularism and the mysticism of the Cabala, traditional faith and apostasy, exile, refugee, or immigrant status, the viability of Yiddish, making *aliyah* (immigrating to Israel), and struggling for success in the Diaspora. Jewish issues local to Latin America are also important: Jewish labor organizations, socialist Zionist groups such as HaShomer HaTzair, the viability of social clubs and synagogues, and terrorist bombings directed at Jewish organizations. Also central are the pervasive issues of assimilation, conversions, mixed marriages, and divided families.

Along with their Jewishness, all of these writers identify themselves as Latin Americans no matter where they may currently live. Just a few examples follow. Marjorie Agosín makes regular trips to Chile, where she has long been involved in the movement for human rights. Ruth Behar has focused her anthropological studies on the Hispanic world and has returned several times to her birthplace, Cuba. Ilan Stavans co-edited *Growing Up Latino*, wrote a perceptive study called *The Hispanic Condition*, and edits *Hopscotch*, a journal for Latino readers. Isaac Goldemberg is the director of the Latin American Writers Institute in New York, a body dedicated to the support of Latino

culture in the United States; he also edits the bilingual literary journal *Brújula/Compass*. Marcos Aguinis has been continually involved in Argentine politics, rising to the positions of minister of culture and minister of state. Ricardo Feierstein refers to himself as a cultural mestizo, the combination of his Jewish and Latin American heritages.

A collective interest in Latin American literature and politics runs through the essays: César Vallejo's broken lines, Jorge Luis Borges's labyrinths and Julio Cortázar's multiple realities, Pablo Neruda's wide vistas, and Octavio Paz's sagacity. The presence of Fidel Castro, Juan Domingo and Eva Perón, and Salvador Allende hovers over certain of the pieces; in profound ways, these figures directly influenced the lives of some of the essayists. The essays are filled with movement, both physical and intellectual. These writers give the impression of being in constant motion (Kozer, Stavans). They, and their parents and siblings, change countries, languages, political systems, continually adapting to what they find (Dorfman, Lubitch Domecq). Often with little notice, but at times in a highly premeditated fashion, they have changed neighborhoods and continents (Muñiz-Huberman). Others are extraordinarily productive while remaining in their country of birth (Aguinis, Feierstein, Freilich de Segal, Glantz). They leave languages behind or else insist on writing in them in places where the majority speaks another tongue (Agosín, Goldemberg, Szichman). Most are multilingual; some, born in Latin America, spoke Yiddish as their first language (Gerchunoff, Stavans), only to become deeply attached to Spanish or Portuguese later on. Some moved on to English when it seemed natural to do so (Behar, Stavans).

Judaism itself has a different meaning for each of these writers. While most of them do not subscribe to the beliefs and practices of Orthodox Judaism, all are quite familiar with them from childhood experience. For most the Sabbath and the holidays that mark the Jewish calendar have significance. Many remember the supportive but stifling Jewish extended family imported from Europe along with Yid-

dish or Ladino and a few ritual objects. On one end of the spectrum, Angelina Muñiz-Huberman and Alcina Lubitch Domecq are guided by the esoteric wisdom of the Cabala. Lubitch Domecq emigrated to Israel, where she has joined study groups of Orthodox women. In the middle, Isaac Goldemberg and José Kozer infuse their poetry with biblical and other Jewish imagery. Ilan Stavans and his family attend a synagogue in Amherst, Massachusetts. At the other extreme, Ricardo Feierstein, Moacyr Scliar, and Marjorie Agosín proclaim themselves to be secular Jews, tied to the Jewish community but not to Jewish religious belief. Feierstein has been a Jewish community professional and the editor-in-chief of a Jewish publishing house, while Freilich de Segal concentrates on Zionist activities in Caracas.

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

Jews started fleeing to Latin America during the earliest days of the Conquest. The first to arrive were *conversos*, Jews who had converted to Catholicism but whose conversion had not been enough to stave off the menace of the Inquisition, and *marranos*, Jews who pretended to be Catholic but who practiced Judaism in secret. These escapees were few in number and, without an available community, were quickly assimilated into the general population and the vastness of the landscape. In the mid-1600s, a small group of Dutch Jews established a community in the Dutch enclave of Recife in Brazil. When the Portuguese recaptured the territory, these twenty-three Jews, fearing the return of the Inquisition, made their way to Manhattan Island. Over the anti-Semitic protests of the governor, Peter Stuyvesant, the directors of the Dutch East India (a number of whom were Jewish) allowed them to stay. A few years later, the British defeated the Dutch, and these new residents became the first "New York Jews." Small Jewish communities were also established in the Caribbean, particularly on the islands of Caraçao and Aruba.

From the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, Jewish immigration from Europe was directed to the United States and, to a much lesser extent, Canada. Waves of Jewish immigration from Germany and other German-speaking areas of Europe chose to bring their "modern" Reform Judaism to the Midwest of the United States where they could live in Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and Saint Louis, among German Protestant neighbors. During these years, very few Jews decided to settle in Latin America.

This changed in the 1880s when there was a pronounced increase in anti-Jewish violence in Russia and Eastern Europe. Economic convulsion hurt Jewish tradesman and traders as well as the neighboring peasants, who blamed the Jews for what was happening. By the end of the century, the situation had worsened to the point that virtually all Jews lived in fear for their lives. Millions left for the United States, the Goldene Medine, or Golden Land.

At the same time, Sephardic Jews from Morocco settled in Argentina and Brazil, often in the interior. These were followed by emigrants from Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and, later, the Balkans, to Panama, Uruguay, and other countries. In general, they were poor, some speaking Arabic or Judeo-Arabic. However, the majority of these Sephardic Jews spoke Ladino and adjusted to their new countries considerably more easily than did the Eastern European Jews. For many, the entry to middle-class life was rapid.

Hearing of the economic difficulties facing immigrants to North America, Jews searched for other safe harbors. Coincidentally, certain Latin American governments, Argentina in particular, were in the midst of an economic boom and were seeking skilled, white Europeans to populate the vast territories within their boundaries. Although Jews were not their first choice, they fit the definition more or less, and their immigration was allowed, even solicited. The Jewish establishment in Western Europe was quick to respond. In particular, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, an Austrian-born, enormously wealthy British

peer, donated vast sums of his own money to establish the Jewish Colonization Agency (JCA). Hirsch sent his agents to Argentina, Brazil, and the United States to purchase huge tracts of arable land. Land, though often of dubious potential for cultivation, was acquired or leased in several Argentine provinces, especially Entre Ríos, in the Rio Grande du Sul in Brazil, and in a number of American states, most notably New Jersey and South Dakota. Meanwhile, other JCA agents recruited Eastern European Jews to settle in cooperative communities on the land. The Argentine experiment was by far the most successful; there were numerous settlements, with, at one point, one million acres being farmed.

In 1924, the Immigration and Naturalization Act ended large-scale immigration to the United States. Because of a formula that was calculated to be prejudicial to Jews, Jewish immigration dropped drastically in 1925 and did not rebound until the *refusniks* were allowed to leave the Soviet Union late in the century. Some immigrants were diverted en route, and many families were separated, some permanently. From 1924 on, Jewish immigrants arrived in Latin America in significant numbers, principally in Mexico, Cuba, Chile, and Argentina but also in the Dominican Republic, where a Jewish settlement was established in the provincial town of Sosua, and in Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Bolivia. Before and after the Second World War, Jews made their way by circuitous routes, and often with the aid of existing Jewish organizations, to the centers of Jewish life in Argentina and Brazil. Holocaust survivors found themselves living next door to Nazis, who virtually controlled sections of southern Chile, or stranded in Central American capitals. Others journeyed to Cuba and Mexico in the hope, most often unfulfilled, of gaining admission to the United States.

Those Jews who arrived in the late nineteenth century often found work in agriculture in the farming colonies or as pack peddlers who carried enormous loads of household and agricultural items to rural villages where outsiders were rarely seen. As the urban economies improved, workers, including many Jews, were drawn from the countryside to work in the new factories. Later immigrants skipped the rural phase entirely and stayed in the cities. In the 1920s, these immigrants would brag, "You land on Monday, you find a place to live on Tuesday, you start work on Wednesday." Compared to the reports of misery from relatives in New York, theirs seemed the better deal. Others found work as shopkeepers, tradesmen, and furriers and in the burgeoning needle trades. Still others, nicknamed *cuenteniks*, sold household goods and personal items on time. Gradually, Jews developed larger businesses and, where possible, their own banking systems. The Jewish press in Yiddish, Spanish, and Portuguese grew quickly, with reporting coming directly from Europe and the United States. The Yiddish theater flourished in the larger cities; visiting troupes came from New York.

Eventually, a few Jewish entrepreneurs became millionaires with considerable personal influence. A few succeeded in politics, though not in Paraguay, where Jews, who could practice as engineers and physicians, were forbidden to study law, the key to political success. Others became entertainers, musicians, and even chess champions.

Jewish immigration to Latin America started in earnest almost fifty years after the substantial German-Jewish immigration to the United States. This difference has had several effects. For one, it is not unusual to find American Jews who are fourth or even fifth generation in the country; most are at least second generation and relatively few are immigrants. In Latin America, the majority of Jews are immigrants or of the first or second generation; the third generation is only now being born. While diminishing somewhat in recent years, the use of Yiddish, both as a vernacular and as a medium for literary expression, retained its vitality well into the 1980s. For those who left the "Old Country," the memories are not so far away. The Holocaust touched most directly and personally those who had immigrated during the

1920s or after, as many had remained in close contact with relatives in Europe. In some cases, these very relatives came to Latin America after the liberation of the concentration camps.

From the 1970s on, the Jews of Latin America suffered a series of shocks from which they will probably never entirely recover. At the same time that many were beginning to prosper financially, political changes made their lives increasingly insecure at best and in mortal danger at worst. After the Cuban revolution in 1959, most Jews, who had, in any case, been there less than one generation, boarded the airlift to Miami. Although most of the thousand or so who remained are involved in Communist party activities and have disavowed their Judaism, there has been, in recent years, a limited revival of Jewish life on the island. As Marjorie Agosín points out in this volume, Chilean Jews with ties to the United States were subject to death threats during the Socialist regime of Salvador Allende; many left the country. Shortly thereafter, when, following the coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, the new right-wing government started imprisoning and murdering its leftist opponents and even those merely perceived as enemies, other Jews fled.

From 1976 to 1983, the situation in Argentina was terrifying. The military junta was particularly harsh on its perceived Jewish opponents. Some had undertaken antigovernment activities, but many had not. Jews were arrested in numbers that far exceeded their tiny percentage of the population. When abducted, they were treated more harshly than non-Jews. The American rabbi Marshall Meyer acted as negotiator with the torturers, saving a number of lives, including that of the newspaper editor Jacobo Timerman. Timerman's book *Cell without Number, Prisoner without Name* brought international attention to the kidnapping, murders, and "disappearings" of Argentina's Dirty War. Those writers who could, fled the country. The novelists Mario Szichman, Gerardo Mario Goloboff, David Viñas, and many others left permanently.

With the return to democracy, the situation of Argentina's Jews seemed to improve markedly. However, in 1992, the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires was destroyed by a car bomb. None of the criminals responsible have been apprehended. In 1994, another car bomb destroyed the offices of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Argentine Jewish Mutual Association, or AMIA), a center of Jewish communal life. Eighty-six were killed and more than one hundred wounded. The psychological effect on the Jewish community continues to be devastating. Communal structures and services, developed over decades, have only partially been restored. The perpetrators have not been caught, and a pall hangs over Jewish life.

The existence of the half million Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Jews of Latin America is scarcely acknowledged outside the region. Even with the trailblazing work of Robert Weisbrot, Judith Laikin Elkin, Jeffrey Lesser, Naomi Lindstrom, Saúl Sosnowski, and a number of other scholars affiliated with the Latin American Jewish Studies Association, the American public, including most Jews, is largely unaware of Jewish populations in Brazil and in virtually every Spanish-speaking country of Latin America. Latin American Jews are invisible to all but their relatives in other countries, a few international Jewish organizations, and Israel, which sees them as a source of educated immigrants.

JEWISH LITERATURE IN LATIN AMERICA

The literary and intellectual production of Jewish Latin American writers (with a few notable exceptions) is only recently becoming known outside of Latin America. Ariel Dorfman, Marjorie Agosín, and Ilan Stavans have achieved international status, and their works are widely available, some in a variety of languages. Stavans edited *Tropical Synagogues: Short Stories by Jewish Latin-American Authors.*

Rita Gardiol has compiled *Silver Candalabra: Jewish Argentine Short Stories*. Literary criticism has been helped enormously by Darrell H. Lockhart, whose monumental *Jewish Writers in Latin America: A Dictionary* provides biographies and literary histories of writers from virtually every Latin American country. Lois Baer Barr's *Isaac Unbound: Patriarchal Traditions in Latin American Jewish Literature* provides an in-depth critical study of six important writers.

For almost a century, however, Jewish Latin American writers have been interpreting and cataloging the Jewish experience, helping their readers to deal with an often hostile environment, and creating exquisite love poetry and polemical political tracts. The Jewish Latin American literary tradition began with Alberto Gerchunoff's *Los gauchos judíos* (The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas; 1910), which rhapsodized life in the Jewish agricultural colonies in northeastern Argentina. The Ukrainian-born Argentine writer César Tiempo produced poetry and drama that explored the immigrant experience in an urban setting. After the Second World War, Jewish writing appeared in many Latin American countries and took many forms: the Dominican Republic's Edgar Paiwanski-Conde's three-dimensional poetry; the Cuban poet José Kozer's harsh, jagged imagery; Uruguay's Teresa Porzecanski's search for connections to her ancestors' opulent past in Aleppo, Syria; Mexico's Esther Seligson's extraordinary fantastic voyages; Guatemala's Víctor Perera's ongoing nostalgia; Brazil's Clarice Lispector's revisions of biblical narrative and Moacyr Scliar's comic parodies of Jewish urban life; and in Argentina, Mario Szichman's biting satire, Isabel Balla's memories of the Holocaust, Alicia Borinsky's stylistic experimentation, Silvia Plager's exploration of male-female relationships, Tamara Kamenszain's ability to portray the flow of time, and Alejandra Pizarnik's crushing self-destructive despair. The dramatists Samuel Eichelbaum, Osvaldo Dragún, Ricardo Halac, Aída Bortnik, Sabina Berman, and Ariel Dorfman have written and produced theater for both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. Educated and

formed to a greater or lesser extent in the Jewish tradition, these writers have had to confront persistent prejudice in Latin America or, having decided to leave, to experience the shock of adjusting linguistically and culturally to the United States, Israel, or elsewhere.

THE ROLE OF THE WRITER

On the one hand, the Jewish Latin American writer who has chosen to explore Jewish themes takes on the role and responsibilities of scribe of the community. At their best, they serve as the mouthpiece for their respective Jewish communities. Local issues, characters that the reader can identify with, communal history become the clay with which this writer forms poetry and prose. Growing up as a Jew and the search for a personal identity that includes being both Jewish and Latin American, encounters with the world at large, the response to anti-Semitism, be it overt or subtle, are the themes that repeat throughout this literature. Since Gerchunoff's The *Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas,* Jewish Latin American writers have produced a steady stream of works that explore these questions: Bernardo Verbitsky, *Es difícil empezar a vivir* (It's Hard to Begin Living; Argentina, 1948); Angelina Muñiz-Huberman, *Tierra adentro* (Inland; Mexico, 1979); Isaac Goldemberg, *La vida a plazos de don Jacobo Lerner* (The Fragmented Life of Don Jacobo Lerner; Peru, 1979); and Ricardo Feierstein, *Mestizo* (Argentina, 1994). Rosa Nissán's *Novia que te vea* (That I See You as a Bride; Mexico, 1992) and *Hisho que te nazca* (May a Son Be Born; Mexico, 1996) provide a vision of the Sephardic immigrant and postimmigrant experience in Mexico.

On the other hand, Jewish Latin American writers work within a constrained environment. Extremely few, whether they have chosen to remain in their native countries or have emigrated to the United States or elsewhere, have been able to support themselves with their literary writing. Many are professors of literature, journalists, or editors

and thus can devote little time to their writing. What is worse, most write for small audiences. Jewish publishing houses such as Acervo Cultural and Editorial Milá in Buenos Aires, though of excellent quality, are small and understaffed. Though the Jewish population of Argentina hovers at around two hundred thousand, sales of five thousand copies of a work of Jewish interest are considered impressive. Throughout Latin America, the great majority of these sales comes from within the Jewish community. Moreover, it is cumbersome, if not impossible, for small publishers in one country to sell their books in other countries. (Only Marcos Aguinis, who has an international following, is able to sell fifty thousand copies of a novel, still a small number by American standards; the Chilean Ariel Dorfman, a professor at Duke University who publishes in English as well as Spanish, has considerably higher sales.) Many writers, like the Argentines Bernardo Kordon and Isidoro Blaisten, while not denying their Judaism, have opted to write for the trade market and avoid Jewish themes altogether.

The Jewish Latin American writer's life can be quite difficult and even dangerous. Though a community figure of some importance and reknown, the writer is subject to criticism from Jewish readers who may even be childhood acquaintances. At various points in Latin American history, Jewish novelists, poets, and essayists have had to dodge governmental critics and censors. In his contribution to this volume, Aguinis describes how he has spent much of his career writing in ways that would fool antagonistic censors. For those who have chosen to live outside of Latin America, the situation is only slightly better. Although there is no censorship in the United States, Canada, France, or Israel, the questions of language and readership are serious ones. Jewish Latin American writers who were immigrants from Europe had to decide whether to continue within the traditions of Yiddish literature or change to Spanish or Portuguese. First-generation writers have tended to write in the language of the country in which they were born, but for those like the Argentine short story writer Samuel Pecar who emigrated to Israel, the decision has been a difficult one. Others like the Chilean Marjorie Agosín or the Argentine Alicia Borinsky who have lived in the United States for many years continue to write their works in Spanish and publish them in their native countries; but they also work closely with Irene Kostopulus-Cooperman and Cola Franzen, respectively, superb translators who render the works into English. Writers who publish in Spanish in the United States are generally limited to Latino literary magazines and editions published by small presses. Cuban-born Ruth Behar writes poetry in English, while Mexican-born critic and novelist Ilan Stavans, now living in Massachusetts, switches from Spanish to English and back, depending on the project. The Argentine-born novelist Mario Szichman, who lives in New York, writes mainly in Spanish and publishes his works outside of the United States. Only Goldemberg, Stavans, the Brazilian short story writer and essayist Moacyr Scliar, the Argentine Gerardo Mario Goloboff (who resides in France), and, most definitively, Dorfman (who only occasionally writes about Jewish themes) have been able to garner an international readership.

Jewish Latin American writers find themselves within three literary traditions: Jewish (biblical, Talmudic, Yiddish—Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Mendel Mocher Sforim, Isaac Beshevis Singer; Hebrew—Chaim Nachman Bialik, A. J. Yehoshua; German—Franz Kafka; Russian—Isaac Babel; American—Bernard Malamud, Woody Allen); Latin American (the writers of the "boom" period of the 1970s and 1980s—Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Alejo Carpentier, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes); and Jewish Latin American (the Argentines Alberto Gerchunoff, Samuel Eichelbaum, César Tiempo, Bernardo Verbitsky, and Humberto Costantini as well as the Venezuelan Isaac Chacrón). The Jewish Latin American writer has an extraordinarily rich but often contradictory legacy from which to draw.

As minority writers, they are simultaneously Latin American writers and Jewish writers.

Yet, in spite of all these difficulties, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and theater have been and continue to be written and published and reviewed (in the Jewish press and occasionally in mainstream magazines and newspapers). "La presentación del libro" (the Book Presentation), a roundtable discussion through which a new book is publicized, is popular entertainment in the Jewish community. Jewish newspapers often include new poetry on Jewish themes and extracts from novels and nonfiction works. Bookstores dealing in Jewish literature and carrying dozens of titles in a variety of languages do business in major Latin American cities.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS IN THIS VOLUME

The writers included in this volume have much in common beyond their Judaism. First and foremost, they are writers—poets, novelists, journalists—people with a professional and personal commitment to getting a precise effect from the words they choose. Unfortunately, this makes their autobiographies somewhat suspect as testimony. On the one hand, many of these authors are blessed with extraordinary memories. On the other hand, they are creative individuals, used to making things up from whole cloth, or at least presenting a version of events. Obviously, this volume placed certain constraints on them. First, it overemphasizes the Jewish aspects of a life. Second, there are the restrictions of space. To provide a panoramic view of the Jewish Latin American writers' experience, each contribution had to be limited in length. In some cases, only a phase of a writer's life is discussed, perhaps skewing the greater picture. However, that these writers are experienced in rearranging or retelling tales does not lessen the veracity or importance of what they are saying. They take seriously their responsibility to tell a tale, that is, to make known the Jewish experience in Latin America, even if their techniques are not those of a historian. They are, in many instances, writing about how writing itself determines the course of their lives. While it may not be that "all autobiography is fiction," these essays are not always unbiased or unprejudiced.

Nevertheless, these slices of autobiography are riveting. They portray complex individuals in circumstances that are often perceived as restrictive, frustrating, and unforgiving. Jewish childhood in Latin America, even if only vaguely remembered, is a repeating theme; grandparents with their ties to the old country play an important role. Tales of displacement, loss, repeated emigrations, and encounters with Nazis outweigh reports of adjustment and production, though these are not absent. These autobiographers not only report on what happened (or may have happened) in their lives. Some envision themselves as role models or teachers, either positive or negative, for their readers. In all cases, these are lives that have been lived to the fullest.

Some of these essays were previously published or appeared as parts of larger works. Most were commissioned for this volume. They have been arranged chronologically by birthdate, so that the reader can witness the unfolding of Jewish life in Latin America in the twentieth century. Alberto Gerchunoff's essay appears first. His influence can be seen in the works of many of those who follow. Since its inception, Jewish Latin American literature has developed into a coherent *movement* with shared themes, experiences, and even friendships. It begins with a Jewish gaucho on horseback and persists in the writings of many wandering Jews, fleeing the Holocaust and looking for Zion in Latin America and later in the United States and Israel. Many Jewish Latin American writers have had to move on more than once, looking for an elusive "normal life." Despite it all, they have created a collective vision that is Jewish and Latin American.

Each of the writers in *King David's Harp* has had to cope with an

environment, or series of environments, that is profoundly different from that known by the parents' generation. Some have become immigrants themselves; they have left Latin America for the United States or Europe. Possessing stubbornness and determination, they share a fierce will to be successful. And they have been.

Alberto Gerchunoff

Argentina

Novelist, short story writer, cowboy, metalworker, peddler, journalist, newspaper editor. Alberto Gerchunoff (1884–1950) lived to tell the tale of early Jewish life in Argentina. His first novel, *Los gauchos judíos*, remains his best-known work and his most controversial. Born in the European shtetl, he arrived in the Argentine pampas when only six, his parents seeking a better future in the agricultural colonies supported by the Baron de Hirsch and the Jewish Colonization Association. As a boy, Gerchunoff quickly assimilated local ways: he spoke Spanish, became a skilled horseman, and grew to love the land.

Gerchunoff's life thereafter was a balancing act of opposing experiences. He started as a country boy yet spent most of his life in the big city. He was a farmer and a factory worker, a country journalist and later an editor for *La nación*, the country's most influential newspaper. A native speaker of Yiddish, he came to dominate literary and journalistic Spanish. He loved school but was mainly self-educated. He favored assimilation into Argentine society but had great pride in his Jewish heritage. Intensely patriotic, he tended to understate anti-Semitism in Argentina. Though concerned about the fate of the Jewish people, he was slow to support the state of Israel. Though

foreign-born, he became a dominating figure in Argentine intellectual life. Prolific throughout his life, he wrote social satire, numerous short stories, and studies of Cervantes and Heine.

The autobiography included here (the date of which is unknown) was probably written before Gerchunoff had reached middle age, certainly before the anti-Jewish violence that broke out during *La semana trágica* (Tragic Week) in Buenos Aires in 1919. An extended essay, this autobiography has been edited and its archaic language modernized.

A JEWISH GAUCHO

Alberto Gerchunoff

Moisés Ville was visibly progressing. Behind the tents, the lush horse pastures were giving way bit by bit to cultivation, and the furrows were becoming damp and dark. Squeaking carts, drawn by pairs of oxen, brought wire and posts, and the plow creaked while turning over thick clay. The tame cows and the docile horses decorated our tranquil way of life, their presence evocative of olden days of peace, the ancient days of the Bible. During the warm mornings the Jews greeted each other as they drew water from the wells; their robust voices covered over by the harsh sound of the pulleys. The greetings had something ritualistic and mystical about them in that peaceable and primitive setting.

I had a white mare, agile and fleet, which would arch its neck and gallop backward, under the pull of the bridle, whenever we passed a girl from the colony. An audacious rider already at a tender age, I would lose my way on the outskirts of Moisés Ville, looking for a lost lamb or for some unexpected rhea tracks.

After midday I would go to the tent of a hunchbacked and lame Jew who taught me Hebrew and then to the synagogue with my father, since I liked to hear the old men's opinions and their interpre-

tations of obscure passages from the texts. A tavern, owned by a Spaniard, had been opened close by us. All the farm workers would meet there, and it quickly became the focal point for the area. Gauchos from nearby ranches, wagon drivers, as well as passersby would stop off at the rancho, tying their horses to the posts in the *criollo* style, and enter the tavern. More than a few times, bitter arguments broke out. From behind the counter, the Spaniard, raising a club above his head to defend himself against possible attack, would shout them down.

The colonists saw this tavern as something evil, and they would not stop telling the town administration's local representative that it should be shut down. After all, something serious had taken place there. A suspicious-looking Jewish fellow, covered with scars, very dark, with shifty eyes and a large curved knife, had stolen a horse from Moisés Ville; the owner complained to the authorities. The police had quickly found the thief and forced him to return the animal. The Jewish fellow, it turned out, was from the outskirts, a slacker, a brawler and a drunk. After returning the horse, he spent even more time in the tavern, particularly during the afternoons, and never stopped arguing with the other gauchos.

One day, as the colonists were preparing to celebrate Passover, the slacker sat in the tavern from morning to evening, completely drunk. It was getting dark. On the road a few colonists passed by. We were in front of the tent, drinking maté. We were talking about this and that and observing, among other things, that it was foolhardy to live in Moisés Ville without a gun. But no colonist had so much as a shotgun for shooting partridges. Suddenly, a gaucho appeared, brandishing an unsheathed knife. It was an instant at once horrible and terrifying. Shouts of panic heated the air. A minute of terrible confusion passed. Soon I grasped the enormity of our misfortune. I don't know exactly how, but we found ourselves before the town administration.

Laid out on the ground was my father, drenched in blood. Clearly, the horse's owner had mistaken him for the thief. In a room inside, women were attending to my suffering mother and my older sister, also in agony, on a pair of cots. The entire distraught colony of Moisés Ville was in the patio. People had beaten the killer to death; his head lay mutilated and his body torn apart.

My father was buried in the little cemetery of Moisés Ville. On his tombstone, the Jews inscribed an epitaph that they composed in the synagogue, in classical Hebrew: "Here lies Reb Gershun Gerchunoff, beloved for his wisdom and venerated for his extreme prudence, a chosen and a just man."

We didn't leave the house for many weeks. In the evening, the neighbors came over to entertain us, and Pinhas Glusberg, former leader of the synagogue, would invariably relate an incomprehensible story about the mythical Russian general Kokoroff, with whom he had had the honor to speak. On the slightest pretext, he would intervene with the name of the famous officer I still can't quite believe existed. Pinhas Glusberg was a little old man, a talker and a dreamer with a poet's imagination. "Don't you see him on autumn afternoons, rising on a distant horizon, a ghost with white wings? Believe me . . ."

Exhausted by the memory of the tragedy, our family abandoned Moisés Ville. We moved to Entre Ríos and settled in the Rajil colony, where we became farmers in the fullest sense. I spent several years there, tilling the land with my brother, guiding the harvester, and caring for the stock. The ox driver, a former soldier with General [Justo José] Urquiza, helped me perfect the art of horseback riding. He also initiated me in the use of the bola. Like all Jewish boys in the colony, I looked like a gaucho. I wore widely cut trousers, a large homburg, and boots with ringing spurs; from the horn of the saddle hung a lasso of

shining iron rings; and tied to my belt, next to my knife, were bolas used for hunting.

No Jew of my age could claim to bring a wild yearling down with a jolt better than I. Nor could anyone else stop an unbroken colt in full flight dead in its tracks with a lasso. But my favorite task was to take care of the livestock near a stream bordering our land. All the boys in the colony would meet there, presided over by the native ox driver, who, incessantly chewing on his black tobacco cigarette, would invite us to drink maté with him.

The ox driver had a special fondness for me. I would praise the songs that he sang to the monotonous chords of his broken-down guitar, and at my pleading, he would relate his adventures as a heroic soldier. He divided the tasks among the boys. He worked the land, while we planted the seed for the next season's harvest.

In Rajil my youthful spirit was filled with legends of the Comarcas Indians. Through picturesque, rustic gaucho tales, through simple rhapsodies to Argentina's past, I assimilated the traditions of the place, its collective memories, the imaginary adventures of local warriors. For the first time, my heart opened up to the poetry of the countryside, making me aware of the native beauty of Entre Ríos and igniting in me a steady pride in liberty and a love of *criollo* manners. The vast calmness of the Entre Ríos, bounded by rivers under a matchless sky, so excited me that it erased my origins and made me an Argentine.

The crops failed the day we saw the approach of a cloud so thick that it blocked out the sun. It was locusts, of course, and hours later, the orchard and the seeded fields were covered with their plague. Men, women, and children we went out with sacks and sugar pans to chase the plague away. The wheat was high, and the orchard was flourishing.

We fought courageously; roaring and shouting. But exhaustion and the locust cloud defeated us, and by the time the sweet, magnificent moon illuminated the colony, only farmers' sighs and the women's bitter laments could be heard in the saddened huts.

The curse came three years in a row.

But Rajil, like the other Jewish colonies, made progress in spite of these disasters. Social life slowly began to stir, and families from different regions quickly formed close ties, overcoming the considerable distances separating them.

The construction of a synagogue and a school was proposed. Jews convened to deliberate. Since the younger Jews predominated in the assembly, they endorsed the school first. Soon it was established in a large zinc shed, and from all over, children were brought in daily, with their lunch boxes hanging down. This was to be the very first school in the area.

I was a good student. I learned the stanzas of the "Himno argentino," the Argentine national anthem, very quickly. During recess, my friends would surround me, as I repeated the gaucho tales I had learned from the ox driver in Rajil.

My studies there didn't last long, though. My mother, obsessed with the fatal evening in Moisés Ville, yearned to leave the region altogether, and her pleading was so compelling that the whole family decided to go to Buenos Aires.

It was in 1895, and my uncertain and wandering life had begun. My mother insisted that I study, but it wasn't possible at first since someone needed to support the family. But how? None of us knew any trade at all, of course. Eventually, I found work in a Jew's business, kneading dough for Passover's unleavened bread. The bakery was far from where we lived, so that I had to get up at dawn. At night, a Spanish cart driver started me on the Spanish alphabet.

When the season of the unleavened bread ended, I once again found myself with no means of support. I had to think about a trade.

Soon I entered a mechanic's workshop as an apprentice. I was assigned to the nickel-plating section among a swarm of young shouting boys who all but drowned out the boss's hoarse voice. I spent the day bent over near a sink filled with chalk, brushing bronzes that I would put in the can of boiling lye later.

My fingers swelled and split open. The days were not as bad as the nights, when I really suffered. Yet in spite of it all, I liked the mechanic's trade, and when I didn't have work to do in the nickel-plating section, I would go down the founders' workshop or the metalworkers' to learn something. After a month, I was able to polish pretty well, and I knew how to handle more than a few machines. I would have stayed with the trade, if a shocking event had not convinced my family to pull me out. I am referring to the death of a metalworker, an Italian with enormous, wide shoulders, a rough and good fellow. One morning, on starting the motor, he got his shirt caught in a pulley. I was preparing the lye when I heard a horrifying crash.

On the floor I saw his decapitated and mutilated body; an enormous bloodstain covered the ceiling.

With affectionate insistence, my mother persuaded me to leave the mechanic's workshop. I then joined a cigarette maker from whom I earned fifteen pesos a month and lunch. My boss would pay his workers only after they had fulfilled a certain hourly quota. I learned fast. In three months, I was producing a thousand cigarettes a day. The owner didn't keep his word, though, and failed to pay me as promised. So I changed trades once again and became a ribbon and embroidery maker—a beautiful trade, which I quickly grew to like. I progressed slowly. I spun, learned how to dye silks, knitted random stripes, and became skilled in framing. I was capable of producing a decorated ribbon less than a centimeter wide.

Soon I was a first-class worker. The factory owner, a jaundiced Jew, nearsighted and quarrelsome, once told me, in the presence of the operators, that I was the most skilled tradesman he had ever known. Meanwhile, I kept studying at night. A buddy taught me Spanish grammar, history, sciences. A factory friend, a lean and witty Asturian, introduced me to *Don Quixote*, a book for which I have a singular and profound love.

My aspirations were no longer those of a simple worker. I dreamed of structuring my studies, of taking examinations at the Colegio Nacional; I longed for the glory of a doctorate. No sooner did my day at the factory end than I went to my books, mixing my reading of the dry everyday texts with those I sought after: my *Quixote*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and Victor Hugo's novels.

Over these first serious books, I usually would fall asleep, exhausted, and when I opened my eyes, my mother's angular and wrinkled silhouette would be in front of me. She wouldn't go to bed until she had covered me up, protecting me during those winter nights from the cold wind. A medical student also gave me lessons. But it wasn't easy to study and work at the same time. I couldn't leave the shop, since I needed to earn a living.

I spent a total of three years in the factory as an ordinary worker. At the end of that period, I arranged to work half a day for a third of my salary. This way I could prepare for my exams, which, when the time came, I passed easily.

Now the problem was, where would I find the money for tuition and books?

A neighbor, the owner of a small store, offered me popular merchandise to sell in the street. This was during the crash of 1899. I would take a bulky sack and go around hawking from sunrise to sunset. I mainly sold the merchandise in the endless port area, but I also spent time in the city's outskirts. And so I walked for long weeks until I collected a paltry sum, sufficient for my immediate needs. It was this job that brought me the greatest suffering and humiliation.

I entered the school. I applied myself above all to grammar and history. Restlessly, with exaggerated curiosity, I read enormously, chaotically. I also became interested in public affairs and argued with my classmates about the questions of the day.

That was the time I obtained my Argentine citizenship card. Until then, I had not been equal to the others, that is, not an Argentine. Once when I told my grammar teacher about this problem, he first laughed heartily and then hugged me affectionately. I was sixteen years old then, two years too young to become a naturalized citizen. The next day, I was called to the school director's little office, where I found my teacher. He put me in a car.

"Where are we going?" I asked timidly.

"Well, my good man!" the director exclaimed. "To make you an Argentine . . . Aren't you really one already?"

Once again I passed my exams with high marks. But the question of making a living was still unresolved. I began to give lessons to Jewish workers. But those unpredictable little earnings were clearly insufficient even for the most rudimentary necessities.

The following year, I was no longer able to study as a regular student. In vain the school director and the teachers sought work for me. But I could find nothing. Free from the discipline of the program, I spent many hours in the National Library, poking around books. And so, bit by bit, my interests led me to journalism and literature.

I got to know a number of writers and journalists at public lectures. They grew accustomed to my presence and were quite interested in my views and stories on Jewish life. Soon I became part of the bohemian side of Buenos Aires. This phase lasted for a long time. Happily, neighborhood newspapers and youth magazines began to accept my hesitant essays.

One fine day in 1903, I was offered the position of editor of *El censor* in the city of Rosario.

Of course, I didn't know how to run a newspaper. It took a great deal of work to acquire the most basic techniques. *El censor* was an opposition newspaper, and my articles, violent like all beginner's, caused a small scandal in town, sufficient to make me a man of the press. The newspaper was forced to close down, and I returned to Buenos Aires, armed, fortunately, with a certain professional preparation.

It was then that I joined *El país* and became an effective journalist, able to take on any assignment and do a passable job of it. I stayed at this daily for years. I also collaborated on various periodicals.

My departure from Moisés Ville and Rajil had not led to my separation from Jewish people. In Buenos Aires the Jewish community was constantly growing, forming a visible nucleus for its intense commercial and industrial activities. Already, there were a considerable number of Jews in the high schools and the universities, all hardworking and extraordinarily energetic, stubborn and firm-willed, who didn't take long to distinguish themselves with their scholarly achievements.

Observing this, I conceived of a plan to study Jewish life in a free atmosphere, without outside persecution. Wouldn't it be interesting to show Judaism redeemed from the share of slavery, martyrdom, and stoicism that usually plunges it into abjection? I was, at the time, literary critic of *La nación*. Well placed and calmer than I had once been, I carried out part of my plan in 1910 by publishing a book in which I tried to describe the customs of Jewish immigrant farmers in Argentina.

I traveled a lot, edited newspapers in the interior, took over the associate editorship of *La mañana* and later the position of editor-in-chief of *La gaceta* in Buenos Aires. That, in short, is how I became a full-fledged journalist, wandering from place to place and from trade to trade. Life, in all its hardships, taught me to love being alive. It

planted deep in my spirit the feeling of human pain, and more than books had done, shaped my personal ideas. This is why I love the Jewish people, for they know, like no one else, the supreme value of liberty. In Argentina, Jews, redeemed from injustice and religious stereotypes, will lose their generally accepted profile. On this soil, they will be gradually freed from the whip of persecution. This can be seen already. From the city and countryside, Argentine Jews are deeply and sincerely patriotic as are their elders, those born in Odessa or Warsaw and immigrants to this land. Argentina can be proud of this and show it to older civilizations. What would the Russian people say about such a transformation, for instance? As I carry out many official functions, I come across Jews who are university professors, which neither shocks nor irritates anyone. These Jews are Argentine citizens, nobody cares which temple they pray in, if they are Catholics or not.

In truth, the Jew lacks religious preoccupations. He is mystical without being dogmatic, exactly the reverse of what anti-Semites think. In an atmosphere of freedom, he assimilates to the country; he is remade in its essence. The venerable Baron de Hirsch understood this potential well when he founded the agricultural colonies in Argentina, an immense task of practical philanthropy, and, at the same time, a testimony to show the systematic enemies of this small suffering people, dispersed over the globe.

Neither moneylender nor martyr, the Jew is a free man. No matter what trade he embarks on—laborer on the land, factory worker, or financial magnate—in Argentina his status will not change; for this is Palestine for the Jew, a land of liberty, the Promised Land in the biblical sense of the word.

I don't sing of Jewish life only, though: above all, I am an Argentine, and, as such, a man of letters.

Translated by Stephen A. Sadow

Margo Glantz

Mexico

Margo Glantz (1930–) is blessed with a quick and subtle sense of humor. Her work is often fun to read. Her powers of observation are extraordinary, and she is able to skip from topic to topic or scene to scene at lightning speed. Her writing style is fractured, sometimes surreal in its presentation.

Daughter of the Yiddish poet Yakov Glantz, an émigré to Mexico, Glantz grew up surrounded by Mexico's intelligentsia. She has not felt like an outsider in Mexico. On the contrary, she is considered a force in Mexican literature.

Margo Glantz is a professor of literature at the Universidad Autónoma de México, and has been cultural attaché at the Mexican embassy in London and a visiting professor at Yale and Princeton universities. She has made a substantial contribution as a journalist and as an essayist and literary critic. Her writing is quite varied, often veering off in unexpected directions. Her *Las genealogías* (The Family Tree) is a "fictional autobiography" or "pseudo-novel." Her novel *Síndrome de naufragios* (Syndrome of Shipwrecks) replays the story of Noah, while *El día de la boda* (Wedding Day) pretends to be a collection of love postcards.

The selection that follows, which shows Glantz's wit and attention to detail, is taken from *The Family Tree*.

Centaur in the Garden), the story of a Jewish centaur; and *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes), a complex novel in which a man becomes aware of the many implications of his Jewish ancestry.

This essay, a retelling of Brazilian Jewish history as well as a personal saga, was written expressly for this anthology.

A CENTAUR IN THE GARDEN

Moacyr Scliar

In 1993, I spent a semester as visiting professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Right after my arrival, they held a traditional ceremony marking the beginning of the academic year, in which professors in academic regalia parade before the student body. I was honored by being invited to be a participant in that ceremony. I can't deny that it made me proud. For the first time in my life I dressed in a professor's gown—and in a prestigious American university. But when I received the commemorative photograph, I was surprised: the face that appeared in the gown wasn't mine, it was my father's. We were never so much alike. The one in the photo wasn't a doctor who teaches Latin American literature or a writer invited to give a course on the image of the physician in literature. Rather, it was José Scliar, the Russian Jew who immigrated to Rio Grande do Sul in the second decade of this century, and who, taking things into his own hands, worked, formed a family, educated his children. It was destiny that my father wore the robes that he deserved. And so it happened that I once again remembered my origins.

I had never rejected them. I never could have rejected them, even if I had wanted to. Judaism is undissolvable. In my case it never had

anything to do with religion, because I am not religious. It doesn't have anything to do with the vague and infamous concept of race. I don't have the hooked nose that anti-Semitic propaganda attributes to Jews. Neither do I have the type of Mediterranean physique that would be expected in the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Palestine. Frequently, and with the traditional mixture of hostility and admiration, I am taken for an American. Of course, I was circumcised, but this isn't uniquely Jewish—anyone circumcised during infancy is affected in the same way.

I do have a personal story that, during my sixty years, I have come to consider as a testament of the history of this century, and a history of a group. I am part of the long heritage of Judaism, formed in biblical times and continuing to the present. I identify with the millions of human beings with whom I share the Judaic condition. I suffered with those who were persecuted, I died with those who were exterminated, and I am proud of those who have made their contribution in the arts, the sciences, literature, politics. I don't accept that a Jew can possibly be indifferent to Judaism. Such alienation is not possible, even in a country like Brazil where identities are often hidden in what I have called "the mix." The Jewish tie may be tenuous, but it is not undone.

I remember the great writer Clarice Lispector (1925–77). An immigrant from Russia like my parents, she hardly ever spoke of her Judaism—perhaps because she was married to a diplomat in a time when "blue blood" was de rigueur in the Brazilian diplomatic service. More than that, in her most admirable literature, Judaism is evident in its absence. A Jewish component is not lacking in her works but represented primarily in a melancholy way. In her last book, *A Hora da Estrela* (The Hour of the Star), a principal character, named Macabea, the prototypical persecuted and humiliated woman, summed up the feminine condition and the Jewish condition. During a personal conversation, Clarice told me, melancholically, of her admiration for those writers who can assert their Judaism.

Quite different was the attitude of another writer, a contemporary of Clarice, and like her, an immigrant, though from Poland: Samuel Rawet (1929–94). Author of the first great work of fiction about Brazilian Judaism, *Contos do emigrante* (Immigrant Stories), Rawet, who was a man known for emotional instability, at times turned against Judaism, calling it a conspiratorial movement. His Jewish self-hatred expressed itself in various articles published in the Brazilian press and followed him until his tragic end, a solitary death in an apartment in the city of Brasilia. Judaism can be, for many, a heavy burden.

Heavy or not, I never doubted my Judaism. My parents were immigrants; they came from Russia, more precisely from Bessarabia, a region that made up part of the czarist empire and where the Jews lived in encompassing and anxious poverty in the small villages that Sholem Aleichem described and Chagall painted. Jews, confined to this region, were subject to persecutions. The social tensions of a society violently polarized between a small moneyed class and the immense miserable masses needed to find an escape valve; the Jews were a favorite target. From the beginning of the century, Bessarabia was the scene of many violent pogroms, in particular the Kishniev pogrom (1903) that inspired Chaim Nachman Bialik's somber *City of Death:*

Of steel and iron, cold and hard and dumb
Now forge thyself a heart, O man! And come
and walk the town of slaughter. Thou shalt see
With walking eyes, and touch with conscious hands,
On fences, posts, doors,
On paving in the street, on wooden floors,
The black dried blood, comingled here and there
With brains and splintered bone.[1]

This situation called out to the worldwide Jewish conscience. Jewish philanthropists from Western Europe formed a company to fo-

ment agricultural colonization, the Jewish Colonization Association, or JCA. The JCA acquired huge tracts of land in Argentina and in Rio Grande do Sul, with the object of settling there the masses of refugees who were then leaving Eastern Europe. The colonizing project was not an exception. From a Europe cut into pieces by national and social conflicts, Germans, Italians, and Slavs left by the millions, facing the turbulent waters of the Atlantic in precarious ships. Their destination was a new promised land, America. In the southern cone of Latin America, where enormous expanses of undeveloped land existed, these immigrants were welcomed; as Juan Bautista Alberdi, an Argentine politician and intellectual said, "To govern is to populate." To populate with Europeans, naturally, who brought work experience and who could "whiten" the Latin American populations.

A few hundred families came to Rio Grande do Sul at the beginning of the century. They settled in the colonies of Philipson, Quatro Irmãos, and Baronesa Clara. They would receive land, agricultural tools, seeds, and some help from the JCA. But it never was a successful enterprise. To begin with, these people had little agricultural experience. In the region where they lived, there were only two distant urban centers, and the hospitals and schools were far away as well. To make matters worse, Rio Grande do Sul, an area ruled by warlords, was going through a period of continuous and bloody conflicts. During the revolution of 1923, the colonists lived in constant agitation. Armed bands frequently stole cattle and rations. Little by little, the colonists left their lands and went to the cities. They weren't the exception. The phenomenon of rural exodus, caused by the lack of suitable conditions in the country, became a constant in Rio Grande do Sul and in Brazil as a whole.

When my parents arrived in Brazil, the agricultural colonies were an episode that was practically over. They settled in the ship's final destination, the city of Porto Alegre. My grandmother Ana Scliar, a widow, arrived with her eight children. My maternal grandparents, Abrão and Edith Slavutsky, had four children. Large families were the rule in those days, when the survival of a child was always problematic. My grandparents, my uncles and aunts, and my parents went to live in a neighborhood called Bom Fim, something like the Lower East Side of New York, or Marais in Paris, or Once in Buenos Aires, or Bom Retiro in São Paulo. A poor neighborhood, of small houses—an Eastern European village in Porto Alegre. Of course, Bom Fim wasn't a Jewish neighborhood: we had Portuguese, Italian, and German neighbors, but the atmosphere was characteristically Jewish. There was a Jewish school, the Colegio Idiche, as it was known in the neighborhood, in which my mother, Sara Scliar, was a teacher; there was the synagogue, small and noisy; there was the club, with its dances, during which the boys found marriageable girls; there was the butcher shop, the general store—the streets were crammed with people: street vendors hawking their wares, rotund ladies discussing other people's lives, girls jumping rope, boys playing soccer.

At night there was never much to do. At times the neighborhood movie theaters showed a film in Yiddish; particularly popular was the tear-jerker *Uma carta da mamãe* (A Letter from Mother) that made the audience sob. When the first showing ended, many stayed for the second, trying to squeeze a little more from one ticket. Theatrical spectacles were also unusual, produced by a troupe, that in spite of its pompous name was almost always limited to a couple (Max Perlman and Guita Galina, Herman Klatzkin and Sofia Rafalovich) or possibly a lone actor (Morris Schwartz, Benzion Witler) from Argentina or the United States. The cast was filled in by local talent, aided by a prompter who, helping them remember the lines, yelled more than the actors. The show, presented in the São Pedro Theater, didn't have a starting time, but it did have a closing time: midnight, when the

last bus left for Bom Fim. So that in spite of the fact that the show wasn't over, the shout *lomir guein, se iz shoin,* hurry, let's go, it's late, caused the audience to disperse. On Saturdays there was a traditional dance, enlivened by an orchestra that was not very skilled but was highly enthusiastic. Under the vigilant eyes of their mothers, the boys asked the girls to dance, keeping in mind that that could lead to a marriage proposal—and in fact, many marriages began at the Saturday night dances.

In general, though, there weren't any dances or theater productions or films. During the hot summer nights, chairs were brought to the sidewalks and people got together there. On winter nights, these get-togethers were held in people's homes, frequently in the kitchen, the most comfortable room. In summer or winter, the favorite distraction—in a time when television did not exist and when movies were expensive and theater rare—was to tell stories. This was a Jewish tradition that had great practitioners in Bom Fim. My parents, especially, were great storytellers. I became a writer, in great part, because of my identification with them, because I wanted to participate in the pleasure they had in telling a good story.

Part of social life—for the masculine sex, at least—had the bars as its locale. Bar Bom Fim was famous, frequented by a varied clientele that ranged from liberal professionals to smugglers who began to introduce into the city electronic marvels—battery-operated radios, calculators—brought from the United States.

Life in Bom Fin was hard. It was difficult to earn a living. Many dedicated themselves to street peddling or to selling on credit: they were the *clienteltchiks,* a term that originated from *clientele.* With merchandise that was easy to carry, clothing, pieces of fabric in a package (*pekel*), or a basket full of things (*koichl*), the clienteltchik went through the poor neighborhoods to *klapen,* knock on doors. Forerunner of the modern credit system, he sold on time. These sales were not written down, there weren't any notes, receipts, payment booklets, scarcely any notations in an account book—it was all done by mutual trust. Of course this trade wasn't free of risk. There were those who didn't pay: the *tchvok* ("nail," in Yiddish). The lenders were united; they had the *clienteltchik farhein,* a special type of union, and a credit cooperative (Lairsparcasse).

There were also regular street vendors. Ties were the favorite merchandise, principally in the center of the city: there the *gravatniks* worked, sellers of ties. And there were also established businesses, in clothing or furniture stores—merchandise produced in the small factories of Bom Fim.

Clothing, furniture. Later, during a surge of building expansion that continued until the end of the Second World War, the Jewish merchants and industrialists began to invest their money in the construction of small apartment houses. Clothing, furniture, houses. There is a connection here, these things that shelter, that protect, reveal a disposition, on the part of those who make and those who sell, to not only earn or to support themselves but also offer something that brings with it emotion, human warmth. He who has had to precipitously abandon houses, furniture, clothing, knows the importance of these things.

The Jewish father was in the store, in the little factory, or in the street, selling. But at home, the Jewish mother ruled. In Bom Fim, she corresponded to the traditional image of the mother who nourishes. It wasn't unusual to see mothers running after their children in the middle of the street, with a plate of food. I can give personal testimony of this. Thin, without appetite, I ate a few spoonfuls of soup by the time they turned on the machines in my uncle's furniture factory. My little brother was even worse: he hadn't eaten anything at all. It was a mystery how he survived. My mother finally found out. In front of our house there was a construction site. My brother crossed the street and asked for food from the operators, who, feeling sorry for him, fed him. Learning this, my mother made an agreement with

the workers. She cooked food for the men who brought their lunch pails. My brother ended up being fed by his own Jewish mother.

These precautions were, if not justified, at least comprehensible. Tuberculosis, the white plague that had decimated the inhabitants of the shtetl, of the ghetto, also afflicted the Brazilians. To feed them well was to protect the children against a terrible illness. But it fomented an Oedipal fixation in the Jewish people, and it isn't surprising that psychoanalysis has dug such deep roots in Bom Fim.

I close my eyes, and with great effort, I remember the house in which we lived, on Fernandes Viera Street. Like other houses in the neighborhood, it was very small; like the other houses, it lacked basic comforts like hot water. To take a bath (not very often, I am ashamed, as a public health worker, to have to admit), my mother heated water in a large Sol Levante cooking oil tin. By the way, she never used a gas or electric heater. It was a large wood stove; and anyone who has had to build a fire with damp wood in the depths of winter knows how it's practically an impossible mission.

In this scenario, I began to become conscious of my Judaism. Initially, it was a form of group identification. Those adults who spoke Yiddish and told stories of Bessarabia, those boys and girls who were my companions in the Jewish school, those were my people, I never doubted that. But Bom Fim wasn't a Jewish island, isolated from the world. Bit by bit, I was also becoming conscious—painfully conscious—of a difference. I was a Jew. I wasn't a *goy*. A strange word, that in Hebrew designates a nationality. It is not a pleasant word. It begins with this G, an ugly, disagreeable letter, that is frequently found in words that designate strangers: the *gajo*, the *ciganos*, the *gaijin* for the Japanese, and even the *gancho*, which doesn't take its origin from a very flattering term, perhaps coming from the Spanish *guacho*, which means "abandoned." In Hebrew several words beginning with G designate the stranger or the unknown: *gehena*, Hell or Purgatory; *Golem*, the android created by Rabbi Judah Löew. *Galut* begins with a G and means "dispersion." The biblical chosen people had ascendance over the *goyim;* but the Jews of Bom Fim were in no way chosen people. There were limits to the neighborhood, foreign boundaries, hostile land. On Holy Saturday, Bom Fim itself wasn't safe; a day after Holy Week, which commemorated the death of Christ, avenging hordes came from far away to punish the descendants of the Christ-killers. No one went out into the street to risk getting beaten up.

One day I got a portrait of Jesus. It was a gift, I think, from a pharmacy. It was a blond Christ, with soft, blue eyes filled with pathos—a good man. So good that I decided to hang it on the picture in my parents' room. My father, impatiently, ordered me to throw it away. I asked why. I received a vague answer, which didn't convince me, but I obeyed.

Paradoxically, my parents took the initiative to enroll me in a Catholic high school. The Jewish school had only the primary grades, and when I had finished, I had to continue my studies in another educational establishment. The high school in which I studied was considered to be difficult, disciplined. In fact, I became an exemplary student. Latin, for example, had no secrets for me. And my handwriting was excellent.

But there was also daily religious education. We prayed every day and we had catechism class. And from that a conflict was born. Let me hasten to say that there was no anti-Semitic or doctrinal element, or, if there was, it wasn't important. But that didn't save me from anguish. I acquired a sudden and sharp consciousness of mortality and eternal life. Heaven, that delicious place, choir of saints and angels intoning hosannas, heaven was for me a complete impossibility. Everything indicated that I was going to Hell, and that I would have to with-

stand, for all eternity, unimaginable suffering. I knew what suffering was, having suffered from colic during my entire infancy. But for eternity . . . God, what was this "for eternity"? As a metaphor, the religion teacher tried to give us a pallid idea of the duration of eternity. Imagine, he said, an immense column made of the hardest iron; every thousand years, a bird comes by this column and scratches it with his beak, carrying with it an infinitesimal particle—by the time the bird had taken the entire column not even an instant of eternity would have passed.

I would pass that eternity in Hell, the existence of which I never doubted. I knew where the entrance was located: behind the altar of a church in Bom Fim. There a tunnel led to a pool filled with alcohol in flames that was burning eternally. My schoolmates could easily free themselves from this punishment. It was sufficient that they prayed a certain number of Ave Marias on the first Saturdays of nine consecutive months. No matter how many sins they committed, they would repent at the hour of their death, guaranteeing for them the salvation of their souls.

Now, I still had a chance. As a Jew, I could escape Hell and obtain an entrance to Purgatory, if I were good and just. Now, for a member of a cursed race to be good and just was almost impossible. The best way would be for me to convert.

They weren't talking about a remote hypothesis. A Protestant boy, son of a Catholic mother, was converted in a ceremony carried out in the high school patio, in front of all the students. His happiness, now assured of heaven, was a cause of envy. But Protestantism wasn't so far from Catholicism as Judaism. Beyond that, I, member of the "stiff-necked people," didn't want to let my arm be twisted. I ended up forming a new religion, a Catholic sect in which I was the only believer and also the only priest. I made up prayers, rituals, penitences—which consisted in playing outside with things that I liked, for example, a new little notebook. My hope was to establish direct communication with Jesus, the good Jesus of the colored badge. Before this happened, I left the high school, entered a lay-sponsored school, and ended my own cult by forgetting it.

But I didn't save myself from the curse. I had already introjected Jewish stereotypes. Yes, the Jews were cheap. Yes, the Jews were avaricious. My new schoolmates turned to me and made allusions—in a teasing tone, of course—about the subject. I decided to give them a lesson. I would transform myself into an anti-stereotype. Did they think that Jews were cheap? I would be generous. Avaricious? I would be careless with my money. I paid for sandwiches, soft drinks, cigarettes for everybody. The Goyim looked at me in surprise, and they distrusted me.

Little by little, I was discovering that not only the Jews carried the stereotype for being avaricious, not only they liked money. Many people were avaricious, many people liked money. The world, I realized, was filled with Jews.

In 1948 the state of Israel was created, a fact that had a profound effect on my generation. Youthful protest, indignation with social injustice (of which anti-Semitism was a facet), could now be channeled toward an objective: life in a Jewish Socialist cell, the kibbutz. A sentiment I shared with hundreds of members of youth groups. Associated with all of this was a profound disgust with the bourgeois life now within the reach of Brazilian Jews.

The youth movement of which I was a member was of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist inspiration. As such, it followed the totalitarian model of the communist parties of the time. There was iron discipline, guaranteed by rituals such as sessions of criticism and self-criticism. But it was an intense experience. To leave the city, to camp in the middle of nowhere, to sing and dance around a campfire—moments of profound emotion. The youth movement deepened my knowledge of

Jewish culture; more than that, I learned to believe in universal values, in justice, in solidarity, in friendship. It was good to have friends in whom you could confide completely. Without mentioning the love affairs, it was a time of devastating passions.

But the truth is that the movement demanded a great deal. They all, I discovered, had a messianic vocation. The conflicts that I had to face were many and painful, as in a family, as with comrades, as with friends. To leave the youth movement was a trauma that inevitably left psychic scars. In my generation, leaving the youth movement was accompanied almost automatically by entering psychoanalysis. There was the balm for our upset psyches: a treatment created by a Jew that was expressly destined to alleviate millennial Jewish guilt. Of course, that too didn't take place without suffering, but it was suffering that had a purpose.

I had other and interesting Jewish experiences. Recently trained as a medical doctor, I assumed the post of physician of the Home for the Aged of the Jewish community of Porto Alegre. There weren't many residents—there were never more than sixty—but being in daily contact with them meant stirring up Jewish memories. Among the people I treated in that institution, I was particularly impressed with a woman who, in spite of her advanced age and dementia, showed a surprising vitality—more than that, a surprising sensuality. When it was necessary to examine her in her room, I had to bring with me a nurse's aide. Without realizing that I was a doctor, she acted as if she were receiving a romantic visit from a young suitor—and she didn't hesitate to throw herself on him. Slowly, I was retelling the story of this woman, a former prostitute, one of the "polacas" as they were known in Brazil, brought over from Eastern Europe by Tzvi Migdal, a secret organization that trafficked in the "white slave trade" in the southern cone. Attracted by the promise of marriage, those women were taken from their homes and brought first to Paris, where they were initiated into the life of the brothel and learned a few words in French—the Argentine ranchers and gauchos had a fascination for French women.

In 1970 I spent three months in Israel giving a course in public health in Be'er Sheva. I discovered, in the first place, that the country didn't correspond to my idealized image of it. It wasn't a great kibbutz, the utopian society that I imagined. But it was a country of tremendous vitality and dynamism, a country in which the people faced the problems of daily life with uncommon courage. I returned from Israel proud of my Judaism—and that is reflected in my literature. From then on, I wrote stories without a defined theme (even though many stories allude indirectly to the political climate in Brazil, then governed by a military dictatorship). In that year I decided to write a novel, and it was natural that my setting be Bom Fim and my characters, the characters of the neighborhood during the Second World War. Shortly before the book was published, my mother got sick and died. It was a trauma from which I will never recover. I remember my mother constantly, and I remember her telling stories with a grace that was unique to her. The stories that I like best to tell.

In my stories about Bom Fim, I tell of childhood fantasies and the dreams of adolescence. I tell of the communists that I knew, I tell of a Jewish prostitute, and I tell of a centaur that, because of its dual nature, seems to symbolize identity conflicts to me.

Little by little, I have been developing and accepting, in a mature form now, my situation as a Jew. I don't claim that being Jewish makes a person superior, but it makes him different, and the affirmation of the difference is crucial in a world that is so homogenized. For me, Judaism isn't a religion—the religious rituals are hardly different from those of other religions. Judaism is for me a rich culture, expressed through history, literature, art, even humor. I don't know what the future can be for this culture, given the rapid process of assimilation.

I hope that I am able to make a minuscule, extremely modest contribution so that it, in some way, survives; so that Bom Fim figures on the map of the Jewish world. And above all, so that I can perceive in the photographs that portray my face, now older, the faces of José and Sara, of my parents, and of so many other Jewish parents.

NOTES

1. Maurice Samuel, *Selected Poems of Chaim Nachman Bialik* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972), 104.

Translated by Stephen A. Sadow

Alicia Freilich de Segal

Venezuela

Alicia Freilich de Segal (1939–) is an activist. She has spent much of her life as a Zionist organizer. Daughter of a journalist and correspondent for the New York Yiddish newspaper *Forward*, she was exposed as a child to international Jewish affairs. As a journalist, she has been constantly in touch with those Venezuelans who are influential in politics, business, and the arts. Always active in Jewish communal affairs, she has served as executive director of the Venezuelan Jewish Federation. She is currently professor of literature at the Universidad Central de Venezuela.

Freilich de Segal uses her fiction as a means of educating as well as entertaining her readers. Her novels *Legítima defensa* (Legitimate Defense), *Cláper*, and *Colombina descubierta* (Columbine Discovered) investigate Jewish identity, the weight of the past on the present, and the meaning of the state of being in exile.

Unlike many Jewish Latin American writers, Freilich de Segal is enthusiastic about her country, thankful for the hospitable climate Jews have found there. In this essay, written for this anthology, Freilich de Segal focuses on her experience of Zionism in Latin America.

a fifth part in progress, he employs highly innovative structural techniques to tell the saga of Jewish Argentina. In *Mestizo*, the mystery novel format becomes a platform for interpreting Jewish history before and after the immigration from Eastern Europe. In *Judaísmo 2000* (Judaism 2000) and *Contraexilio y mestizaje* (Counterexile and Mestizaje), Feierstein issues a polemical call for profound changes in current Jewish ideology.

In this selection, taken from *Contraexilio y mestizaje*, Feierstein writes of the interplay of personal experience and literary theory in his approach to the Jewish Argentine novel.

BLOWS TO THE HEART

Ricardo Feierstein

Two characteristics unify the Jewish writers born in this part of the world: cultural mestizaje and the cutting away from history. I participate in both.

I am a cultural mestizo. I am a being with two heads simultaneously turned toward the Jewish and the Argentine, the birth of the state of Israel and the American attempts at liberation, the European Holocaust and the genocide of the last military dictatorship in these latitudes.

Reviewing the proofs for my book *Contraexilio y mestizaje* (Counterexile and Mestizaje), I said to myself, Why add pages to the many that inundate, with improbable success, the sparsely frequented bookstores? This not very original question—one every author who values himself ought to ask about each work—was answered a warm September day in 1996, through two "blows to the heart" (almost simultaneous) and a somewhat confused intuition.

The first "blow" occurred on a Friday afternoon. On the insistence of my friend Steve Sadow (who is also my English-language translator and who had just finished the English version of my novel *Mestizo*), I took him on a tour of my childhood neighborhood in Villa

Pueyrredón. A large part of the novel he had just translated takes place in those streets: Mosconi Avenue, between Nazca and Lavallol, plus a few secondary arteries on one side or the other.

The walk was very sad: the neighborhood that I remembered didn't exist anymore. Not only had most of the neighbors disappeared or moved away, it was different physically—sidewalks, buildings, street corners, and the hideouts had changed. The Villa Pueyrredón of my memory had become unrecognizable. Worse yet, Salvador, one of the few from that time, tells me—on the same sidewalk in front of his old and failing furniture store—that same Mosconi Avenue "has died." Before, there were chairs near the door, and the neighborhood conversation lasted almost until daybreak. "Now," he relates, "the stores close at 7:00 P.M., and everyone runs for the protection of his home. The street is deserted. No man's land. Even the Portuguese's bar—he died some years ago—turned off its lights and closed. It's a desert . . ."

The beginning and good-bye for nostalgia, those sidewalks and their inhabitants, with the experience of shared pluralism that crossed over those sidewalks in the forties and fifties. They are history. They only remain alive in my heart and my memory, where the protagonists still converse in Italian and Yugoslav, shouting from door to door, exchanging cultures and foods in a country of immigration. And in my writings, of course: those lines that vainly pretend to encrust a memory in the fast-moving sands.

The second "blow" occurred that same night. I had to give a lecture in the place that had sheltered my enthusiastic Socialist Zionist movement in the sixties: the place of joy and struggle, the transcendent decisions, and the experiment at life for a shared tomorrow. "To construct and to reconstruct: to unite theory and life, to be pure and rebellious at the same time."

And once again, the sensation of a search for time lost: there weren't any young people among the hundred or so that filled the room. Only companions of my age and some older yet.

Neither does that place of utopia exist any longer, except in nostalgia. And in the pages of a novel that with love gone astray, I, many years ago, dedicated to them. The new generations have stubborn fads, words, decisions, and even clothing that would put off anyone from that period.

Perhaps it ought to be that way, I said to myself. The petrified memory is reactionary, useless, antinatural. The places that the velocity of history has left behind ought to be (and can be) re-created in a literary manner, bringing back to life (fixing) in what is written that emotion that now exhausts the soul.

I should publish it, I thought. Perhaps it will be of interest to someone other than myself. That did happen with my collection of essays, *Judaísmo 2000*, published in 1988. That time, too, I asked myself for what purpose, for whom, why, was this irrepressible vanity of the graphomane. Nonetheless, years later, an experience in Uruguay (where enthusiastic readers collected that text like ideological manna for their own doubts and ordered dozens and dozens of copies) made me understand that these reprinted articles about the emergency and the debates about Latin American Judaism are, also, another mode of history. A form of preserving, in outbursts and hearts and between the covers of a published book, everyday traces of a passing that is difficult to predict.

Two "blows to the heart" on the same day were difficult to take. However, the insight that finally led to the publication of *Contraexilio y mestizaje* is less simple to define. After the horrendous attack of July 1994 against the headquarters of the AMIA—preceded by the March 1992 attack against the embassy of the state of Israel in Buenos Aires—I felt that something inside me broke (and in many Argentinian Jews, I would suppose). I asked myself if the nearness and the lacerating pain of the events didn't cloud our perception of a historical process that is occurring and that we live with only with difficulty.

Said in another way, I perceive that the bomb continues to pro-

duce victims. With delayed effect, the explosion has taken the heart of the proud former Jewish community of the country. The school system is reduced in size. There is uncertainty about the future of the institutions and the organizational forms that should be adopted: a sizable number of families have emigrated to Israel and other developed countries. The suffering middle class—which includes the majority of the Jewish community—is being systematically destroyed by successive adjustment plans imposed by the savage neoliberalism of the Menem government. The political crisis is added to the economic. Avodah, the party that traditionally directed the institutions of the community, appears fragmented and wounded by the events of the last two years.

Once again, the Jewish minority constitutes an "index" of the processes that affect all of Argentinian society. Like a sensitive seismograph of general situations, its quick mimetism of the environment reproduces on a small scale the upheaval and backward movements of this time in our country.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Inspiration. The "lightbulb that goes on." Concentration and flight. Synthesis of the social process. Ivory tower. The attempts to explain it are varied, but the act of creation, the mechanism that allows the channeling of a series of disparate experiences, organizes them according to a rather mysterious process and forms, finally, a play or a painting or a poem, is not understood. It is likely that, in its entirety, the process will never be analyzed with scientific precision.

Freud himself, in his writings about art and literature, admits that there exists, beyond the reach of investigation, an obscure and inexplicable space that precedes the creative act.

The poet makes use of latent elements in the collective unconscious and weaves them together in a particular arrangement to produce a new work, extraordinary, and at the same time suggestive. Also, he can expand his investigation of the profundities of the human soul through routes that are inaccessible to other forms of knowledge. But the mysteries of its mechanisms persist.

I think that some of my personal experiences may be of some help in attacking these questions.

I remember that when I was a university student a teacher of advanced architecture courses never tired of repeating that we ought to limit ourselves to seeking logical and rational solutions for the posed design problems, since "the wheel has already been invented," all the original or "revolutionary" variations that we might try to create with our projects surely had already been proposed, at this level of civilization, by thousands of architects that share the current moment. In some way or other, and without referring to it, he brought to mind Ecclesiastes' refrain, "There is nothing new under the sun."

I was skeptical about this teacher. While I was willing to recognize the permanence of certain great problems through the ages—love, death, brotherhood, the cosmic dimension—that have been repeated in every historical moment and have varied only in form, in the synthesis chosen for their presentation (and not the theme itself), I couldn't forget that every one of us, each unique and irreplaceable individual, generates architectural or literary or human answers that are always different, always original.

Nevertheless, some recent experiences, of varying intensity, have led me to doubt that certainty in the individual answer.

PROSE WITH ADAGIO AND ANDANTE

Starting with my study of aesthetics, begun when I was a student of art history, everything that had to do with the *relationship between form and content* disturbed me deeply. Along with my nonfiction writing, I developed my theories in practice in a book of short stories,

Lucy en un cielo con diamantes (Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds) and in a novelistic saga, completed over the course of fourteen years, composed of four novels: *Entre la izquierda y la pared* (Between the Left and the Wall), *El caramelo descompuesto* (The Melted Candy), *Escala uno en cincuenta* (Scale of One to Fifty), and *Mestizo*.

Especially in the first cycle of three novels, collected under the title *Sinfonía Inocente*, the project—quite ambitiously—takes the musical form of a symphony. (I ought to recognize here my debt to my wife, who is a musician and who has taught me the basic elements of music that I needed in my search for a relationship between the texture and velocity of literary prose and musical pacing, a search that—I read years later—the Russian cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein developed in his theory of montage, but in his case, referring to musical bars and drawings of photographed plains.)

The saga's story—the "content," to the extent that it could be teased out—revolves around the personal experience of the protagonist, who at a crucial stage in his life (that stage of definitions and contrasts that occurs around thirty years old) painfully reaches his inevitable maturity through the search for an innocent place. This search brings him from political action to the recognition of his identity and from communal life in a kibbutz to the practice of his adult profession and to the reencounter with his human and ideological roots.

The "form" chosen for the narration of this story is rather complicated, but, to begin, it can be summarized: a change in the point of view of the narrator (first person in the first novel—*thesis;* first and third person in the second novel—*antithesis;* and third person in the third novel—*synthesis*) allows him to transcend his obscure individuality and in that way objectify—and perhaps generalize—his experience. Otherwise, the entire "Symphony" is organized in three movements, each one of which possesses an *ascending melody* (the melody), a *descending melody* (the rhythmic accompaniment), and a *contretemps*, a brief variation that is analogous to the central theme, developed in alternating chapters. These arise "from inside" the text or from the narrator's "adventure of initiation."

The literary search possesses an infinity of matrices that play with the length of the phrases: the unconventional use of punctuation and the "respiration" of each written section, with the intention of achieving variations of reading that may correspond to the musical movements.

This process, told this way, seems simple, but it took more than a decade of uninterrupted and continuous work. It was, I thought, a very original and aesthetically valuable contribution to the contemporary novel.

Nevertheless, the surprise came. Reading a book by Macedonio Fernández that had inexplicably remained hidden in my library, I found—many years after what I have just related—a note at the bottom of the page in one of his texts: *"No todo es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos,"* "It's not all wakefulness, that of the open eyes." In the course of reflecting on metaphysical problems, Macedonio notes concisely, like a marginal thought,

> Can I combine a prose that could sustain in equal order and step the sentiments that each measure stirs up in a piece of music? (Taking away, of course, all musical value of the word as sound.) Not to say that such a harmonic or melodic element signifies the presence of a forest or a river, but the precise sentiment expressed. When the amateur or professional musicologist strives for that interpretation, he distracts its force. Music and prose are two expressions, and one kind of expression cannot express another expression: forest or river can bring forth the same emotion as a certain musical passage, but one wouldn't say that the landscape expresses the forest; they are two expressions. The problem of the verbal version falls within

> a generic one: the intermingling of the same themes in different art forms (a version in sculpture of a literary theme, a pictorial version of a sonata, etc.).

I am stunned. After years of intense work, I have discovered gunpowder.

And, although I haven't recovered from the blow, a few months ago I came upon the essay "Technique of Narrative Fiction" by Leon Surmelian. Innocently, I began to skim its pages. I read:

> Stories and points of view can entertain in the intrigue in a contrapuntal manner and, as in polyphonic music with its melodies that are interrelated but independent; we can have a mixture of alternating, parallel and contrasting actions, with the repetition of a dominant idea, executing variations on the same theme. This is a experimental form that intends to modify the old conventional structures of the story and create a better method to reproduce an infinitely rich and varied pattern of life through abrupt transitions and an ingenious discontinuity of the thread of the story. The counterpoint can be the answer to some modern problems of the plot, although the experiment is almost completely abandoned. It is yet to be seen if a musicalization of the narrative and great progress over conventional methods is really possible.

My narcissism lies wounded. But I tell myself, the results are yet to be seen: that which is important in the end is the novel itself and its realization, before the theorizing around it.

Do I need to mention, at this point, *Roots* by Alex Haley, that profound and moving investigation of the ancestors of an American black, constructed in a manner similar (return to the ancestors, investigation of the sources, progressing through the generations to find an explanation for the worries and strains of an identity that was repressed and sometimes denied) to my own novel *Mestizo*, whose provisional title was *Family Tree* and which I had been writing since I was an adolescent, in the early sixties? It is possible to find "outside," sometime later, what one has been constructing "inside," convinced of its absolute originality and privacy of the narrative material. Am I, I, or am I the others?

To fill out this point, I believe it would be prudent to summarize some provisional conclusions:

1) The themes that preoccupy human beings are variations of a few great problems and joys—the mystery of love and death, the longing for the lost paradise, the initiation into maturity, moral profundities—essentials of the human being and permanent throughout history, with their logical spatial and temporal sequences.

2) What varies are the "forms" for expressing those "contents," the variations of development that occur in each place and time and in each artist or writer. At the same time, and I postulate this as a thesis, *the different forms chosen redetermine the contents*, they bring them new qualities and thicknesses, define them in a different way, modify and embellish them, give them meanings that remained invisible until they found their form of expression.

3) The creator who intuits and later matches diverse "forms" to those "contents" that he chooses to express doesn't create his works from nothingness, through a sudden illumination or through divine grace. On the contrary, he brings together—through a process that is indeterminate enough—facts and outflows, meanings and matrices that remain latent in the environment of their historical period or their most basic everyday situations, and those whose expressive antennas allow them to capture and synthesize (without excluding, certainly, the mathematics of the "law of probability"). In this manner, the artist would no longer be "one of God's enlightened ones"

but a kind of *medium*, "an intermediary spirit" who acts as a transmitter between forms and latent contents and their concrete expression in a poem, a painting, or a symphony.

4) This way of understanding the creative process doesn't invalidate individual effort and talent, needed to produce and accelerate this process of synthesis that leads to the completed work. Without the daily, craftsmanlike, and exhausting work of the literary trade, without the call to the fantasy and the hallucination, to the farthest limits of the imagination, the catalyzing process would not occur.

5) Nevertheless, the creator is not the only ruler of his truth. Other men, other artists, perceive similar signals in the distinct confines, collect with the fine-tuned radar of sensibility the anguish and expectations, the ideals and the fears, and channel them into forms that sometimes appear similar. Confronted with similar problems, the answers can coincide, approach each other. Intermediary between the spirit and the reality of his time, the artist comes to understand, with Plato, that "to learn" is to "remember." Nothing less.

"The search for one's self": a key decade.

Who, except the author himself, would be interested in this diversion about his own work? Is their anything more annoying than a literato puffed up with fatuousness, speaking of himself in the third person and talking about his books as if they were in the public domain and all were obliged to know them?

Another meaningful vision—no longer so humble—reveals that the writer possesses a minimal influence (and often a regressive one) on the social fabric. A few thousand readers, in general hurried and forgetful, don't guarantee any transcendence at all or authorial fidelity or recognition of the quotations to which reference is made in this type of analysis.

However, another point of view still exists: perhaps egotistical, doubtless productive. To study a posteriori the influences that illuminate a literary work constitutes an exciting adventure, not always

(hardly ever?) at the reach of the author himself. Unconscious restrictions, self-satisfaction, childhood readings hidden in the folds of the memory, narcissistic negations, are some of the barriers that wall off the road to that objective. It has occurred, more than once, that the inquisitorial and objective view of a critic has made clear, with cool professionalism, motivations and variations that explain obscure zones of my own creations.

The objective of the following lines, therefore, is another concern: *the search for oneself in the body of one's literary creations*. To write about yourself, not so that someone will know you, but rather to know oneself though the process of writing. That burning desire is understandable: no one can be oneself without obtaining that knowledge.

Also, the possibility to experience again—as a substitute life, woven of disconnected pieces and disordered strands, a route of literary creation at the second power—the process of constructing a narrative puzzle, a frightening effort, if such a thing exists. The style is the man, what he signifies: I recognize myself in that mixture of personal adventure and excessive rationalization, as if the paragraphs and the silences of the page recall, laboriously, a slightly deformed mirror and with balsamic therapeutic action, on the way to exorcizing historic interior demons.

The construction, at times complex, of this narrative saga cannot be extracted from the period of cultural formation during which it was conceived: the decade 1960–70 in Argentina, a time especially significant for the sociology of art, for the close relationship among three simultaneous phenomena that included my own Jewish Argentinian generation:

1) The decade begins with the Cuban Revolution (Fidel Castro takes command the first of January, 1959) that profoundly moved all young Latin Americans; with its images of bearded faces and informal *guerilleros* defeating a corrupt army: *beginning* with a libertarian program that won the support of the most influential intellectuals of

the moment (Jean-Paul Sartre, Julio Cortázar, Leopoldo Marechal, etc.) and ended with Paris Spring (1968), when the French students propose "the imagination of power" and occupy Paris with slogans such as "Let's be realistic, let's ask the impossible."

2) The presence of the Jewish Question is added. It is understood—since the "Sirota case" (a young girl raped by a Nazi commando in 1963; he tortured her and tattooed a swastika on her breast) and the ultranationalist shock troops of Tacuara and Guardia Restauradora—as an emergency of particularized violence that brought back the horrible existence of the not-so-distant Nazi genocide in Europe and that didn't receive "specific" answers from the Argentinian political parties.

3) The lowest level is composed of the organic interrelationship between the economic positions in favor of development and the aesthetic ideology of the Argentine vanguards in that decade, between industrial development and the creation of better material and cultural conditions for artistic experimentation.

Thus the four novels written between 1972 and 1987—the trilogy *Sinfonía Inocente* and its river's mouth narrative *Mestizo*—encounter again and again the man that I was during the early decades of my life. The idea of a literary saga, conceived and then explicitly developed during those years, was to allow me to apply freely to the literary work the sublimation of my own tensions and personal experiences into an adventure on paper, with an uncertain and perhaps amusing finale—a proposition that could be summed up in the following four coordinates:

a) There exists the need "to tell the world" what the sixties were like for my generation. This adds an original variation to the *nonfiction* genre that I decided to employ in the novel cycle: the personal participation of the narrator/protagonist who would be the author himself (in the style of Hemingway and others).

Therefore, it is a *novel of initiation* that, starting from a private experience, reflects—to an extent that was only visible to the author, many year later—what was general in Argentine society, especially in the process of searching for identity in an immigrant country that is culturally mestizo.

b) There exists an incarnation of ideology; to bring banners and poetry declaimed in words to daily life would generate a feeling of adventure that inevitably created new technical problems for me: the relationship between truth and verisimilitude of the text, the necessity of a dramatic line, the selection of archetypical characters and their evolution, and, above all, a sufficient montage of reflections, actions, and crisscrossing experiences.

c) The two previous paths come together in my own experience as an architect and student of the theory of form and its relationship to content. So, as a variation of the *nonfiction* style, I brought together life and literature: the narrative transmission of that experience allowed for the combination of ambitious formal searches—already developed in earlier books and short stories—and a work with language that would be less acceptable in short stories or other forms.

These three paths produced four completed novels (a thousand pages) and the sensation of an autotherapeutic effort that greatly exceeds individual experience—because of its suggestions about ideology, human innocence, or cultural mestizaje—and permits a scenario for cardinal questions at this postmodern turn of the century with its "aesthetics of fragmentation" and its apparent impossibility of access to totalizing visions.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The idea of cultural—not ethnic—mestizaje recognizes the belonging to a generation, to the first litter of immigrants born in this country. In this fact appears, simultaneously, the following three dimensions: the European (village in Poland), the Latin American (Buenos Aires

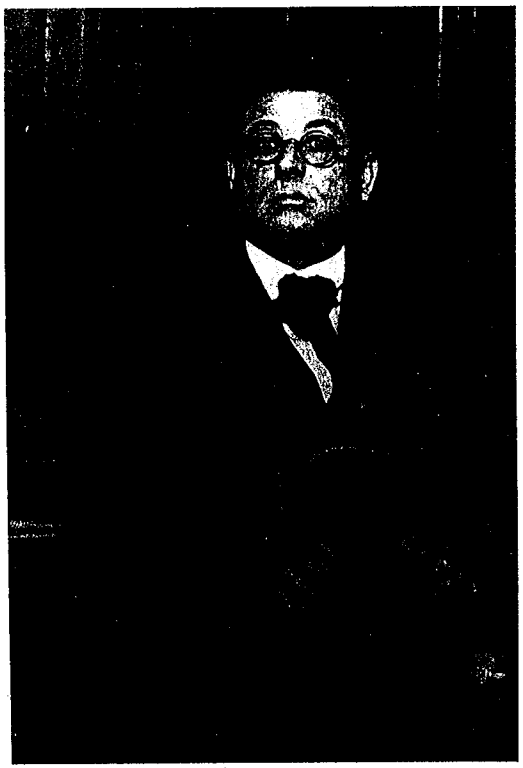
neighborhood) and the Israeli (the kibbutz, the childhood Arab friends, the Middle East Conflict). This mixture is found, but in a hybrid state, without having to give way to a new product.

In the "cultural mestizo," the three dimensions are still mixed and superimposed but not integrated; perhaps the coming generations will carry a new model of identity. But meanwhile the current world—not the dimpled protagonist of a narrative fiction—finds itself facing the option of choosing the improving mestizaje or fall into a fratricidal war between national or religious groups who definitely ought to coexist (the former Yugoslavia, the former USSR, European nations such as France, Italy, or Germany with immigrants from the starving Third World—or, in general, the entire "global village" that today constitutes the planet).

This point in time ceases to count this voyage historically. "There is no reading without a date," Ernst Fischer would say, while referring to the interpretations and writings of each of us. Somewhat more pragmatic, the Canadian poet Leonard Cohen prophetized, "All of those who marry the spirit of his generation will be a widower in the next."

In a manner that is perhaps ingenuous (innocent?), my novelistic saga pretends only to recover, at least understand, with affection and sensitivity that moment in which the world seemed better than that which resulted later: this difficult and vain present that we carry with us with exhausted hope.

Translated by Stephen A. Sadow



Alberto Gerchunoff: from the 1936 edition of *Los gauchos judíos*

Edna Aizenberg

Parricide on the Pampa?
A New Study and Translation of
Alberto Gerchunoff's *Los gauchos judíos*

Vervuert • Iberoamericana • 2000

Gerchunoff's entire work deserves to be translated... Because you can find bits and pieces of him in every one of his writings, in every sentence... When I think about him, what comes to mind is not a book or a page of a book, but something much more important –the man Gerchunoff... That's why I like to remember him, I like to talk about him, I like to transmit my feelings to others.

Jorge Luis Borges

INTRODUCTION

I pick up *The Jewish Gauchos* once again. I reread the book, nostalgically reliving each of its pages. I see my father's comments written in the margins, and my comments under his. So many decades come alive, so many memories, so many echoes shaking me to the core... As I close the beloved book, I am moved to tears by this testimony to our youth and to the magic of the new land.

Lázaro Liacho

What is the meaning of [Gerchunoff's] bucolic Argentina in the face of... the violent Argentina of the Buenos Aires pogroms?

David Viñas

This book inspires strong passions. At first read, it seems an unlikely candidate for such outbursts of emotion. *The Jewish Gauchos* is a collection of twenty-three stories about turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants to the Argentine pampa authored by one of their own, the Russian-born Alberto Gerchunoff. Gerchunoff began to publish vignettes based on his country life in 1908. These sketches, some first printed in the influential Buenos Aires daily, *La Nación*, became the seed of *Los gauchos judíos*, which appeared as a volume two years later.

If the genesis and content of Gerchunoff's work are as bland as the bare-bones outline, then why the fuss? Why the powerful reactions, the virulently opposing opinions, the heated critical discussions, the many reprintings and imitations, this new study and translation? Readers of Gerchunoff's better-known countryman, Jorge Luis

Borges, might recall the acrimonious debates surrounding that author's work, the longstanding arguments between the adherents of the "good" Borges whose fictions helped remake contemporary literature, and the enemies of the "bad" Borges who escaped the realities of his nation (see Aizenberg 1997). But Gerchunoff?

The controversies about Gerchunoff are less familiar, but in this era of fierce disputes about immigration and multiculturalism, it is high time for an English-speaking audience to become acquainted with his creation. Borges's *El Aleph* (1949) may be the most famous "Jewish" book to come out of the republics of the south, yet Gerchunoff's was a precursor text. Much before Borges, the agriculturalist-turned-writer posed important questions about literature written at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, and displayed the problematic multicultural layering since considered characteristic of the best Latin American fiction.

On the brink of the twentieth century, Gerchunoff –a colorful figure in Buenos Aires literary and journalistic circles, a founder of the Argentine Writers' Association, a defender of Borges, and a friend of Rubén Darío, Leopoldo Lugones, and other Latin American literary lions– presented sociocultural dilemmas common to both Americas: How do you negotiate the breach between the demands of homogeneity and the need to sustain ethnic identity? How do you open up histories, ideologies, and literary canons? How do you constitute culture on the periphery and resist the forces of authoritarianism and prejudice?

Gerchunoff asked these questions at the century's opening, hopeful about its possibilities. Now that it has closed, still struggling with the predicaments he experienced, it is appropriate to let his inaugural book speak to a broad readership that includes, in North America and elsewhere, large Hispanic and Jewish communities, as

well as other minority and immigrant groups. At a moment when writers are struggling to create modes of expression that do not hide ethnic or sexual difference, his book addresses the difficulties inherent in any reductionist view of community and self (see Foster).

The Context of a Canonical Text

The story of Gerchunoff's pathbreaking words begins with prior words, found in the Argentine constitution of 1853: "The Federal Government will encourage European immigration, and will in no way... restrict... the entry into Argentine territory of foreigners whose aim is to work the land, improve industry, and introduce the arts and sciences." A radical departure from colonial Spain's closed-door policy in Latin America, the declaration embodied the desire of independent Argentina's nation builders to "govern by populating" –to fill their country's vast, unharnessed spaces with hardworking immigrants whose European habits and skills would lift the land out of its "barbarism" into "civilization."

This unabashedly Eurocentric modernization project called for the extermination of the Native Americans and the domestication of the gaucho, the free-riding cowboy of the pampa, whose wild ways no longer suited an Argentina intent on becoming a progressive member of the concert of nations. "Peace and prosperity" meant closely tying Argentina to Europe, but not as an industrial partner, as an exporter of meat and wheat; this longterm weakness was overlooked in the rush for modernization.

Riddled with contradictions, the modernization program did nonetheless succeed in imposing its model on

reality, changing the demographic face of Argentina and fostering greater economic well-being. By 1910, year of the first centennial of Argentine independence, the country's leaders could boast that the nation had become a prosperous melting pot in which people of diverse backgrounds were amalgamated harmoniously. The price paid by minorities for such "amalgamation," and the fissures in the smooth façade –labor strikes, anti-immigrant pogroms– were scarcely mentioned.

The words of the 1853 constitution were broadcast by emissaries sent from the far-off New World to the Old. They found a ready audience in Baron Maurice de Hirsch, the Judeo-Belgian philanthropist anxious to undertake a civilizing mission of his own –the saving of his Jewish brethren from the barbarism of the Russian Pale. Under his auspices, starting in 1891, the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA) began to purchase acreage on the pampa in order to settle Jews; Moisesville was the first colony to be established.

In fact, just as Argentina's immigration policies were an attempt to move away from Hispano-Catholic feudalist pastoralism, so was the baron's plan part of the modernization of Jewish life. From the beginning of the last century, the Jewish world had undergone radical transition from a "medieval" to a modern existence, as Jews, impelled by czarist anti-Semitism and diminishing economic horizons, emigrated by the millions to North and South America. The period saw an expansion of traditional Jewish culture, anchored in the Hebrew Scriptures, with new secular literatures in Hebrew, Yiddish, and European languages. Jews adopted new ideologies of action –Zionism, Socialism, Territorialism– that contrasted profoundly with religious teachings fostering obedience to God and faith in His redemption.

The intersection of the two modernization processes, Jewish and Argentine, had a particular coloring, significant for understanding Gerchunoff. These were modernizations on the margin, of peoples in ambiguous relationships with the centers of Western culture. At the turn of the century, Jews –the quintessential minority– and Argentines, long colonized by Spain, both had an uncertain territoriality, an undefined linguistic-cultural identity, and a murky ideological field, in which newer forces of pluralism struggled mightily with older exclusivist models.

Like many postcolonial peoples, the Argentines had only recently unified their national space and were struggling to cohere a physical and imagined community called "Argentina." Building an identity was a fundamental aspect of this task: If Argentines were no longer subjects of Spain yet continued to speak Spanish, how should their language differ? And what should they do about the languages of the immigrants flooding the country? Should Argentine identity be based on the fast-disappearing Hispanic ruralist model, symbolized by the landowner and the gaucho, or was it to be a Europeanized, urban identity? Were the literary paradigms to remain gauchesque literature, poetry and prose based on the exploits of the gaucho, such as José Hernández's master poem, *Martín Fierro* (1872), or were newer forms, often inspired by continental fashions, to prevail? Did the coming of the foreigners signal greater openness in the political system, or could the country continue to be governed in oligarchic style?

Jews, for their part, were even more unsure as they entered modernity. Exiled for two thousand years, they had no territory at all. The major ideologies of the period contended with this vital problem, made desperately

acute by the latest round of czarist pogroms. Zionism proposed the establishment of a Jewish home in the ancestral Promised Land; Socialism aimed at Jewish normalcy through a juster order wherever Jews lived; Territorialism sought to end dispersal anywhere –for instance, in agricultural colonies on the pampa. A literal, regenerating "living on the land" was an integral part of the ideological effervescence. Jews became farmers and a more urban folk at one and the same time.

Cultural-linguistic disputes were likewise heated. Was Yiddish, the idiom of Eastern European Jewry, to be the modern Jewish tongue? Or was it Hebrew, the scriptural language that had united all Jews? What about the European languages, which Jews increasingly made their own? And as Jews integrated into society, to what extent should they abandon their relatively closed, traditional communities and "melt" into the secularized, though still Christian environment? The issue was of great consequence, since secularism and integration exacted a price seen in the existential anguish of those who abandoned old ways without being totally accepted by society, and in the diminution of strongly-marked Jewish identity.

Territory, language, ideology –the similar challenges that faced Jews and Argentines did not, however, make for an easy coexistence; more often than not the unresolved problems of the two peoples-in-flux resulted in friction. Gerchunoff's work, deeply imbued with his Jewish background, and equally permeated by the Argentine milieu, illustrates the predicaments of cohering new communities and imagining novel discourses on the periphery.

Three Versions of Gerchunoff

Since a work is constituted by the history of its reception, the challenges of territory, language, and ideology can best be studied in *The Jewish Gauchos* through three versions of Gerchunoff –the "good," "bad," and "complex." All three begin with the same facts:

Alberto Gerchunoff established an authoritative discursive practice because he founded a new form of Jewish life in a new country. But in order to transform his experiential pioneering into literary pioneering, Gerchunoff had to leave the pampa, move to Buenos Aires, and initiate a successful career as a journalist and writer. It was away from the rural setting he lovingly portrays that he again became a founder. His book was among the earliest Latin American accounts of Jewish emigration to the New World, and among the first works of literary value to be written in modern Spanish by a Jew. Gerchunoff was thus the forerunner of contemporary writers of immigrant stock, the Argentines David Viñas, Andrés Rivera, Alicia Steimberg, Santiago Kovadloff, and Marcos Aguinis, the Mexicans Margo Glantz and Sabina Berman, the Venezuelan Isaac Chocrón, the Brazilians Clarice Lispector and Moacyr Scliar, and a growing number of U.S. Jewish-Latino authors, Marjorie Agosín, Ariel Dorfman, Mario Szichman, Isaac Goldemberg, and Alicia Borinsky. Gerchunoff's existential and literary firstness helped win canonical status for his book.

From this point on, the paths of the three versions fork.

Path I: The Good Gerchunoff, or Argentina, Land of Promise

Territory: Gerchunoff's work rooted Jews on Argentine soil. Bernardo Verbitsky, a fellow intellectual, claimed that Argentine Jews received their citizenship papers through the book, which represented them at their new country's Centennial celebrations. To term a work of fiction a group's "citizenship papers" may be hyperbolic, but it speaks to the power of literature to create what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities," in eras of nation-formation.

Gerchunoff understood that during the Centennial, Jews, long bereft of a land, had to declare themselves part and parcel of the community envisioned by Argentina's founders. The most powerful symbol of Argentine territoriality was the gaucho, a figure extoled in speeches, festivities, and books; Leopoldo Lugones's *La guerra gaucha* (1905) [The Gaucho War] and Martiniano Leguizamón's *De cepa criolla* (1908) [Of Native Stock] were just two examples of the copious literature that glorified the pampa cowboy and all things autochthonous. By positioning "Jews" alongside "gauchos," and portraying the immigrants as adopting rural ways, Gerchunoff earned them the right to belong.

Language: Although he knew Yiddish and Russian, the immigrant tongues, testimony after testimony cites Gerchunoff's mastery of the Spanish language, his love for its classical sources, his special devotion for Cervantes. Borges notes Gerchnoff's interest in the twists and turns of vocabulary and syntax (*Figuras* 14). Luis Emilio Soto points to the author's nuanced use of modernist linguistic impressionism (9). Gerchunoff was a champion of *modernismo*, the literary movement that renewed Spanish-language poetry and prose at the start of the century, whose best-known figure was Rubén Darío (see his essay "Rubén Darío"). In *Los gauchos judíos*, Gerchunoff wed modernist chromatism to oral gaucho idioms, and modernist barroquism to archaic Castilian and Judeo-Hispanic turns of phrase, demonstrating that, through their handling of Spanish, Jews could be true Argentines. And if to be true Argentines, Jews had to shed their Old World linguistic heritage, so be it.

Ideology: The Centennial represented the high point of nineteenth-century constitutionalist, free-trade Argentine liberalism. Thanks to this ideology, Argentina had opened its doors to immigration, and Gerchunoff underlined Jewish identification with its tenets, structuring his work like a secular Haggadah, the Passover narration that recounts the Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom. His portrait of the grateful Russo-Jewish immigrants was taken up by the poetic giants of the period, Leopoldo Lugones, in his *Oda a los ganados y a las mieses* [Ode to Flocks and Grains], and Rubén Darío, in *Canto a la Argentina* [Song to Argentina], both written for the Centennial. The implications are evident: Argentina is the modern land of liberty where Jews have been redeemed from Russian oppression. Loss of identity in the assimilationist melting pot was a small price to pay.

This version of the "good" Gerchunoff has become a keystone of official rhetoric, and has given rise to multiple reelaborations, including Juan José Jusid's film *Los gauchos judíos* (1975), and the play by two of Argentina's best-known dramatists, Roberto Cossa and Ricardo Halac, *Aquellos gauchos judíos: recuerdos de la colonia* (1995) [Once Upon a Jewish Gaucho: Memories of the Colony]. Any reference to Argentina's acceptance of Jews, to Jewish integration to the Land of Liberty, inevitably involves an allusion to Ger-

chunoff's cowboy epic of the new homeland (see also Ricardo Feierstein's anthology, *Los mejores relatos con gauchos judíos*).

Path II: The Bad Gerchunoff, or Argentina, Land of the Disappeared

Territory: Gerchunoff's work misrepresented Jewish rootedness. From the outset, Jews left the colonies for the cities, unable to overcome the pampa's lingering latifundist legacy, crop failures, ICA mismanagment, limited educational opportunities, and rural violence. Gerchunoff himself lived through these bitter experiences; after a drunken gaucho murdered his father, the shattered family moved to Buenos Aires.

In the past two decades younger intellectuals, often victims of repression and exile, took Gerchunoff to task for what they saw as his uncomplicated territorialism. David Viñas, Saúl Sosnowski, Leonardo Senkman, Mario Gerardo Goloboff, and Mario Szichman are among those "parricides on the pampa" who challenged Gerchunoff in critical works and novels, presenting a contradictory deracination or a complex polyterritoriality –Argentina, Europe, Israel– as the more accurate portrait of numerous Argentines, who were scarcely settled on Argentine soil in peace and calm. Bitterly parodying his predecessor, Szichman writes the following in his novel about persecuted Russo-Jewish immigrants sailing to Argentina: "On the first day of the crossing they were shown a film called 'Argentina, the Promised Land.' The screen had been divided into four parts... you could see wheat fields, cows... ships... and a family... looking up at a radiant sun... In the country that had been prepared to fool the immigrants... there were no... short folks... fat folks... or

anti-Semites... money grew on trees, and the immigrants became expert broncobusters" (*Los judíos*, 77).

Language: Gerchunoff's skillful handling of Spanish silenced the immigrants' multilingualism and glossed over the impediments to fluency in the new tongue, since then, as now, bilingualism was considered threatening (Senkman, 80-81, 97).

Countering Gerchunoff's perceived strategy of linguistic accomodation, the literary parricides intentionally recreate the difficulties of switching from one linguistic code (Yiddish) to another (Spanish), as in this excerpt from Goloboff: "*Argentineh. Aryentineh. Argentina.* First is the homeland of speech, you must shape a tongue from its very roots. A language that in order to sound like *tug* and mean *día* [day] must be *día* from the deepest depths" (26). Their protagonists incorporate traces of Yiddish to recreate a certain texture of life and to conjure up a storehouse of Jewish experience. Szichman has so many Yiddish words in his novel that he provides a glossary; Feierstein continually interrupts the narrative flow with footnotes to explain *idn, melamed, toit shtibl, schwitzer* (Jews, teacher, deathhouse, showoff). They foreground bilingual tensions in order to resist homogeneity.

Ideology: Gerchunoff capitulated to the reigning political philosophy for a place in the Argentine sun. In a caustic essay that became the parricides' manifesto, David Viñas forcefully attacks Gerchunoff, to be seconded by Leonardo Senkman (Viñas, "Gerchunoff: gauchos judíos y xenofobia"; Senkman, *La identidad*; see also Lindstrom). Peace and integration, whatever the cost, are the watchwords of *Los gauchos judíos*, Viñas charges. Where, he asks the patriarch, is the conflict, the discontent?

Path III: The Complex Gerchunoff, or Argentina, Land of Contradiction

Which, then, respect or vituperation? Both positions, good and bad, simplify the book, since they are based on the premise that Gerchunoff constructed a one-voiced text and an uncomplicated figure. But did Gerchunoff truly obliterate Jewish ethnic and idiomatic signs? And was his work unremittingly monovocal and accomodationist as claimed? The evidence is more complicated than either side would have it.

Translation is the best way of reading. It forces you to get into the nuts and bolts of the text, to notice the minutae. If criticism looks at macrostructures and makes generalizations, translation focuses on microunits –articles, prepositions, words, phrases. The English translation that forms part of my new look at Gerchunoff, the first ever made of the original 1910 version of *Los gauchos judíos*, uncovers a far greater ideological and linguistic-cultural intricacy than has been allowed, calling for a more nuanced assessment. It has permitted me to rethink the work, and to revise some of my earlier "parricidal" analyses (see "Parricide on the Pampa").

To put it bluntly: most critics base their opinions about what Gerchunoff thought and did in the Centennial period on the wrong text, the *second* version of *Los gauchos judíos* published in 1936, *a quarter of a century after the original*. They make assertions about Gerchunoff's meltingpotism and Hispanism unaware –or unconcerned– that they are judging a much later reworking.

Yet the 1910 edition was the Jewish community's entry into the Argentine imagination. It seems imperative to present the foundational text as it was at the founding. At the same time, it is essential not to ignore Gerchunoff's revisions, because they throw light on the depth of his ideological contentiousness and his intense work-in-language right from the book's initial inception. *Los gauchos judíos* must be read in the shuttle space between versions, as a process not as a stasis.

I read the book in just that way, using the insights of genetic criticism and current translation theory. Genetic criticism considers texts to be complex entities constituted of notes, drafts, emendations, and reprintings; translation theory posits interlinguistic transfer as a tense act, meant to lay bare rather than to smooth over roughness and ambiguity[1]. Together, these approaches provide important keys for understanding Gerchunoff's knotty creation. Like Mark Harman's new translation of Kafka's *The Castle*, mine is based on a "restored text," and like Harman's it mimicks the strange oscillations and dense counterpoints of the original (xvii).

Three major textual components make up the translation portion of this study: 1) the entire 1910 version of *Los gauchos judíos*, including the barely-known introduction by Martiniano Leguizamón; 2) some significant changes made in 1936, included in brackets (square for omissions,

[1] On genetic criticism see Louis Hay and Péter Nagy (eds.) (1982), *Avant-Texte, Texte, Après-Texte*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó; and Michael Malicet (ed.) (1986), *Exercices de Critique Génétique* (Cahiers de Textologie), Paris: Minard. I quote from the introduction to *Exercices*: "Toutes ces études illustrent l'importance de la critique génétique qui peut d'autant mieux fournir la base de toute interprétation ultérieure qu'elle révèle la nebuleuse primitive dont nous parlions plus haut, où réside la plupart de temps la source de la polysémie du texte définitif" (4). For current translation theory see, for example, André Lefevre (1992), *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, New York: Modern Language Association. Also, Suzanne Jill Levine (1991), *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Literature*, St. Paul: Graywolf.

brace for substitutions); and 3) an appendix containing the two stories added to the second edition. My intent was to give a broad audience a sense of the text and its evolution, not to produce a critical edition with detailed variants[2]. This is the only manner to fully appreciate *Los gauchos judíos* as an experiment in forging a new idiom for a novel experience.

Territory: Rereading *The Jewish Gauchos* as an argumentative, kaleidoscopic work highlights previously-ignored moments –its crucial opening scene, for instance. At a Sabbath gathering set in the Old Country the learned Dayan (rabbinic sage) explicates difficult points in the sacred texts employing the semiotics of talmudic discourse. Traditional Jewish exegesis applied past precedents to present events, and allowed no ideological position to be expressed without a real or hypothetical counterposition (Harshav, 16). Not surprisingly, then, the future immigrants, steeped as they are in the world of the Talmud, critically consider various territorial possibilities, and –just as inevitably– lock horns over the choices.

The antagonists argue contrary points of view: praise for Spain, its mild climate, and kindness to the Jews in centuries gone by; condemnation for blood-saturated Iberia and the horrors of the Inquisition. On the one hand, there is acclaim for Argentina's virtues; but on the other, profound awareness of the millenary pull of Zion, a pull reiterated throughout the work. Even as the newcomers express deep gratitude to the South American refuge, they

[2] I have been invited to prepare such an edition for the Colección Archivos, a landmark series of critical editions of twentieth-century Latin American literature funded primarily by UNESCO.

recall that they are not in Jerusalem, that Argentina is not the Promised Land of their ancestors.

Palestine or the Argentine? Benevolent or malevolent new Hispanic earth? Old Russia, where they lived badly but feared God; or the New World, where the young stray from the faith? Gerchunoff does not silence the loud territorial disputations of his time, letting the settlers wrangle and have their say –with the gravity of talmudists, as he frequently points out– signaling to his readers that a single territoriality was far from easy for his persecuted brethren.

Language: Contrary to what might be expected, at the time of the Centennial, when melting-potism and Hispanism were regnant, Gerchunoff's text was exceedingly particularistic and openly yiddishist. The author incorporates the idiosyncratic cultural baggage of the greenhorns: words in Yiddish and Hebrew; multiple footnotes to explain these words; specific references to classic Jewish religious works; translations of Yiddish songs; allusions to popular Yiddish plays and novels; Hebrew-Yiddish forms of biblical names; Spanish calques of Yiddish expressions.

The work brims with non-Spanish expressions: "Cherbale-chaim," "Sana toikef," "Mischnais," "Zeroim,""Gemara", "Iorudea," "ben-yuchid," "shel yod," "umed," "kitol," "Yom Kippur," "Rabbenu Yehudah Ha-Kadosh" (see "Names and Terms" list for meanings). Gerchunoff peppers the stories with allusions to *jerga vulgar* [popular vernacular], a translation of *zhargon*, a common name for Yiddish; to "El canto de la Sulamita," Abraham Goldfaden's famous romantic Yiddish operetta, "Shulamis" (1880); to novels by the best-selling Yiddish author, Shomer; and to the cities of Kishinev, Zhitomir, and Elizabetgrad, important in the history of Eastern European Jewry. Women are

addressed Hebraically as "Dvorah" and "Esther," not "Débora" or "Ester," and men as "Rabí," Gerchunoff's rendering of the Yiddish *reb* through multilingual layering that melds Hebrew, Yiddish, and Spanish.

Reb, Yiddish for "mister" (used with the first name), derives from the Hebrew *Rab*, "teacher, rabbi," but it does not have that meaning. *Rabí* does –it is the medieval Spanish term for "rabbi." Gerchunoff's recontextualization of the old Hispanic word appears far from perfect to contemporary eyes, but it gives an idea of the author's linguistic experimentation. I have retained it in my translation to convey the sense of complexity, polyglotism, erudition, archaism, and even estrangement it evokes. *Rabí* exemplifies the tone of Gerchunoff's book, a tone I have endeavored to preserve, since I fully agree with what Mark Harman says about his work on Kafka: "Literary translators must forge a prose style that mimicks the original" (xiv).

To render Gerchunoff's book in breezily colloquial English, to omit its learned circumlocutions and the various strata of language, to substitute the unfamiliar with the familiar, the uncomfortable with the comfortable, would not do it justice. Gerchunoff, it is now clear, was working in uncharted waters and essaying untested solutions. He has not been given enough credit for his efforts even if they now seem eccentric –like *rabí*. Gerchunoff himself often realized where he had gone astray, as can be seen by reading the editions together. What do you call Jewish prayer, the Jewish prayerbook, the holy ark? The author tries on *misa* "mass," *misal* "missal," and *santuario* "a niche for a saint's image." He modifies or eliminates these Christological terms in 1936. But he also omits anti-Christian remarks in the colonists' speech, such as "sus escasas luces de cristiano" 'his thick Christian head,'

surely a translation of the Yiddish expression "goyisher kop." In fact, a number of Hebrew-Yiddish idioms are likewise toned down –*kitol* becomes *ropón blanco*, "white tunic," for example, and *Iorudea* merely *los libros* "the books," producing a more generic, though not un-Judaic, second version.

What emerges is hardly a smoothly-blended text in which linguistic wrinkles are quickly ironed out, but an agonistic writing, shaped and reshaped by an author who did not hide the tensions of plurilingualism. (To give another example: Gerchunoff's unadorned *matarife* "slaughterer" for the Yiddish *shochet* may be more grating than a softened rendering like "ritual slaughterer" –but Gerchunoff did not soften the word.) It has not been noted that in Gerchunoff's hands modernist philological cosmopolitanism was not the stuff of fashionable idiomatic borrowings from Paris, or from a long-gone Greco-Latin antiquity; it was an existential struggle. Again and again, the immigrant storyteller registers the greenhorns' tonguetiedness: Spanish, he says, could be as hard as stone.

Ideology: If territory and language are more complicated than has been allowed, then ideology –the crux of the matter– could scarcely be neat. Territory and language are in themselves ideological: Gerchunoff's inscribed the acerbic territorial battles of his day among Zionists, Territorialists, and Socialists; and his verbal toil revealed the strain between the dominant Spanish and the minority Yiddish, the embarrassments of "glottal" assimilation (see Zabus). Gerchunoff's reputation has hinged on the question of assmimilation: Did he, or did he not, produce an accomodationist work, and was this good or bad?

In the rarely-reprinted introduction to the 1910 version, Martiniano Leguizamón lauds the young Jewish

immigrant women as the sexualized vessels of cross-ethnic breeding, the genetic crucibles that would smelt down identifiable Jewish traits. But his supposed protégé, Alberto Gerchunoff, gives a far less rosy picture, registering the bitter dismay and profound shame the comely Jewish maidens bring to their families and community when they "blend." This pain remains unaltered in both editions: "It's a disgrace. But is it true? Unfortunately, it is. She ran off with a peon, a gaucho. We saw it coming. She lit the samovar on the Sabbath and ate chickens killed by the peon. What a slut!" Even the gaucho, Gerchunoff's alleged ideal for nativist political correctness, receives ambivalent treatment, sometimes depicted as noble and patriarchal, sometimes as ignoble and murderous.

A gaucho protagonizes the most glaring subversion of the Argentina, Land-of-Technicolor ideology, the narration "Tale of a Stolen Horse," in which he falsely accuses a Jew of filching his mare, as the authorities turn a blind eye. An epigraph from a medieval Castilian document sets the tone: Nuño de Guevara, a Spanish knight, has stolen a fellow hidalgo's sword but has imputed the theft to Don Moisés de Sandobal, "for it is more virtuous to blame the dogs of Jewry than Christian noblemen." The learned slaughterer talmudically teases out the reluctant message: the landscape and the peasants may change but a Jew is a Jew; Argentina may be not so different from Russia, after all.

Gerchunoff attempts to end on a high note –"I want to believe that it won't always be this way"– yet leaves the disturbing implications. These are only underscored by "The Silver Candelabra," one of the two stories he added in 1936. This fiction about the theft from a Jewish home of the valuable and symbolic object –Will Judaism be "stolen" in Argentina? How safe are Jews in the Argentine

haven?– closes that most familiar edition of Gerchunoff's paean. He was uncannily prescient: in 1994, a bomb destroyed the institutional home of Argentine Jewry, the AMIA building on Pasteur Street which housed an irreplaceable library of Jewish authors –including Gerchunoff (see Aizenberg 1994).

Republishing the book in 1936, some twenty-five years after its initial appearance, was itself a symptom of the artistic and ideological restlessness I have been tracing. On the one hand, it vigorously affirmed Jewish identity at a time of growing anti-Semitism in Europe and Argentina; on the other, it reflected Gerchunoff's distancing from the colonies' original ethos and speech milieu, and from the greater hopefulness of the earlier period (see also Senkman 1999). That does not mean that we can neatly posit a first, Hebraic, unbeat version and a second, dehebraized, downbeat writing, since the quarrelsomeness and questioning are there from the start. Read against the long-accepted grain, Don Alberto emerges less as the high priest of quietism –the object of "parricide on the pampa"– and more as a dynamic forerunner of intellectuals who today strive with homogeneizing ideologies, problematic postmodernities, and impoverishing ethnic, linguistic, and historical verities.

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FOREWORD

I found this book waiting for me at a most propitious time. I had just come back from the country where I spent many a quiet afternoon in the fresh pampa air; I was still imbued with the spirit of the plains, and the image of the sunsets that turn the green hills into a fiery red was fresh in my mind. This new book, so full of Argentine flavor and aroma, revived these fond memories of my native region. I enjoyed it immensely, since I am an unabashed enthusiast of works deeply rooted in our tradition.

This book, then, brought back warm remembrances of a region whose landscapes and sensations are closely bound to the best years of my childhood. A writer who was not born under these benevolent skies, but who grew to love and to understand them, has offered me a bouquet from my native land. Just a few short years of contact with the land and its original inhabitants were enough for him to ably capture its spirit and unforgettable images in colorful sketches of the Jewish colonies established near Montiel. The colonists cut their first furrows at the edge of this wild and impenetrable forest, long ago a refuge for men whose savage acts of bravery became the stuff of legend.

Gerchunoff's stories are short, yet the author succeeds admirably in describing the countryside and its folk. The book rings true, and it is filled with so much local color. The episodes first seem scattered and unrelated, but they gradually come together through the strong expressions of love for the land and of gratitude for its bounty. In Ger-

chunoff's small colony of Rachil we meet the classic, sharp-nosed bearded old Jews and their sad and wrinkled wives, as well as graceful young Jewish maidens bronzed by the radiant sun. There are dark-haired girls with deep, mysterious gazes, and golden-haired lasses with thick long braids, eyes as blue as the Virgin's, and shapely bodies whose sculptural forms are revealed whenever the pampa rain drenches their rustic cotton dresses...

The author loves these women with brotherly affection. He portrays them with great tenderness because they remind him of the biblical shepherd girls who grazed their gentle flocks in green pastures. He is moved to poetry when he recalls the august women of Scripture, and he moves the reader as well. Raquel, Rebecca, Esther, Miriam, and Ruth so captivate us with their strong and simple beauty that we forgive them for the ease with which they violate the strict prohibition against falling in love with men who are not of their race, and lose their hearts to the gallant gauchos who woo them with love songs and plaintive guitars, or with displays of horsemanship.

These young women play an important role in the book. They are the crucible of love that is forging a handsome and manly new figure: the Jewish gaucho. The aged, bearded rabbis may continue to chant hoary lamentations –their prayers will be in vain. Their children no longer frequent the synagogue; they are abandoning the traditional ways and adopting local customs and dress. Under the influence of their surroundings they are developing the sense of freedom and the spirit of courage characteristic of our country people.

The author describes how the young Jews of Rachil rope, lasso and saddle their horses in criollo style. We see the quick-witted Jacobo wheeling a frisky stallion,

dressed like a gaucho with a knife tucked into his silver-studded belt, and lead boleadoras to pummel the animal's back. He is the colony's first true Argentine, who prefers the taste of bitter mate to that of tea brewed in the samovar brought over from the far-off Russian village. And as the mate is passed from hand to hand around the fire, Favel Duglach, the wandering bard, spins his yarns, mingling stories about the exile in Babylon with the tale of the gaucho who knifes a tiger deep in the wilds of Montiel.

The process will be slow but sure: the old Jews will disappear, and their ancient biblical longings will be buried with them. Through the fusion of bloods, their children's children will become Argentines free of worry and travail, bursting with affection for the fertile land, thankful to the peaceful, joyous homeland. The culmination of this process will be celebrated on the second centennial of Argentine independence, when the immigrants' grandchildren will sing glorious hymns to their country's liberty.

In *The Jewish Gauchos* the young writer gives us a wonderful glimpse of rural life at a time when it is undergoing change. His vignettes will surely be useful to future students of one of the most curious aspects of this transformation. By choosing a local theme the author has earned a place of honor among the thinning ranks of national authors. He should serve as an example to native-born writers who reject the countryside as a source of inspiration and who instead churn out sterile and imitative exotica devoid of feeling or originality.

The arrival of Jewish colonists on the plains once dominated by outlaws and free-riding gauchos gave the author the opportunity to depict both the native Argentines and the immigrant Jews, whose customs, language, and dress were foreign to the pampa. In these

sensitive little sketches –much like miniature watercolors– we see the venerable figure of the rabbi next to that of the aged herdsman Don Remigio, who, faithful to the cult of courage that was the hallmark of the gaucho of old, stabs his own son in the head rather than face the shame of the young man's cowardice in a fight.

Don Remigio comes alive through Gerchunoff's skillful portrayal. We sense that the author must have spent many a night around Don Remigio's fire listening to his tales of sorrow and glory as a lancer in Urquiza's armies; tales told without pompous exaggeration, with the simplicity typical of our country folk. Perhaps Don Remigio was his first teacher in the art of pampa life –and what a teacher! He taught the young boy how to do the hard work of a gaucho, and with his slow, deliberate speech and colorful turns of phrase, he instilled in his student a love for the landscape and the sheltering sky of Entre Ríos. Gerchunoff transmits these feelings to us when he has Rabí Abraham sing the praises of that sky on a clear, moonlit night made for blissful reverie.

The finest pages of the book are without a doubt those devoted to nature. Gerchunoff exercises great artistic control in his suggestive vignettes –perhaps too much control. They would have been more effective had he written with less restraint, with larger doses of local color. Indeed, at those moments when the evocations succeed in breaking out of their narrow confines, they come alive and vibrate with emotion. If the author plans to suprise us with more such fine writing in his forthcoming novel of manners, *Land of Zion*, then we can hail the publication of his short sketches as an auspicious beginning.

With this work of art and truth, Alberto Gerchunoff has proven his undying affection for his adoptive country, an affection that will surely grow when he holds the

first child born on Argentine soil in his arms. He has also revealed the sensibility of a poet who knows how to transmit his deep feeling for our natural world with the kind of intensity that we find in Joaquín González's or Fray Mocho's paeans to the countryside.

We happily salute him as one of the writers of the land. He has a special gift for finding hidden beauty in the familiar and the mundane; he possesses great powers of observation and a keen eye for capturing the restrained emotions and peaceful tempo of country life.

I hope that he continues to explore this rich vein, unencumbered by ethnic considerations or literary canons. He should find his own rhythm, allowing the images to flow from his pen unbridled, like a spirited horse let loose on the pampa of my beloved Entre Ríos, galloping beneath the sun and the moon, with a song of love on his lips and a zest for life in his heart...

My warmest greetings to his delicious Jewish maidens, whose steps I followed throughout the book as they turned young men's fancies away from the local girls, while their elders intoned ancient benedictions for the bountiful land of golden grain in their archaic tongue. I likewise salute the old gauchos –remnant of a vanquished race–, whose legendary tales awaken nostalgic feelings of love and respect in children's hearts.

Martiniano Leguizamón

Rosa Nissán

Novia que te vea

Planeta

COLECCION: FABULA

Dirección editorial: Homero Gayosso A.

Diseño de portada: Gerardo Islas
Ilustración de portada: Archivo de la autora
Fotografía de contraportada: Rosa Nissán

DERECHOS RESERVADOS

© 1992, Rosa Nissán
© 1992, Editorial Planeta Mexicana, S.A. de C.V.
Grupo Editorial Planeta de México
Avenida Insurgentes Sur núm. 1162
Col. Del Valle
Deleg. Benito Juárez, 03100
México, D.F.

ISBN: 968-406-437-3

Quinta reimpresión: agosto de 1996

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Impreso y hecho en México-Printed and made in Mexico

Impreso en los talleres de
Impresos y Acabados Marbeth, S.A.
Privada de Alamo Núm. 35, Col. Arenal
México, D.F.
Esta impresión consta de 1,500 ejemplares

Agosto de 1996

¡Ah, el novio no quere dinero!
Quere a la novia de mazal bueno.

Ah, el novio no quere ducados!
Quere a la novia de mazal alto.

Ah, el novio no quere alhajillas,
quere a la novia, cara de alègría!

¡Ay, el novio ya quere dinero!
También a la novia de mazal bueno.

¡Ay, el novio ya quere ducados!
También a la novia de mazal alto.

¡Ay, el novio ya quere alhajillas!
También a la novia cara de alegría.

Canción popular
SEFARADI en ladino.
Idioma judeo español mantenido desde el año de la EXPULSIÓN DE LOS JUDIOS DE ESPAÑA en 1492

"Te lo decía, Ernesto, así es la vida, mi veintiúnico hijo, primero tuvo una musher; ni modo, tú conoces a Oshinica, mi nieta; la adoro; lleva el nombre de mi madre, que el Dió tenga en Gan Eden. No dije una palabra; tú sabes que soy una persona correcta que no se mete con nadie; es más, hablé varias veces al hospital a ver si la niña ya había abierto los oshos. Dos años después, gracias al Dió un hombre. De este niño yo fui zandak, por ley me tocaba el honor. Lleva el nombre de mi padre, porque muestra religión tú sabes, manda que el primer nieto lleve el nombre del abuelo. Mi nuera no vino al Berit Milá; si el niño la necesitara está bien, pero ni la leche tuvo buena; ella que traiga hombres, los cuide y los engrandezca y ya. Bueno, curto de palabra, para no hacerte el cuento largo, al tercer hisho: otra musher. El Dió sabe por qué manda las cosas. A los once meses: ¡Barmin Nán!, otra más y se mos hicieron tres de ellas. A estas dos, la madre les escogió nombres de su yente ¿Te imaginas? Tres dotes, mi hisho va a tener que trabajar como burro para casarlas. ¿Quieres un café? ¡Uba!, un café para el señor; como te iba diciendo, si ahorita que quiero casar a Chelita mi hisha, que a ti te consta que es una muñeca con cara de luna, un dulce, obediente la muchacha, hemos tenido puras postemas, porque estos árabes están pidiendo cien y doscientos mil pesos, y si el muchacho es de buena familia, hasta tres y cuatrocientos mil; entre mosotros ansi es. Te cuento estas cosas porque eres mi amigo; desde que lleguí a México te conozco. ¡Ernesto!, ¿por qué te alvantas? Es demprano, apenas van a dar las diez... ¡espérate!"

Me cayó mal mi abuelito, yo creo que al doctor Ernesto también, porque se salió corriendo por más que él lo quiso detener. ¡Qué feas cosas dijo!

¡Qué padre ese sillón verde; me mece tan bonito! No creo que me dejen sentar, pues el otro viernes, Moshón ya se había acomodado y le dijeron:

—¡Quítate!, no tarda tu abuelito y luego se enoja.

A mí menos me van a dejar. Y así apretándonos mis cinco hermanos y yo en el sillón grande, seguimos sentados, al fin que el programa de la tele entretiene y olvidamos las ganas de ocupar la mecedora. El abuelo hace su aparición. De golpe todos nos ponemos de pie como cuando entra el director al salón. Alto, erguido, una mano en el bolsillo y otra libre para retorcernos la papada cuando nos llega el turno de besarlo; Chelita mi tía ya lista, de pie, encoge su cuerpo haciendo pequeñita su voz en señal de que es muy insignificante y que respeta la grandeza de su padre, besa su mano y la lleve a su frente, para recibir la bendición. Él la estira hacia nosotros y mientras se la besamos voltea la cara al otro lado. Es su forma de saludar. Después saca del bolsillo la otra y cambia el canal de la televisión; una vez que decide el programa que vamos a ver, se sienta en su mecedora. A veces me entretengo viendo los retratos de la sala; hace años que no los cambian; hay cerca una foto bien padre en que se ve mi abuelito sentado en una mesa; no se cómo está tomada, que aparecen abuelitos de lado, de frente, de espalda, riendo, y en otras muy serio, ¡qué foto tan divertida! Junto a la ventana, otra de cuatro de nosotros sentados por edades, primero yo, salí riendo con mis trenzas y moños grandes, ¡qué bonito me peinó mi mamá de bucles!, sonrío y abrazo muy fuerte a Moshón que como siempre está lindísimo, luego Zelda y Clarita, ¡qué bien salimos! Al lado un mapa de Israel con la bandera azul y blanca con un Zión en medio atravesándolo y dice abajo: "Israel, la patria de los hebreos". En esa foto salió mi tía Chela con un vestido verde y su peinado de rellenos, el que se llama cuernos. Luego una de mi papá cuando era soltero, y mero arriba de la chimenea, que jamás se ha prendido, un título o diploma de la masonería,plateado y dorado del que mi abuelo se siente tan orgulloso. Dice que es un grupo secreto y que sus mejores amigos son de la masonería.

¡De veras que es un presumido mi abuelito! Hoy subí a su cuarto y encima del tocador hay una infinidad de perfumes de diferentes tamaños y colores; algunos tienen una bolita negra y al apretarse sale un aire fuerte y mojado. A mí me gusta mucho subir a su cuarto que es tan elegante como el de un rey; también al de mi tía, es sólo de ella, tiene un tocador con su banquita; nunca me había visto por detrás y de frente a la vez, ¿entonces así me ven los que me ven de lado? A esta Oshinica no la conocía, creo que mi nariz es demasiado grande de perfil, pero... ¡es una recámara tan elegante!, con una terraza grandota a donde cabe una salita de mimbre; el baño lila con turquesa y blanco está adentro de la recámara. Luego me pongo a abrir los cajones, ¡qué cosa más padre! Es como entrar adentro de mi tía. Guarda medias, invitaciones, hilos, cajitas; ahí todo son secretos; abro y cierro puertas, cajones.

Aquí sobra espacio donde guardar cosas y en mi casa lo único que tengo es "mi cajón"; el primero del chiffonier es para mí sola; ahí acomoda mi mamá mi ropa interior, pero realmente no puedo guardar ningún secreto. ¡Cómo me gustaría que hubiera llave y tener un lugar mío!, aunque sólo sea para esconder este diario y no vivir con el miedo de que lo encuentre; nada de lo que pienso debe saberlo ella.

Muchas veces oigo decir a los grandes que qué darían por ser otra vez niños, que la niñez es un tesoro, que los niños somos felices, que nada nos falta, que de cualquier cosa reímos... y ponen cara como de buen recuerdo. No sé qué le ven de bonito, ¿ser feliz será esto? Mi mamá me grita, me pega y en la escuela me castigan; todavía no acabo las quinientas líneas: "Debo ser obediente con mis padres y maestros", y no puedo hablar en clase; es más, desde hace un mes que diario tengo que llenar hojas y hojas de puras líneas; las únicas tareas que me da tiempo de hacer son ésas; me gustan, y como las hago de escalerita, las acabo bien rápido y me quedan rebonitas. Creo que los que piensan eso de los niños es por que no les dejaban las líneas o no les pegaban sus papás.

Si esto es la felicidad, ¿cuando sea grande va a ser peor?

¿Querer parecerme a mi mamá, a mi abuela, a mi tía? No, mejor a mi abuelo, a mi papá, o hasta a mi hermano. ¡Qué aburridas son las mujeres y además tontas!; bueno, mi mamá no es tonta, pero no es

nada divertida; mi abuelita no puede ir sola ni siquiera a Sears, que está a dos cuadras. Pero a escondidas se va con Uba. Las mujeres siempre en casa, no se les ocurre ni irse a remar. Mi papá es bien simpático; los esposos salen y ellas a cuidar a sus hijos o a sus hermanos, como me toca a mí. Lo bueno es que yo no me aburro porque me bajo a jugar frontón o béisbol a la calle y les gano a los hombres.

—Ese señor de azul, ¿es el novio?

—No sé, mijita. Creo que sí. El otro se ve muy viejo, pero vámonos al parque, tu agüelo no quiere que hagan ruido.

—¿A poco ese señor tan feo se quiere casar con mi tía?

—No sé, luego le pregunto a tu agüela; lo que sí sé es que tu tía ha estado retenerviosa, quién sabe de qué van a hablar.

"Cuando les llevé café, oí que pedían de dote el terreno de Polanco. ¡Pero vamos!, si no me mata tu agüelo. Lleva tu barquito y lo echamos al agua, ya ves cuánta gente va con el suyo, ¿lo trajiste?"

—Claro que sí, Ubita, si me gusta venir a esta casa porque nos llevas al parque.

Cuando volvimos se estaban despidiendo.

El señor de azul, ese de pelo chino —dijo mi papá— no se va a casar con tu tía.

Se me doblaron las piernas. ¡Dios mío! ¡Qué horrible! Estaban todos enojados. Pobrecita de mi tía, tan bonita y él tan feo. Se encerró en su cuarto con su vergüenza. Mi papá no tiene terrenos ni coche, ¿qué va a hacer para casarnos? Cuando nos íbamos, alcancé a oír a mi abuelo.

—¡Están locos!, les pareció poco ¡que se vayan al carajo! Ya quisieran. Una mujer más linda que mi hisha, ande la van a topar.

No quiero que se den cuenta que lloré toda la noche, ni que mordí las cobijas de rabia. ¡Pero quién se va a fijar si uno de los seis tiene coraje! ¡Cómo ha de haber sentido mi tía! ¡Qué vergüenza que haya sido él el que no quiso! ¡Qué vergüenza! Llevaba ya varias veces que salía con ese de barbas y sombrero negro, y ahora que vinieron a pedirla, pues que no. A Moshón eso no le va a pasar. Si por lo menos me quedara siendo niña. No quiero que nunca me hagan eso ¡es feo ser mujer!; si soy más fuerte que Moshón y puedo hacer todo lo que él, ¿cuál es la diferencia? No quiero acercarme a ningún árabe. Ayer que llegaron esos señores, mi abuelito les dijo con sus dientes de oro que yo era su nieta y dijeron lo que todo el mundo: ¡novia que la veas!, ¡novia! ¡Mazal bueno!

¿Para qué quiero llegar a ser novia?

Tía, ¿por qué si eres tan bonita te hacen eso?

Mi mamá dice: "Son atrasados y pesgados, *ash cursum*, a tu tía nunca la desharon salir sola, traían maestro a la casa, la han tenido tan chiqueada, por eso habla así. ¡Uf!, ni amigas le desharon tener. Estos de Persia, son el mismo shishit. ¿Cuál es la diferencia?, tu abuelo tiene a tu papá de esclavo; ya ves, ayer le habló para que le fuera a sacar el coche del garage yusto cuando mos íbamos al cine, y mos quedimos. ¡Guay de él que no vaya!, se estruye el mundo. Y ya ves, si no es de High-Life no endeña un traje, y mosotros ni coche. Yo en Estambul iba a las mejores escuelas, mos daban las clases en francés. La familia de mi mamá sí es de categoría."

Dos niños que se bajan en la colonia Roma se pelearon, en el camión se dijeron un bolón de groserías y maldiciones en árabe, uno le dijo al otro: "que te tragues un paraguas y se te abra en el estómago", y la niña contestó: "que vivas hasta los 120 años en el hospital", y todavía respondió el otro: "¡Maldito sea el barco que trajo a tu papá!"

Me da miedo que alguien oiga hablar árabe a mi papá; lo aprendió en La Lagunilla y a veces lo habla; claro, no en la casa, pues ¿con quién?

Lo bueno es que nadie de la escuela lo ha oído.

"Achaques de la reina Esther, mos salvimos todos los yudíos", dijo mi mamá. Y es que de Esther a Malcá se enamoró el rey de los filisteos, que no era judío. Como era el rey le llevaron a todas las muchachas del reino y él escogió a Esther. Así que sólo por ser tan hermosa salvó al pueblo de Israel, a pesar de que Amán, el primer ministro hizo todo lo posible para que el rey no se casara con ella. Por esta boda, en marzo festejamos la fiesta de Purím, en el colegio hacemos una kermés de disfraces, el comité de madres reparte a cada alumno panes rellenos de mermelada que se llaman "osnei ammán" y nos dan matracas para festejar esta alegría.

De cada salón se escogen dos candidatas para Malcá Esther. El

día de la kermés que coronan a la reina, la cosa se pone muy emocionante; los papás se pican comprando votos para que su hija sea la reina ¡Qué dichosa se ha de sentir la que sale! En mí nunca se han fijado; además mi papá ni compraría votos. De todos modos, cuando vienen a escoger a los salones, me pongo nerviosa porque alguien puede decir mi nombre. Pero nunca ha pasado; es que no he de ser guapa; siempre salen las mismas; Dorí, el año pasado, perdió por cien votos; quedó reina la hija del presidente del patronato. Después de la coronación voy a la tómbola porque hay regalos buenísimos que donan los papás que tienen tiendas o fábricas; también se hace una representación de cuando el rey escogió a Esther. Después bailamos Horas alrededor de una hoguera que hacemos en el patio de la escuela, y comemos. Mi mamá hizo una bolsa enorme de palomitas porque tiene uno de los puestos de comida.

Otra vez me pishé, y eso que mi mamá antes de acostarme me lleva medio dormida al baño, pero sigo haciendo durante la noche en la cama y no siento. Ya se ha de haber acostumbrado porque no regaña a Clara ni a mí; sólo nos deja toda la semana con nuestras sábanas con la marca y se ven refeas.

Cuando entra una muchacha nueva me da pena, pero luego se me tiene que quitar; ni modo que viva escondida en mi casa; me hago la disimulada.

Mi hermana y yo nos dormimos en cualquiera de las dos camas, y cuando nos damos cuenta que estámos mojadas, nos cambiamos de pijama y nos pasamos a la seca; Zelda nos hace cara de fuchi, dice que nuestras camas apestan, y se siente muy desgraciada porque duerme con nosotras. Ni que lo hiciéramos por gusto, si ni me atrevo a invitar a alguien a dormir y menos ir yo a otra casa, ¡qué tal si en la escuela se llegan a enterar!, ¡tiene razón mi mamá en querer más a Moshón! Él es muy limpio. ¿Cómo le harán los que no se pishan?

Freddy también moja la cama. Podríamos probar que nos pongan en un mismo cuarto a los que nos pishamos y a los tres perfectos en el otro.

Podemos, si quiere mi mamá; si no, que Zelda cuide que no se confundan sus cobijas con las nuestras y deje ya de molestar.

Iba a decir que de las tres tías más cercanas que tengo, a la que más quiero es a mi tía Chela, pero la hermana de mi mamá que vive en Monterrey, me cae muy bien; estas vacaciones me mandaron para allá, todos los días me voy a la escuela de mis primos, y eso me encanta, pues sus compañeros quieren saber quién soy, y mis primos les presumen que soy de México. A la salida venden jícamas, naranjas, pepinos con chile, chicharrones, yoyos, baleros, paletas, chocolates, pinole; bueno, venden todo lo que mi papá dice que son porquerías, ¡ah! y unas manzanas cubiertas con caramelo rojo, que se chupan, y cuando se llega a lo blandito, se encuentra la manzana. A mí me dan el mismo domingo que a ellos, puedo gastar y gastar y nunca se acaba. En México no se ha de usar eso del domingo; será porque no hay dónde comprar, porque saliendo de clases los camiones están adentro en el patio, y si afuera venden cosas, ni las vemos.

Alegre tiene cinco años más que yo, tiene un cuarto para ella solita y me gusta ser su prima. ¡Cómo la quieren sus amigas!, ella manda, usa camisas de cuadros con cuello y mangas de hombre, y guarda sus billetes en una cartera igual a la de mi pa; ¡ah! y usa pantalones. Los sábados invita a dormir tres o cuatro amigas, bajan colchones, cobijas y cojines a la sala, ponen el tocadiscos muy fuerte y nos dormimos hasta la hora que queremos. ¡Qué vida tan maravillosa! En México cuando mi mamá apaga la luz, si hacemos escándalo nos grita: "Bré, esténse quietos!, ¡les voy a dar jaftoná!

Aarón me preguntó si quería nadar; pensé que en el deportivo, pero no, que en la azotehuela. Con una tabla tapamos la coladera y la puerta para que no se metiera el agua a la cocina. Desde las ocho de la mañana comenzamos a llenar el patio, a las once nos llegaba de hondo hasta las rodillas y aunque se sentía muy fría nadamos con pura ropa interior, no sé cómo me atreví a que me viera en fondo. ¡Fue un día a todo dar! Cuando llegó mi tía, me asusté, pero ni siquiera se enojó; se rió, me puso una toalla encima y dijo: "Guaidimí, estas buz, me estó entesando nomás de verte. De vedrá que un loco quita cien".

Antes de dormir me dijo: "¿Dime Janúm, ya sabes los cuentos del loco ishodotro de Yojá? Mos los contaban de chiquiticos en Estambul."

Me gusta mucho la risa de mi tía, se ríe como si estuviera diciendo travesuras; se me hace raro, porque los grandes no hacen.

Quise que me contara los cuentos aunque son los únicos que le he oído a mamá.

¡Qué tía tan rara!, si viviera en México a lo mejor se llevaría más con mi mamá y a lo mejor mi ma se volvería más simpática.

Ya este año termino sexto. Casi todas las niñas las sacan de la escuela para que se queden en casa con su mamá; toman clases de corte, de cocina, repostería, y no sé cómo le hacen, pero de pronto se ponen muy bonitas y se casan. A los niños los dejan estudiar más.

¡Ay, Dios mío!, ¿y qué tal si a mí me hacen lo mismo?, ¿qué voy a hacer todo el día en mi casa?

Dos panaderías nos quedan cerca, pero vamos a la de Nuevo León, que es más lejos, porque el pan de allí le gusta más a mi mamá, lo malo de ir a ésa es que tenemos que pasar por la casa de Rosi; como siempre, su mamá está en la ventana; cuando nos ve pasar, grita:

—¿Vas al pan, chula? asiviva tu madre treéme dos, tres bolillicos.

Y ni modo de decirle que no, ¿verdad? Así que siempre agarra barco a alguno de mis hermanos o a mí, pero del diario le llegan sus bolillos a domicilio. Ayer se botó una nueva puntada cuando le llevé el pan.

—Sube tantito, preciadica de la madre: ¡Anda, chula, macari me ayudarás a mover esta mesita y esta plantita y esta tazita...

—A Moshón le pidió que le trajera unos refrescos de la tienda de enfrente. Ya de plano no vamos a pasar por casa de esa pudridora; con razón le dicen a Rashelica la conchuda, digo, la puntuda; mejor vamos a rodear la manzana aunque nos quede más lejos, ¿por qué no mandará a La Rosi, como le dice ella?

Sentada junto a la ventana que mira a la calzada de la Piedad, la tant Cler deja pasar los días. El sonido de un enorme radio ovalado la acompaña. Esta tarde oímos juntas las comedias de la XEW y XEQ. Entre comedia y comedia pasan programas cortos con algunas cantantes como Avelina Landín, Amparo Montes, "Voy por la vereda tropical/ mis ojos llenos de pasión/ y el alma muere de llorar", o algo así. A las seis, la Doctora Corazón. Es un programa bien suave donde ayudan a resolver problemas; me encanta oír cuánta cosa hay que ni me imaginaba. Me gustaría escribirle una carta anónima o firmada con un nombre inventado, para que no me cache mi mamá, pero de seguro no le hacen caso a una niña de once años; a los grandes no les parecen importantes los problemas de los niños. Mi padre dice: "Salud que haya, lo demás no importa; debes dar gracias al Dió que no te manca una pierna, ni la vista, ni eres huérfana. Los que le escriben no tienen nada que hacer, son atavanados." Y que cuáles problemas; pero a mí me gustaría preguntarle cómo le puedo hacer para no pisharme, y qué hacer para que mi mamá ya no me grite; de seguro me contestaría: "Amiga mía..."; ¡qué linda mujer! ¡Cómo quisiera que alguien me hablara así de bonito!; mi papá dice que las que hablan así de amables son hipócritas y que él no confía en ellas.

¿Será verdad?, a lo mejor sí.

Mientras oímos las comedias la miro cose y cose preocupada por lo que sucede en la radionovela, que si a Esmeralda la cacharon, que si la hija engaña a su padre. En silencio la tant cambia hilos, remata, ve y disfruta feliz las jugosas uvas lilas que van naciendo de sus manos para adornar los cojines de la sala.

Mi mamá va a la cocina a servir ese dulce riquísimo que hace la tant Cler con la cáscara enrollada de la naranja sin semilla. Su muchacha sale los lunes, por eso escogemos este día para visitarla, "no puede quedarse sola, a veces tocan o quiere ir al baño y si no hay dingunos, ¿cuálo que haga?, guay de mi la pasa muy mal, ma si está en la silla de ruedas, sábali, se puede arremenear un poco. Ya en la nochesica, como quisho el Dió, llega el tío David".

Así viven desde que, dos años después de que murió su hija, ella quedó paralítica.

Como mi mamá no pudo ir a visitar a la tant Cler este lunes, me dio las llaves del departamento para que yo fuera.

—Es sajut ¡qué te quedó en basho!, échale un rato lashón, que se engleneé un rato la desmazalada.

Desde que el tranvía entra por la calzada de la Piedad, voy al pendiente a ver si reconozco la ventana desde mi asiento. En ese edificio veo una cortina que luce con orgullo almidonado, su precioso encaje hecho a mano; detrás de esa elegancia bordada se asoma la diminuta cabeza con el pelo estirado de la tant. Subo las

escaleras deteniéndome en cada uno de los pisos; son tan amplios que se podría bailar una Hora en cada uno; pienso que ella los subió un día caminando y que ahora los bajará el último día de su vida. Saco las llaves y estoy en la sala, mis ojos recorren sillón por sillón, bordados por todos lados y sus manos en cada cojín, en cada rincón. Cruzo la estancia y llego al cuartito donde está el radio color caoba que llena la casa y la vida de la tant. Sé que encontraré sus ojos sorprendidos porque no sabe a quién de sus sobrinas le tocó acompañarla esta tarde.

—¡Ah! ¿Eres tú? —dice sin poder sonreír.

Esos ojos hundidos y grandes que yo creía me recibirían con más gusto, se me clavaron fijamente y me da frío; me cae mal que no me diga algo bonito porque vine; sin ganas, pero estoy. Me siento en un taburete, frente a ella, veo hacia la calle y el sol está fuerte, se está ocultando, bajamos la cortina-persiana. Me gusta hojear sus revistas de bordados mientras oímos las comedias; en un número atrasado de *La familia* encuentro uno precioso de punto de cruz; se ofrece a enseñarme a hacerlo. Cuando me manda por el dulce de naranja, aprovecho para detenerme un rato en la estancia sin sentir que la molesto; mi mamá me ha dicho que ella misma limpia lo que guarda en la vitrina y que es pulía, las fiede a las yaries, quiere todo esponyado, con las cuatro puntas estiradas; por eso toman aire. Me asomo a las recámaras; veo la foto de su hija, una niña un poco más chica que yo, y me entristezco por la tant que perdió a su hija y por la niña que, de haber vivido, le hubiera tocado el peso de cuidar de la enfermedad de su madre. Esa hija estaría con ella bordando, mirando otras vidas a través de la ventana, oyendo el radio y el ir y venir de los trenes que pasan una y otra vez por la calzada de la Piedad.

—¿Oye, abuelita, me puedes poner un disco?

—No sé prender el tocadiscos, mijita.

—¿Le digo a mi abuelito que lo prenda?

—Sólo tenemos discos árabes.

—Bueno, aunque sea...

—Ahorita que baje tu agüelo.

—¡No, no le digas! —dice mi papá— luego se descompone y se enoja conmigo.

—¡Ay, papi, cómo eres!, quiero ver cómo suena. Desde que nací

nunca lo han prendido; nada más lo vemos ahí parado, ¿o no sirve?

¡Cállate!, allí viene bajando, y ¡no le digas nada, eh!

Papá y yo nos levantamos con el resorte de siempre, le besamos la mano al abuelo y ya que la guardó en su bolsa dice:

—Shamuel, la televisión no quedó bien.

—Mañana vuelvo a llamar al seguro, papá.

—¡Y diles que no se burlen de mí, dicen que la arreglan y la dejan peor, y van cuatro veces en esta semana!

—Déjame ver cómo se ve.

—Qué, ¿no me crees? ¡Si te digo que quedó mal, es que quedó mal!

—Mi mamá está viendo la comedia desde hace rato y no le noté nada.

—No notas nada porque eres bruto. Pero se ve mal, ¿verdad, Luna...?

—...Pues.

—¡Mira!, ¿ves esas rayas?

—...¿Cuáles?

—¿Cómo cuáles?, ¿ciego estás? De vedrá, que entre más grande más burro, cualquiera las ve —dice con esa sonrisa con dientes que él usa—. A ver, Oshinica, tú que eres más inteligente que tu padre ¿verdad que la televisión se ve mal?, ¡no estoy loco! Siempre me contradice. ¡Hazme el favor de decirle a esos desgraciados que vengan y ya!

—¿Abuelito, qué tal se oye el tocadiscos?

—¿Cuál?, ¿ése? Se oye precioso, es un aparato finísimo con el mejor sonido; ya sabes, tu abuelo no compra cosa mala. Ahorita no, hija, estoy cansado y además, con el coraje que me hizo pasar tu padre, me duele el estómago. El dumingo, si me siento bien...

Like a Bride Like a Mother

ROSA NISSÁN

TRANSLATED BY DICK GERDES

INTRODUCTION BY ILAN STAVANS

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS

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First edition

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Nissan, Rosa.
[Novia que te vea. English]
Like a bride ; and Like a mother / Rosa Nissan ; translated by Dick Gerdes ; introduction by Ilan Stavans.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-8263-2364-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Nissan, Rosa.—Translations into English.
I. Title: Like a bride ; and Like a mother.
II. Gerdes, Dick. III. Nissan, Rosa. Hisho que te nazca. English. IV. Title: Like a mother. V. Title.
PQ7298.24.I77 A6 2002
863'.64—dc21
2001003717

To my mother, who taught
me to be courageous.
To Elena Poniatowska, to her
laughter—the one who opened
doors, colors, and taste for me.

Rosa Nissán

For Nadia,
Forever an Inspiration

Dick Gerdes

A popular song from Judezmo, a language based on Old Spanish, written in Hebrew, and spoken by descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in the fifteenth century:

AH, THE GROOM DOESN'T WANT ANY MONEY!
HE WANTS A BRIDE WHO BRINGS GOOD LUCK.
AH, THE GROOM DOESN'T WANT ANY GOLD COINS!
HE WANTS A BRIDE WITH A GOOD UPBRINGING.
AH, THE GROOM DOESN'T WANT ANY JEWELS!
HE WANTS A BRIDE WITH A JOVIAL FACE.
AY, NOW THE GROOM WANTS MONEY!
AND HE WANTS A BRIDE WHO BRINGS GOOD LUCK.
AY, NOW THE GROOM WANTS GOLD COINS!
AND HE WANTS A BRIDE WITH A GOOD UPBRINGING.
AY, NOW THE GROOM WANTS JEWELS!
AND HE WANTS A BRIDE WITH A JOVIAL FACE.

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INTRODUCTION

Ilan Stavans

"Ma, ¿qué escrivites?" wondered the poet Myriam Moscona when *Novia que te vea,* Rosa Nissán's autobiographical novel, a title translated poetically by Dick Gerdes as *Like a Bride,* was released in Mexico in 1992. And Moscona, singing further praise to a storyteller of her same ethnic background, added: *"¿Aude tupates tanta historia, tanta memoria, tanta palavrica de las muestras? ¿Dí que queres arrevivir ista lingua casi muerta que conocites por la banda de tus padres y abuelos? ¿Quén te ambezó a dezir las cosas como las dices? ¿Escrivana salites?"* In translation, these queries appear mundane: "But, what have you written? Where have you, Rosa, found so much history, so much memory, so many of these words that are close to our heart? Do you want to revive this almost defunct tongue that you got acquainted with through your parents and grandparents? What urged you to say things the way you do? Have you turned out to be a writer?"Yet in the original, the utterance, of course, has magic; or better, it has zest. It is in a modified form of Ladino, the so-called Judeo-Spanish jargon with roots in the Iberian peninsula that probably date back to the thirteenth century, if not earlier. Moscona and Nissán, as Sephardic Jews from Mexico, came of age listening to it. The jargon appears somewhat prominently in Nissán's oeuvre, especially in *Like a Bride.* Curiously, it is not heard from the mouth of Nissán's protagonist, Oshinica, but by those in her entourage, most of them immigrants from Turkey and, prior even, from Persia.

¿Escrivana salites? is an accurate question to ask Nissán. Although she is unquestionably a novelist—aside from *Like a Bride,* she is the author of its sequel, *Hisho que te nazca* (1996), herein published in a single volume for the first time ever in any language; a travelogue about Israel entitled *Las tierras prometidas* (1997) that is also an exploration of her inner conflicts as a Mexican and a Jew; and a collection of stories, *No sólo para dormir es la noche* (1999)—her quest for a space and a voice came rather circuitously. That journey, in fact, is narrated in her books about Oshinica. With a plethora of tales inside but no way to articulate them, Nissán, as it were, enrolled in a creative writing course—*un taller literario*—with Elena Poniatowska, one of Mexico's most prominent women authors. This delayed encounter with her artistic self, it ought to be added, is not atypical in her ethnic group, where, as she herself explains lucidly in her fiction, the education of women until recently was if not forbidden, at least delegated to the status of non-essential. Indeed, it was Poniatowska herself, a non-Jew, who first recognized Nissán's energy and encouraged her to pursue her literary exercises. Soon those exercises turned into full-fledged narratives about the Sephardic idiosyncrasy, filled with humorous and linguistic puns. As in the case of most artists, her imaginative formulations might have represented an attempt by Nissán to distance herself from her community. But it is clear that, not only in the plot of her novels but in life too, as her people put it, *"la engrandecimos,"* her pilgrimage enriched her. The result, in the reader's hand, is, in my mind, unique in the shelf of Mexican letters and, equally, in the tradition of Jewish fiction in Spanish.

The uniqueness is twofold: first, I know of no other *bildungsroman* where the main character is a Sephardic female, whose odyssey is contemplated from adolescence to maturity; and second, the insertion of Ladino, not inconsequential, makes this a rarity. To understand these reasons I've just stated I ought to offer some context. To begin, it is illustrative to consider the question of why in the Jewish literary

tradition Eastern Europe, in its rise to modernity, became the cradle for the novel. With the French Revolution came the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a major class, and the novel, as an artistic artifact, served as a thermometer of its angst. Ironically, *Don Quixote,* published in two parts in 1605 and 1615, is perhaps the first one to implement a reflection on actual change—internal and external—in human nature; its protagonist, Alonso Quijano, transforms himself from a loquacious *hidalgo* to a fool and back to a man of sense. But Cervantes's masterpiece stands alone as a door opener in Spain. The majority of groundbreaking novels, such as those written from Defoe to Diderot, were produced elsewhere in Europe. By the dawn of the seventeenth century, the Jews and also the Muslim populations of the peninsula had already been expelled. For this and other reasons, for years Sephardic literature focused on the liturgical and philosophical: the poetry of Shmuel Hanagid, Shlomo ibn Gabirol, and Yehuda Halevi, are highlights, as are the treatises by Halevi himself, Maimonides, and Hasdi Crescas. Fiction as such was not, in any significant way, an ingredient. Paloma Díaz-Mas, in the authoritative *Los Sefaradíes: Historia, lengua y cultura* (1986), embarks on an inventory of literature by Judeo-Hispanic authors that ranges from *coplas* to proverbs and ballads (e.g., *canticas* and *romansas*). About a fourth of her catalog is devoted to "adopted genres": journalism, narrative, theater, and "autograph" poetry. It is intriguing, though, that among the *romansos* (novels) she lists, almost all are described as *aranjados:* imitations. The earliest of these, released in places like Cairo, Smyrna, Constantinople, and Salonika, are traceable to the period of 1900 to 1933 but never before. In other words, while a distinct Judeo-Hispanic ethos is apparent in the Middle Ages—Abraham Joshua Heschel discusses it thought-provokingly in essays and, in passing, in his biography of Maimonides—its role in modernity is that of an addition, and not that of a source.

Nissán's *Like a Bride* and *Like a Mother* are not included in Díaz-Mas's register, probably because Hispanic America never became a

centrifugal center of Sephardic culture. In fact, to my knowledge, the number of published Sephardic narratives in the region is minuscule; Angelina Muníz-Huberman, in her anthology with a Ladino title, *Lah linguah floridah* (1989), corroborates this statement: in the back matter of the book, a list of suggested further readings might best be described as *sparse.* (Muníz-Huberman, by the way, is the author of a number of memorable fictions on this topic, among them *Huerto cerrado, huerto sellado [Enclosed Garden]* and *El mercader de Tudela [The Merchant of Tudela].* None, however, is realistic in tone, nor does any include the Sephardic dialect.) Hence, Nissán, at sixty-one years of age, is a *rara avis:* to employ an oxymoron, she is an *aranjado* novelist with an original voice, one that is modern, Jewish, and *muy mexicana.* Plus, another asset of hers ought to be contemplated: in 1993, *Like a Bride* was successfully adapted into film by Guita Schyfter, her husband Hugo Hiriart, and Nissán herself, in a production of the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematográfia. This allowed Oshinica and the immigration she has come to be an emblem of to be better known in Mexico and beyond. (A succinct evaluation of the film is included in my book *The Riddle of Cantinflas* [1998]).

I might have an unruly, instinctual reaction to Nissán's protagonist and her Ashkenazic counterparts, but I shall refrain from indulging in an examination of them. It should suffice to say that, although at times over-sentimentalized, their inner world is not at all in conflict with the Jews I remember while growing up in Mexico in the sixties and seventies. The cadence of speech is captured astonishingly well and equally astonishing and vivid, too, are the various Spanish dialects recorded in the novel, each used by a different type of people. Indeed, just browsing through Nissán's pages makes me shiver with uncomfortable nostalgia for a milieu that formed me and which, with a dramatically different approach, I tried to evoke in *On Borrowed Words.* (A capacious study of Nissán's portrait of them is available in Yael Halevi-Wise's article "Puente entre naciones" [Bridge Across Nations] in the journal *Hispania* [1998].) This, as far as I know, is the most comprehensive analysis by an academic of her work.) And of Nissán as a person I have even less to say, since our paths have not yet crossed. Instead, I offer a quote from Poniatowska that illuminates the fashion in which her education and worldview are in symmetry.

> I've never met a person as natural and spontaneous. Rosa Nissán adapts herself to life the way a plant adapts itself to the soil or the sun. Her reaction is immediate. Her suffering and joy overwhelm her entirely. But there is reason for it, for *Rosita* . . . is a total woman, rotund, her embrace wide, as wide as the patterns her legs create when she dances around . . . [Her] parents carry their Jewishness in their bone marrow, and they always enlighten Nissán's path with their seven-handed candelabra. She never sees any star other than the Star of David. Suddenly, though, she and her milieu were turned into star dust. [But Nissán] has returned to herself, but is no longer her parent's child, a child of Jews, the byproduct of schools for Jews only, and of the Centro Deportivo Israelita [Jewish Sports Center], of an isolated community. She remains the same star of Jericho, but her petals are fleshier, wiser, more vigorous. They have been expanded to embrace us all.

Escrivana she came out indeed, and full of pathos. Poniatowska addresses her as Rosita; I prefer *Rosica.* The former is Mexican; the latter is Sephardic. Either way, to the question "*Ma, ¿qué escrivites?*" she vigorously answers to her Spanish-language readers: a few God-granted words—*unas palavericas, como quisho el Dió.*

Like a Bride

ROSA NISSÁN

translated by Dick Gerdes

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"Like I was telling you, Ernesto, that's the way life is, my twenty-somethingth child, first it was a girl, impossible; you know Oshinica, my granddaughter, I adore her, she has my mother's name, may she rest in peace. I didn't say a solitary word, you know I've got good manners, I don't stick my nose into things; in fact, I had called the hospital several times to see if the girl had opened her eyes yet. Two years later, thank God, a boy. I was his godparent, and it was my right. He was named after my grandfather because in our religion, as you know, it's required that the grandson carry the name of the grandfather. My daughter-in-law didn't go to the circumcision ceremony; if the baby needed her, she was there, but she couldn't even give much milk; she has boys, takes care of them, raises them, and that's it. Anyway, to make a long story short, her third child was a girl. Only God knows what he's doing. And, eleven months later, lo and behold: another girl. She gave us a total of three of them. For the last two, the mother chose names from her people. Can you imagine? Three dowries! My son is going to have to work like a dog in order to get them married. Would you like some coffee? 'Hey! A cup of coffee for this man.' As I was saying, right now I would like for my daughter Chelita to get married, and I can vouch for the fact that she's a doll with a creamy-white face, a real sweetie-pie, and obedient. We've had

some real pests come around, because those Arabs are asking for hundreds of pesos—and if the boy is from a good family, even as high as several thousand pesos. Between you and me, that's the way it is. I tell you these things because you are my friend; I've known you ever since I arrived in Mexico . . . Ernesto, why are you getting up? It's still early; it's barely ten o'clock . . . wait a little longer!"

My granddaddy got sick, and I think Dr. Ernesto did too, because as much as my granddaddy wanted him to stay, he left there quickly. What horrible things he said!

What a neat green rocker! It's cool the way it rocks back and forth. But I don't think they'll let me try it because last Friday after Moshón had gotten all comfortable in it they said, "Get out of that rocker! Your grandfather is about to come home, and he'll get upset."

I know they'll never let me sit in it. So my five brothers and sisters and I sat all squished together on a couch and, once we got absorbed in a TV program, we forgot about fighting for the rocker. Grandfather makes his appearance. We all jump up at once, just like when the school director comes into the classroom. Tall, standing erect, one hand in his pocket and the other ready to tweak our little chins, we take turns giving him kisses. Chelita, my aunt, is also standing, hunched over a bit, and speaking like a mouse to show him how insignificant she is compared to the superiority of her father. She kisses his hand and puts it on her forehead as if to receive his blessing. He puts his hand forward, and while we kiss it, he looks the other way. That's his way of doing things. Next, he takes his hand out of his pocket and changes channels on the TV. Once he has decided which program we'll watch, he sits down in his rocking chair.

Sometimes I just stare at the photographs on the living room walls. They all look so old. There's one I especially like of my granddaddy sitting at a table. I don't know how they took them, but there are other grandparents from different angles, some laughing and others very serious. What a funny picture! Next to the window there's a picture of us sitting together arranged by age: first me, I was laughing with my braids and a huge topknot, my mother really knew how to make those curls in my hair, too. I was smiling and giving Moshón, who was always handsome, a big hug; then Zelda and Clarita. We all look great together! Next to our picture, there's a map of Israel, and a blue and white flag with a Zion symbol in the middle, and it reads below, "Israel, nation of Hebrews." In the next picture, Aunt Chela is wearing a green dress and a protruding hairdo; then comes my father when he was still single, and above the chimney, which has never been used, there's a Mason diploma with silver and gold edging that my grandfather is really proud of. He says it's a secret group and some of his best friends are Masons. No doubt about it, my grandfather is really pompous.

Today I went upstairs to his room and on top of the chest of drawers there were a million oddly shaped and different colored bottles of cologne; one of them has a little black ball on top, and when you squeeze it, a wet, strong smell comes out. I adore going up to his room because it's as elegant as a king's chamber, and so is my aunt's bedroom: it's all hers, and it has a dressing table and stool. I've never seen myself from the front and the back at the same time before. Is that the way they see me when they see me from the side? I didn't really recognize this new Oshinica, and I think my nose is too big if you look at me from the side, but . . . what a luxurious bedroom . . . and it has a terrace with cane furniture. She has her own bathroom. It's violet with turquoise and white. Then I begin poking around in her chest of drawers. Wow! Is that neat or what? It's like getting inside my aunt's world. She

has hose, invitations, spools of thread, little boxes; everything's a secret, but I just go about opening and closing doors and drawers.

Here there's plenty of room to store things; at our house all I have is the bottom drawer of the chiffonier. That's where my mom puts my folded underwear, so I can't really hide anything there. Oh, how I'd like to be able to lock it and have my own private space! Even if I just had a place to hide this diary, so I wouldn't have to live in fear that someone is going to read it. It's no one's business but mine.

A lot of times I hear the adults say they'd give anything just to be kids again. Being a kid is marvelous, we're supposed to be happy, not be in need of anything, and laugh at anything . . . and also, they begin gazing nostalgically. I don't understand it. What do they see that's so great about it? This is being happy? My mother yells at me, she spanks me, and at school they punish me. I still haven't finished writing "I must obey my parents and my teachers" five hundred times. For more than a month now, I've had to fill up page after page of the same thing. And they won't let me talk in class, either. The only homework I have time for is to repeat this writing, and I like it, especially when all the lines are connected. I can do it fast and they look great. I think that those adults who believe those things about childhood probably couldn't draw those lines, or their parents didn't scold them. And if that's true, will it be worse when I grow up?

Do I want to look like my mom, my grandmother, or my aunt? No, I'd rather look like my grandfather, my dad, or even my brother. Those women are so boring, and they're dumb as well! Well, I guess my mom isn't so dumb, but she's not all fun and games either. My grandmother can't even go to Sears by herself, and it's only two blocks away. But she goes secretly with Uba. Women are supposed to stay at home; it doesn't even occur to

them to go rowing. My dad is really nice; the men go out to work and the women take care of the children or the brothers and sisters, like me. At least I don't get bored, because I can go outside and always beat the guys at soccer or baseball.

"That man dressed in blue, is he the groom?"

"I don't know, honey, but I think so. The other one looks too old, but let's go to the park, because your grandfather doesn't want anyone to disturb him."

"Is it really possible? That ugly guy wants to marry my aunt?"

"I don't know. I'll ask your grandma later. All I know is that your aunt has been jumpy lately, and who knows what they're going to talk about?

"When I brought the coffee, I heard them talking about the property in Polanco as a part of her dowry. But I shouldn't say anything; your grandfather would kill me. Let's take your little boat to the park, and we'll put it in the water; all the kids will be taking theirs. Didn't you bring yours with you?"

"Yes I did, Uba, and I like to come over here because then you always take us to the park."

When we got back, they were saying good-bye.

"That guy dressed in blue, the one with the straight hair," said my dad, "he's not going to marry your aunt."

I felt faint. Oh my God! What a shame! Everyone was mad. And my poor aunt, she's so pretty and he's really ugly. She was so embarrassed that she locked herself in her room. My father doesn't have any land or even a car, so how is he going to get *me* married? When we were leaving, I heard my grandfather say, "They're crazy! Is that all they think of her? They can go straight to hell! They don't know what they want. Well, I dare them ever to find any girl as beautiful as my daughter."

I don't want anyone to know that I cried all night long, or that

I bit my blankets out of rage. But what difference would it make if just one of us got mad? What did my aunt feel? What a shame, him rejecting her like that! How embarrassing! She had already gone out a few times with this guy, who had a beard and wore a black hat, and now, when they finally come to formalize the engagement, the deal is off. This isn't going to happen to Moshón. Maybe I'll just stay like a little girl. I don't want this to ever happen to me. It's horrible being a woman. If I'm stronger than Moshón and I can do anything he can, what's the difference? I don't want to even get close to an Arab. Yesterday, when those men arrived, my granddaddy, smiling with his gold teeth, said that I was his little granddaughter, and they said what everybody says: "Like a bride! A true bride!" That means good luck!

Why would I ever want to get married?

"Auntie, you're so pretty. Why would they want to do that to you?"

"Well," my mommy answers, "they're backward and stupid. They never let your aunt go out alone; they always hired a teacher to come to the house. They always made her seem like she was hard to get, and that's why she talks like that. Ugh! They didn't even let her have any friends. And those from Persia? They're all the same. What's the difference? Your grandfather has made a slave out of your father. See what I'm saying? Yesterday he told him to get the car out of the garage just as we were getting ready to go to the movies. That ended that idea. Heaven help him who doesn't do what he's supposed to. Everything will get ruined. And don't you see? If you're not high class, you don't have good clothes, and we're even without a car. In Istanbul, I used to go to the best schools, and our classes were taught in French. My mother's family, of course, was upper class."

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Two kids who ride the school bus to the Roma neighborhood began fighting; they had said a lot of bad words in Arabic to each other on the bus.

"I hope you swallow an umbrella and it opens up inside your stomach," said one of them.

"I hope you live 120 years in a hospital," said the other.

"A curse on the ship that brought your father here!" replied the first one.

I get scared when my daddy speaks Arabic to someone. He learned it in the Lagunilla Market and he speaks it from time to time, but not at home, of course—well, whom would he speak it with? Fortunately, no one at school has ever heard him speak it.

"Because of Queen Esther, we Jews were saved," said my mommy. It just so happens that the king of the Philistines, who wasn't Jewish, fell in love with Esther. As the king, he had all the young girls of the kingdom brought to him, and he chose her. Even though his prime minister did everything he could to prevent him from marrying her, it was her beauty that saved the people of Israel. And now we honor that marriage with the Purím celebration in March; at school we have a kermess charity bazaar with costumes; the mothers distribute bread and marmalade called "hamentachen," and they give us wooden rattles to liven things up.

They pick two candidates from each room to play the role of Queen Esther. On the day of the kermess, when they crown the queen, everyone really gets excited. Even the parents get drawn into it—they buy lots of votes so that their daughter will be elected the queen. How fortunate the chosen one must feel! They've never even considered me; besides, my dad wouldn't ever

buy any votes. But still, when they come around to choose the candidates from each room, I always get a little nervous because they just might say my name. But it's never happened. I guess I'm not that pretty. And it's always the same girls. Last year, Dori lost by one hundred votes to the daughter of the school president. After the coronation, I like to go to the charity raffle, because the parents who own stores or factories always donate neat gifts. Then they reenact the moment when the king chooses Esther. Out on the patio, we dance horas in a circle around a bonfire. Then we eat. My mommy usually makes a huge bag of popcorn because she was assigned to a food table.

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I wet the bed again, and my mommy had taken me half asleep one last time to the bathroom. I still do it, and I don't even feel it. I guess she has gotten used to it, because she doesn't scold Clara or me; she just leaves the sheets on the bed all week and the stain begins to look really horrible. Whenever we get a new maid, I'm always embarrassed, but then I shake it off—there's no way I can hide in my own house, so I just act like nothing's happened.

My sister and I sleep in either of the two beds and when we realize that we're wet, we just change our pajamas and get into the one that's dry. Zelda just frowns at us and complains that our beds stink; she thinks she's unlucky because she has to sleep with us. We don't do it because we want to, and I'd never be able to invite anyone to spend the night, and I'd never dream of going to someone else's house. Just think what would happen if everyone at school found out! My mommy's right in loving Moshón more than us. He's really clean. These kids that don't wet their beds—how do they do it?

Freddy wets his bed too. We could try putting those of us who wet our beds together in one room, and those who are normal in the other. We can do it, if my mommy wants to; if not, Zelda will have to make sure she doesn't get her bedding mixed up with ours; then she'll have to stop bothering us.

I was going to say that out of the three closest aunts I have, the one I like the best is Chela, although my mommy's sister who lives in Monterrey is nice too. I was sent to stay with them during vacation. I even went to my cousins' school, which I really liked, because everyone wanted to know who I was, and my cousins would act like they were important, saying I was from Mexico City. Just outside the school gate they sell jícama, oranges, cucumber slices with chile, crisp pork rinds, yo-yos, baleros, paletas, chocolates, pinole, well, you know, all the things my dad says are no good for you—ah, and some caramel-covered apples that you suck on until you reach the apple part. Sundays are the same for me as for anyone else: I love to buy, buy, buy. But it's not the same in Mexico City. There's nothing to buy because when we get out of class, the buses are waiting inside the school yard, and even if they *are* selling things outside the gates, we don't ever see them.

Alegre is five years older than me. She has a bedroom all to herself, and I like being her cousin. And she has so many friends! She does things the way she wants to, she wears checked shirts that have the necks and sleeves like a man's shirt, and she has a wallet for her money just like my dad's—ah, and she wears pants, too. On Saturdays, she invites three or four friends over to spend the night; we haul mattresses, pillows, and blankets down to the living room, turn up the record player, and stay up as late as we want. What a great life! At home, if we make any noise after my mom turns out the light, she yells at us, "Enough! Be quiet. Or I'll give you all a good whipping."

Aarón asked me if I wanted to swim; I thought he meant in a swimming pool, but no, he meant on the terraced roof behind the kitchen. We put a board in front of the kitchen door to keep the water from leaking inside. We started filling up the patio at eight o'clock in the morning, and by eleven it was up to our knees. Even though it was freezing cold, we swam in our underwear. I can't believe I even opened my eyes underneath the water and I could see the bottom. It was a fantastic day! When my aunt came home, I got scared, but she didn't get mad. She just laughed, put a towel around me, and said, "Girl, you're so crazy. Just look at you! Really, you do some of the silliest things."

Before I went to sleep, she said to me, "Tell me, have you heard the stories about crazy Ishodotro of Yojá? They used to tell them to us when we were little kids in Istanbul." I adore the way my aunt laughs. And she has that mischievous look in her eyes. It seems a little strange to me because grown-ups don't do pranks. I wanted her to tell me the stories, even though they're the same ones my mom tells us.

What a strange aunt! If she lived in Mexico City she might get along with my mom, and then maybe my mom would be easier on us.

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This year, I'll finish sixth grade. It's the year when they start taking most of the girls out of school—this is the year they begin to live at home with their mothers. They take sewing lessons, they learn how to cook, make desserts, and who knows what else; but all of a sudden they become pretty and get married. The boys are allowed to continue their studies. Oh, heaven forbid! What if they do that to me? What am I going to do at home all day long?

There are two bakeries near our house, but we always go to the one on Nuevo León, even though it's farther away. My mom likes their bread better. The only bad thing about it is that to get there we have to walk past Rosi's house, and every time her mom's standing at the window, and when she sees us walking by, she yells out, "Are you going for bread, honey? For the love of your mommy, get me a couple of loaves, too."

And there's no way you can say no to her, right? So she's always taking advantage of my brothers, or me, and as a result, she always gets fresh bread brought to her door. And yesterday, when I brought her the bread she had even more nerve:

"Honey, dear, could you please help me move this table, and that plant, and this pot?"

And she asked Moshón to bring her some soft drinks from the store across the street. We're definitely not going to walk by that old bat's house anymore. No wonder they call Rashelica the brazen old . . . I mean, well, she has some nerve! Even though it takes longer, let's walk all the way around the block, and besides, why doesn't she send Rosi dear, as she calls her, to do those things?

Sitting at the window that looks down to Piedad Street, Aunt Cler helps while away the hours. She is accompanied by the sounds coming from a large oval-shaped radio. This afternoon we listened to the comedy programs on Radio XEW and XEQ. Between programs they play songs by singers such as Avelina Landín and Amparo Montes—"I'm walking down that tropical path/my eyes are full of passion and my soul feels like crying"—or something like that. And at six o'clock, *Doctor Heart*. It's a neat program that helps people solve their problems. I love hearing about things that I never knew existed. I'd like to write her an anonymous letter with a fake signature so that my mom wouldn't

find out, but I bet they'd never pay any attention to an eleven-year-old.

"So long as you've got your health, the rest is unimportant; you should be thankful to God that you're not an invalid, blind, or an orphan," says my father. "The people who write to her have nothing else to do; they're just vain."

And do they have problems! I'd like to ask her what I need to do to quit wetting my bed or to stop my mom from yelling at me.

"Dear Friend, . . ." she'd probably answer. But what a lovely lady! How I wish someone would say that to me sometime! My father says people who talk like that are hypocrites and he doesn't trust them.

Is that really true? Maybe so.

While we listen to the programs, I watch Aunt Cler sew and sew, and I see that she's concerned about what's going on in the soap opera—if they had caught Esmeralda or if the daughter had deceived her father. Silently she changes the color of the thread, finishes the last stitch, and happily admires the juicy purple grapes that grew from her hands on the throw pillows that will adorn her couch in the living room.

My mom goes into the kitchen to fix that tasty dessert that old Aunt Cler makes from rolled orange rinds. Her maid is off on Mondays, that's why we go to see her on those days.

"She can't be left alone; what would she do if someone comes to the door or she needs to go to the bathroom? If no one is around, what would she do? Heaven help me if something were to happen to her. And, to top it off, she's in a wheelchair. Poor thing! She can wheel around a bit. Uncle David, thank God, will come this evening."

And that's the way it's been for two years, and ever since her daughter died, she's been paralyzed.

This Monday my mother couldn't visit Aunt Cler, so she sent me with the keys instead.

"That's very nice of you, child. Stay for a while! Let's talk, take your mind off things, you poor dear."

As soon as the train starts along Piedad Street, I try to spot her window from my seat. In that building, there's a window curtain with that starched pride and the elegant hand-stitched lace, behind which I spot aunt's little face with straight hair. I climb the stairs, taking a short rest on each floor; the stairwells and hallways are so wide that you could dance a hora in each one. I think: once she walked up those stairs for the first time, and she'll go down them on the last day of her life. I get the keys out and I'm in the living room. I look around everywhere, there are embroidered doilies all over the place, and you can see the work of her hand in every throw pillow, in every corner. I cross through the sitting room and reach the door of the little room where the sound of the dark wood radio fills the house and my aunt's life. I know that she'll be surprised to see me because she never knows which niece has been designated to visit her that day.

"Ah! Is that you?" she says without cracking a smile.

Those big, deep eyes that I thought would light up just stare at me, giving me the shivers. I don't appreciate her not saying something nice about me coming—not willingly, but here I am. I sit down in this small armless chair, directly in front of her, and I look toward the street. The sun is strong, but it's partly hidden, so we put the blinds down. I like to leaf through her embroidery magazines while we listen to the radio programs. In one of the old magazines, *Family Magazine,* I run across a beautiful cross-stitch and she says she'll show me how to do it. When she sends me to get the orange-rind dessert, I stop and linger in the living room without bothering her. My mom told me that Auntie cleans all of

her decorations on the glass shelves herself. She doesn't trust the maids, everything has to be carefully dusted, right down to the last little corner and crack; that's why she gets them out. I take a peek into the bedrooms: I see a picture of her daughter, then a girl younger than me, and I get sad for my aunt who lost her daughter and for the girl who, had she lived, would have inherited the responsibility to take care of her sick mother. That daughter is with her when she's embroidering, watching other lives from the window, listening to the radio, and watching the trains coming and going up and down Piedad Street.

at Grandma and Grandpa's house.

"Hey, grandma, can you put a record on for me?"

"I don't know how to turn on the record player, dear."

"Should I ask grandpa to do it?"

"We only have Arabian music."

"Well, that's okay, whatever . . ."

"Just as soon as your grandpa comes downstairs."

"No, don't say anything to him," my father says, "it'll probably break, and then he'll just get mad at me."

"Oh, Daddy, don't worry! I want to hear how it sounds. Ever since I've been born, they've never played it. It's always been closed up, just sitting there by itself. Does it even work?"

"Be quiet. He's coming down now, and don't you dare say anything to him!"

Like always, my dad and I jump up from our chairs at the same time and proceed to kiss my grandpa's hand, which he then promptly sticks back in his pocket.

"Shamuel," he says, "this television set isn't working."

"I'll talk to the repair man tomorrow, Papa."

"And tell them to quit making a fool out of me, they say they fixed it but now it's worse. And it's happened four times this week."

"Here, let me take a look at it."

"What! You don't believe me? If I tell you it's broken, then it's broken."

"Mom has been watching a soap opera and she doesn't notice anything wrong with it."

"You don't see anything because you're ignorant. Look, the picture is horrible. Isn't that right, Luna?"

"Well . . ."

"Look, don't you see those lines across the screen?"

"Uh, where?"

"What do you mean where? Are you blind? Yep, it's true, the older you get, the stupider you become. Anyone can see them," he says, smiling toothily.

"Okay. Oshinica, you're smarter than your father. Don't you see the lines? I'm not crazy! Everyone around here contradicts me. Do me the favor of telling those jerks to come and fix this once and for all."

"Grandfather, what does the record player sound like?"

"Which one? That one? It sounds beautiful. It's one of the best record players around. The sound is the greatest. You know, of course, that your grandfather doesn't buy cheap stuff. But not now, dear, I'm tired, and besides, on top of what your father has put me through, my stomach hurts. Maybe on Sunday, if I'm feeling better . . ."

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Studies in the Literary Imagination 33.1, Spring 2000 © Georgia State University

Manuel F. Medina

Imagining a Space in Between: Writing the Gap between Jewish and Mexican Identities in Rosa Nissan's Narrative

Rosa Nissán (b. 1939, Mexico City) emerged as a celebrated figure in the Mexican literary world in 1992 with the publication of *Novia que te vea*, a novel that became an instant editorial success. This story about Oshinica, a Jewish girl, and her coming of age in a predominately Catholic, Mexican society became the script for a 1993 award-winning film of the same title. *Hisho que te nazca* (1996) continues narrating Oshinica's life, picking up where *Novia que te vea* leaves off. It provides the reader with details of the life of a Mexican-Jewish housewife and her struggle to deal with her predetermined roles as dedicated, caring mother and loving wife. Nissán's third book, *Las tierras prometidas: crónica de un viaje a Israel* (1997), a travel chronicle, gives a true account of her visit to Israel. Her most recent work, *No sólo para dormir es la noche* (1999), a collection of short stories, incorporates the narrator's familiar style into texts that deal with the challenges of being a woman in a society that still needs to come to terms with issues of gender equality. Nissán's voice stands out as refreshing because of her presentation of male-female interactions. Each of these works also attempts to create a space in between the two cultures that make up her identity: the Mexican and the Jewish.

The Jews of Mexico account for only 0.63% of the total population—approximately 40,800 people—and therefore represent a very small minority (Schuvaks 75, Elkin 193). They reside primarily in the three major urban centers, Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara, and in the border city of Tijuana (Hamui de Halave 20). Becky Rubinstein traces the first massive Jewish immigrations back to 1848 and explains that Maximilian brought 100 Jewish families from Austria and Belgium in 1864 (1). The next considerable migration occurred in 1920 with the arrival of 9,000 Ashkenazi and 6,000 Sephardic Jews, which increased the number of Jews in Mexico to about 21,000 (Rubinstein 1). The Mexican government's initial openness to immigrants changed into a race-based policy that welcomed from Western Europe more than Poles, Arabs, Turks, Africans and Chinese. In Mexico, we find three main Jewish communities divided according to their members' national origin. The Ashkenazi speak Yiddish and came from Hungary, Rumania, Germany and Poland. The Sephardic left from Turkey and the Balkans and speak Ladino. The Arabs, who came mostly from Syria, divided themselves into two subgroups, those who arrived from Damascus and those who came to Mexico from Aleppo. Luz Hamiu de Halave explains this classification

as the product of a natural ethnic division that dates back to the 1920s when the number of Jewish immigrants increased considerably (21). Robert M. Levine, commenting on Harriet S. Lesser's research, identifies even more divisions:

> Even within Jewish districts, subgroups preserved their Old World identities and remained segregated from one another. Researcher Harriet S. Lesser identified seven distinct and relatively isolated ethnic groups within Mexico City's small Jewish colony: Arabic-speaking Sephardim from Aleppo; Ladino-speaking Sephardim from Turkey, the Balkans, and Italy; German speaking Ashkenazim; and Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim, among others. Throughout Latin America, a gulf separated the Sephardim (who tended to be patriarchal, less well educated, and more religiously observant) from the Ashkenazim (who were upwardly mobile and relatively secularized, and who permitted women to work). (74)

Gilbert W. Merkx explains this phenomenon as particular to Latin-American Jewish communities: "Prior national origin and culture have retained their saliency for Latin-American Jewish communities, whether be Sephardic, Alsatian, German, Eastern European, Moroccan or Turkish" (7). Merkx affirms that Latin American Jewish communities have preserved close ties to their ethnicities, but, compared to Jews in North America, they stand out as less united: "Greater separation and social distance appear to mark ethnic boundaries within the Jewish communities of Latin America than in those of North America, with less social, religious, or marital crossing of community lines" (7). Rubinstein and Hamui de Halave argue that, in spite of this obvious division into subgroups, the Mexican Jewish community stands out as a united religious group that has found a space in which to practice its principles and preferred way of life (1; 21-22). However, ethnicity and inherent cultural differences do separate them.

Regardless of national origin, Mexican and Latin-American Jews share a sense of belonging to an adopted land. They have so integrated themselves into the social, economical, and political affairs of the country that their Jewish identity does not interfere with their Mexican identity. They do not exclude but, rather, complement each other (Rubinstein 2, Hamui de Halave 21-22). Jews hold public offices at the local and national levels and participate actively in the everyday business of the country (Avni 16). These immigrants and their children born in Mexico have managed to maintain their traditions while simultaneously developing a sense of national identity.

Nevertheless, living in or between two cultures generates problems of adaptation in the "other" national culture. Merkx notes the persistence of anti-Semitism rooted in Latin America's strong Catholic tradition and the hostility toward "supposedly foreign elements" (9). He affirms that Latin-American popular culture resents apparent Jewish economic success: "Jews are associated with interna-

tional capital, with high levels of achievements in the developed countries and with the success of Israel as an outpost of capitalism in the Middle East" (9). Jews must prove themselves as worthy citizens of the nation. Moacyr Scliar, one of Brazil's most celebrated writers, states it this way: "We had to conquer the place, to make it our own. We needed to prove we could be Brazilians just like everyone else, to show that our loyalty was not with the past but with the future" (50).

The literature produced by members of these communities reflects the dilemma of cultural adaptation and assimilation deriving from allegiances to their often conflicting Jewish and Latin-American identities. Haim Avni has observed a noticeable increase over the past twenty years in the literary activity of Latin-American Jewish authors who write in Spanish and Portuguese. He considers their role in Latin-American literature:

> In spite of this abundance, at least one central question remains to be examined. Does literature written in Spanish and Portuguese by Jewish and non-Jewish authors truly reflect the experience of the Jewish community and transform that experience—with its negative and positive aspects—into a legitimate, accepted topic in Latin American literature? Or does this literature essentially express the Jewish identity problems of the authors, who cannot serve and do not wish to serve as the community's representatives because they tend to remain on its periphery? In other words: what do these Jewish writers contribute towards building a stable bridge between being Jewish and being Latin American? (16)

Avni raises the issue of representation by questioning whether Jewish authors speak for themselves or for the community and whether or not they help foster better communication between their own communities and the non-Jewish communities. David Schers asserts that the literary corpus of Jewish authors addresses three main issues: one is associated with identity by asking the questions, "Who am I as Jew?" and "What does it mean to be Jewish?"; another concerns the social and cultural issues surrounding the communities; and the third regards social structures of interaction (289). While these critics concur that Jewish authors attempt to understand themselves and their interactions with both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens of the countries in which they reside, they also find that Jewish authors speak first and foremost for themselves and their Jewish heritage.

During the last thirty years, the names and works of female Jewish authors (such as Sonia Chocron, Alicia Freilich de Segal, Jacqueline Goldberg, Martha Kornblith, Elisa Lerner, and Blanca Strepponi) have become familiar to Mexican readers and literary scholars. Their books have received great recognition, meriting several reprints and earning numerous literary awards. Darrell B. Lockhart notices in the extensive and prolific production by contemporary Mexican-Jew-

ish authors an attempt to define Jewish identity as it relates to their place within their two cultures: "These authors, nonetheless, have much to say regarding their marginal status not only within Mexican society but also within Jewish culture. In their texts, they often posit strong feminist standpoints through characters that seek to overcome their double marginalization" (159-60).

Homi K. Bhabha views the location where conversation between two cultures takes places as a fragmented space: "The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it" (4). He believes that the bridging of gaps between borders occurs in in-between spaces rather than in completely defined and clearly marked areas: "What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (4). Alberto Melucci claims that communication between cultures that share a space has changed thanks to the influence of mass culture: "The multiplication of contacts and the constant flow of messages destroys the homogeneity of the individual cultures.... The growing differentiation of roles breaks up the unity of individual groups and forces their members into networks of functional and atomized relations" (89).

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Rosa Nissán's writings operate within the assertions made by Bhabha and Melucci. Nissán understands the problems of identity associated with belonging to two cultures and moves the cultural conversation to a place between them, fully aware that it refers to a space not yet clearly defined. Her narratives propose a shifting model for Jewish identity based on a more modern version that allows for diversity. For instance, Lockhart elucidates that *Novia que te vea* moves the definition of Jewish from the religious to the secular: "The generationally progressive move from religious orthodoxy to secularized Jewishness portrayed in both novels [*Novia que te vea* and *La bobe*, by Sabina Berman] is indicative of how socially motivated change is reflected and preserved in literature" (166). He also asserts that Nissán uses a child narrator as "a nostalgia-imbued strategy for approaching the topic of Mexican Jewish identity" (166). From the narrative perspective of a child, Nissán explores other possibilities in the definition of Jewish identity.

In effect, the novel, which is written in the form of an autobiography, filters the story through the eyes and voice of Oshinica, a child who matures into a teenager. Oshinica experiences the story as it unfolds: "Muchas veces oigo decir a los grandes que qué darían por ser otra vez niños, que la niñez es un tesoro, que los niños somos felices, que nada nos falta, que de cualquier cosa reímos ... y ponen

cara como de buen recuerdo" ("Many times I hear the adults saying what they would give to be children again, that childhood is a treasure, that we don't want for anything, that we laugh about anything ... and they look nostalgic"; 25). She provides a youthful, innocent perspective that allows her to propose changes:

> ¿Querer parecerme a mi mamá, a mi abuela, a mi tía? No, mejor a mi abuelo, a mi papá o hasta a mi hermano. ¡Qué aburridas son las mujeres y además tontas!; bueno mi mamá no es tonta, pero no es nada divertida; mi abuelita no puede ir sola ni siquiera a Sears, que está a dos cuadras. Las mujeres siempre en casa, no se les ocurre ni irse a remar. Mi papá es bien simpático; los esposos salen y ellas a cuidar a sus hijos o a sus hermanos, como me toca a mí. (25-26)
>
> If I want to be like my mom, my grandma, my aunt? No, better to be like my grandpa, my dad, or even my brother. Women are so boring and silly! Well, my mom isn't silly, but she's no fun at all; my grandma can't even go to Sears by herself, two blocks away. Women are always at home; it doesn't even occur to them to go rowing. My dad is very outgoing; husbands go out, but the women must take care of their children or siblings, like I have to.

Oshinica questions traditional gender roles, but this reflection does not stand out as preachy or confrontational because it merely presents a little girl's explorations and attempts to make sense of her world. However, to the intended adult reader, the statements ring true. The text calls for a revision of conventionally accepted roles by portraying a world custom-made to men's advantage.

Oshinica attends a Catholic elementary school where she is confronted with the two disparate cultures. Appropriately enough, the school is named Guadalupe Tepeyac after the place where, in 1531, the Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego (Cuautaltóhuac), an Aztec Indian. The name assigned to the Virgin itself symbolizes a fusion of two cultures: the Mexican (indigenous) and the Spanish. The Virgin stands as the most sacred and appropriate symbol of the new syncretist religion imposed by the Spanish conquistadors onto their unwilling subjects. This Virgin, with her dark complexion, allowed Spaniards partly to fulfill their mission of preaching Christianity in their newly "discovered" land while allowing the Indians to remain somewhat true to their own religion. The Virgin of Guadalupe represents a gracious compromise between the two cultures. The Indians, disposed of their temples, still had a place to adore their gods, although they had to observe a new manner of adoration. Oshinica faces a similar dilemma, and tries to become a Catholic-Jew or a Jewish-Catholic. She addresses her prayers to Catholic saints, crosses herself, and has a collection of Catholic iconography (12-13). She adopts the Catholic Church's philosophy of eternal damnation. Her family lives in the La Villa neighborhood, located in close prox-

imity to the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Oshinica attends mass there and contemplates the privileged and fortunate situation of Juan Diego: "Ojalá un día se me aparezca a mí; si es milagro, a mí también me puede pasar" ("I wish she would appear to me one day; if it's a miracle, it can happen to me, too"; 13). Her "confusion" disappears when the family eventually moves away from La Villa to Colonia Hipódromo, a more "Jewish" neighborhood, and Oshinica transfers to a Jewish school.

Merkx affirms that the persistence of anti-Semitism rooted in the strong Catholic tradition represents one of the major stereotypes surrounding Jews in Latin America (9). *Novia que te vea* addresses this issue by presenting a Catholic classmate who refers to Oshinica as a "Jew" in an insulting tone. Eventually, when her "identity" becomes better known among most of the students, she becomes the victim of openly aggressive harassment: "'Ustedes, mataron a Cristo,' y me ponían la señal de la cruz casi en la cara mirándome como si yo fuera el Diablo" ("'You Jews killed Christ,' and they made the sign of the cross over my face looking at me as if I were the Devil"; 10). Oshinica the child remains silent to the charge, but an older Oshinica provides a more logical answer to her accusers: "Sí soy [judía] pero no creo que es cierto lo que dices, lo mataron los romanos y fue hace muchísimo tiempo" ("Yes, I am [a Jew], but I don't believe what you are saying is right; the Romans killed him and that was a very long time ago"; 46). When she arrives at the Jewish school, her first reaction concerns the anti-Semitism of her former classmates: "¿Todos estos niños mataron a Cristo? Los vi tan tranquilos que pensé: Ni parece que lo hicieron. Ya ni se han de acordar. Juegan a las canicas, a la roña, a los encantados, a todo lo que jugaba yo en la otra escuela. ¿Serán iguales? No se les nota para nada que son judíos" ("Did all these children kill Christ? I saw them so calm that I thought: It doesn't seem like they did. They don't even remember it. They play marbles, tag, freeze-tag, everything I played at the other school. Will they be the same? They don't look Jewish at all"; 15). The use of a child narrator effectively questions and ridicules this long-standing stereotype. Oshinica reflects on the similarities between Catholic and Jewish children, which, in turn, emphasizes the cultural nature of the stereotypes. The children look alike, but their parents have embedded in them ideas of dissimilarity.

The narrator belongs to two worlds in which she operates as a "same" or as an "other," depending on the space she occupies at a particular time. Gilliam Rose notices this as a characteristic of the paradoxical space navigated by people who simultaneously occupy the center and the margin:

> I have noted that the territory of the Same is differentiated between the centre of the Same and the margin of the Other. The Other is not outside the discursive territory of the Same... The manipulation of the field of the Same/Other, being both separate and connected, the simultaneous occu-

> pation of both the centre and the margin, being at once inside and outside; all these discursive spaces depend on a sense of an 'elsewhere' for their resistance. (151, 153)

Oshinica prefers to confront her "otherness" among non-Jews rather than hide her identity. She is Mexican but not of Mexican ancestors, and this makes her unique. She has two names: a Jewish one, Oshinica, and a Spanish/Mexican one, Eugenia. In social situations outside the Jewish community, she introduces herself by her Spanish name, Eugenia, but adds that some people call her Oshi, short for Oshinica (97). This triggers the follow-up question regarding her nationality, "¿Eres mexicana?" ("Are you Mexican?"), to which she replies, re-affirming her identity: "Mis papás no son [mexicanos], yo sí. Aquí nací" ("My parents are not [Mexican], but I am. I was born here"; 97). Yael Halevi-Wise interprets Oshinica's answer as a confirmation of her two identities because she lives simultaneously in two cultural worlds (271). Halevi-Wise explains that Oshinica does not avoid the stereotypes associated with her ethnic background but, instead, exposes her problem as one of defining herself as Mexican, having been born in Mexico but of foreign ancestors (271). She presents herself as a Mexican-Jew with inherited allegiances and responsibilities to two cultures. Simultaneously, as Scliar did in Brazil, she takes upon herself the burden of having to prove herself worthy of being called "Mexican" (21).

The narrators in all of Rosa Nissán's novels address these issues of nationalism and the two identities inherited with being born in Mexico but lacking full ancestral "Mexican-ness." At the same time, they must remain Jewish and carry on their parents' traditions. They constantly must prove to others that they are indeed worthy of their ethnic and nationalistic labels, Mexican and/or Jewish. Nissán expresses that, at times, her Jewishness becomes a heavy burden: "Estoy cansada de ser judía; ni un mes de mi vida lo he podido olvidar, vaya, ni una semana" ("I am tired of being Jewish; I haven't been able to forget it for a single month, well, not even for a week"; *Las tierras* 10). In *Hisho que te nazca*, a friend of Oshinica's has found the perfect place in between two worlds:

> Ser judío es mucho más profundo, si vivieras y estudiaras un poco te sentirías orgullosa, como yo, lo que no quita que ame profundamente a México. La religión de una persona no determina su lealtad a la patria. Disfruta y no padezcas ser judía-mexicana o mexicana-judía, como quieras, eso te enriquece. (268)
> To be Jewish is a lot deeper; if you lived and studied a little, you would feel proud, like myself, which doesn't mean that I don't love Mexico with all my heart. A person's religion doesn't determine his loyalty to his country. Enjoy and don't suffer about being Jewish-Mexican or Mexican-Jewish, however you like—that enriches you.

Rosa Nissán openly reflects on her nationality in *Las tierras prometidas*: "No seré mexicana como los que tienen raíces indígenas, pero sí soy mexicana, México es mi casa y me encanta." ("I won't be Mexican like those who have indigenous roots, but I am Mexican; Mexico is my home and I love it"; 11). And, in a conversation with her brother, she adds: "Le digo: estoy hecha en México, hablo en español, amo el color, la sensibilidad de los mexicanos, si un día no viniera aquí me sumergiría en la nostalgia" ("I tell him: I was made in Mexico, I speak Spanish, I love the color, the sensitivity of the Mexicans, if one day I couldn't come here I would submerge myself in nostalgia"; 11). During her stay in Israel, where she traveled in search of her Jewish heritage, Nissán realized her tendency to look through a nostalgic filter searching for vestiges of her father and grandfather. She feels overwhelmed in a city where she must fulfill the expectations placed on her by previous visitors: "Sé que muchos judíos lloran de emoción al llegar a Eretz Israel. ¿Cómo me sentiré yo?" ("I know many Jews cry with emotion when they arrive at Eretz Israel. How will I feel?"; 15). She misses her legitimate space, Mexico; among the Jews in Jerusalem, supposedly "her" people, she feels completely out of place. Israel represents an idyllic place created in her imagination where she has envisioned a perfect life among those who share her Jewishness. There, although she should feel like part of the center, she stands out as an "other" and not as a "same."

Nissán also calls attention to the narrator's "otherness" by incorporating a substantial number of words from Ladino into the text, which is written mostly in Spanish. Halevi-Wise maintains that the use of expressions and dialogue in the language of Oshinica's ancestors represents an attempt to bridge two other cultures: Spain's during the time of the Conquest and that of the Jews who were expelled from Spain (274). They now find each other through the links of a language that has endured the test of time after five centuries in "New Spain." The novel offers a place, if only textual, where both cultures can co-exist. At the same time, it reminds us that these people continue to carry the designation of "other" assigned to them back in the fifteenth century, still stand out as different, and still must continue to prove their loyalties to the nation where they now live. Their language, an older version of Medieval Spanish, still stands as a symbol of their "otherness" just as it did centuries ago.

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Novia que te vea presents the ethnic sub-division among Mexican Jews and the significant distance that separates them. Oshinica's family belongs to the Sephardic Jewish community because of her parents' ancestry: her mother came from Turkey and her father from Persia. Curiously enough, Oshinica observes this separation within her own home because her mother considers "her people"

superior to the ones who came from her father's land: "Estos de Persia son el mismo shishit. Yo en Estambul iba a las mejores escuelas, mos [sic] daban las clases en francés. La familia de mi mamá es de categoría" ("The ones from Persia are the 'shishit' itself. In Istanbul, I went to the best schools; classes were given in French. My mom's family was one of the finest"; 27). A visitor from Israel ponders on the exclusive nature of these divisions: "He notado que entre los judíos de México hay diferencias muy marcadas en las tres comunidades, lo que es una verdadera pena. Cada uno cree que sus costumbres son mejores" ("I've noticed that among Jews from Mexico there are strong differences in the three communities, which is a true shame. They all think their customs are the best"; 75). Note that Nissán uses an outside narrator to criticize this attitude among Mexican Jews; she avoids utilizing Oshinica's voice to assume the subversive role of criticizing her own community. The novel takes a definite stand on the issue of ethnic separation and how it affects Mexican Jews by advocating for better integration. Nissán's narrative echoes Merkx's claim that Latin-American Jewish communities stand out as being less united than those in North America (7). Nissán places the novel in the middle of a cultural debate, whereas other critics affirm the complete opposite by stating that religious principles erase the ethnic divisions and make all Jews equal. *Novia que te vea* portrays each ethnic group holding its own meetings at its own synagogue, and presents only one neutral space where Jews do gather together as a community—the Centro Deportivo Israelí.

The novel hides its subversive ideology behind Oshinica's focalization, masterfully using it to challenge the establishment. Oshinica befriends Andrés, a university student who promotes liberal changes to Mexico's ruling conservative ideology. He introduces Oshinica to Jose Rubén Romero's novel *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez* (1938). Pérez, a typical picaresque hero, displays a nonconformist attitude toward society by questioning the roles of federal institutions and national customs. Andrés holds a similar critical attitude. On a third level, Nissán criticizes the traditional Jewish way, albeit subtly, through other people's voices. On a first reading, the inclusion of quotations from *Pito Pérez* appears out of place in this novel. However, a closer reading reveals Pito Pérez as a paradigm of the subversive hero who dares to criticize the establishment. Nissán links Pito, a mid-twentieth century outcast, with Andrés, a contemporary revolutionary, in order to criticize tradition and conformism in Mexico. By association, the quotations from *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez* emphasize Oshinica's own visions and ideas of renewal for her culture's long-established traditions. Oshinica challenges tradition by marrying for reasons other than those her culture dictates. She avoids a pre-arranged marriage, choosing a husband for whom she feels love and attraction. Furthermore, her family does not pay the traditional marriage dowry. Despite these deviations from the typical marriage arrangement, the novel's final words, "*¡Hisho que te nazca!*" reveal that tradition will continue to place expec-

tations and demands on her. She now must perform her feminine roles of loving wife and caring mother (181).

§

The story of her marriage, appropriately named after *Novia que te vea*'s final sentencing words, resumes in *Hisho que te nazca*. Nissán's second novel presents traditional feminine spaces as prisons where women suffer long sentences and men's as the free and ample spaces located outside the constraining boundaries of the home. Oshinica, also the main protagonist and narrator in this novel, reflects on the new being that starts to occupy a space inside her: "Estar casada es bonito, pero esta panza que difícil traerla cargada todo el tiempo" ("It is nice to be married, but it's so hard to carry around this big tummy all of the time"; 24). She contemplates the perennial nature of motherhood and how it will impact her life. Her enlarged stomach—and, eventually, the baby—announces to the world her status as mother, a status that carries with it certain responsibilities. At the Centro Deportivo Israelí, Oshinica no longer can flirt with men, play sports, swim, or enjoy any of the activities in which she participated before. She now must deal with her body's new shape and size and her physiological reactions. Oshinica notices how life has changed drastically for her but not for her husband, Lalo. His body does not experience the transformations, pains, and aches she must suffer: "Me duele la cintura, caramba, ¿por qué a él no le dolerá nada? Su cuerpo está igualito, perfecto, sus piernas musculosas, ni un poquito de grasa en el vientre, no se le nota que también va a ser papá, me choca" ("My waist hurts, darnit. Why doesn't anything hurt him? His body is the same, perfect, his legs muscular, not a bit of fat on his belly, you can't tell he's going to be a father—it annoys me"; 40). Conversely, Lalo acquires more freedom, spending his evenings playing cards at his parents' house or elsewhere (25).

When the children arrive, Oshinica faces other difficulties. The family's apartment becomes the space where she must struggle to remain her own person and, at the same time, act as ideal caretaker to her offspring and husband. Her daily space becomes a prison. She must perform a successive and never-ending series of chores, striving for perfection in every detail:

> Este ritmo me hace sentir más serena; poco a poco se tienden las camas, el reguero de juguetes se mete en sus respectivas cajas, las toallas del baño se ponen a secar, se guardan. Me siento en la sala recién aspirada, destapo la dulcera, desenvuelvo un dulce, la miro otra vez. Estoy harta de ordenar, de tratar de alcanzar la perfección que esperan de mí. (83)
> This rhythm makes me feel calmer; little by little the beds are made, the scattered toys are put in their respective boxes, bath towels are hung out

> to be dried, put away. I sit in the room that was just vacuumed, I open the candy jar, I unwrap a candy, I look at the candy jar again. I am tired of tidying up, of trying to reach the perfection that they expect from me.

Oshinica acts to avoid the suffocation caused by this asphyxiating space by breaking tradition and altering the apartment's neatness and order by purposely dirtying up the floor: "Saco los dulces y como si estuviera echando agua al piso antes de barrer, los desperdigo en el tapete" ("I take out the candies and, as if I were sprinkling water before sweeping, I scatter them on the carpet"; 83). And she gives her maid precise instructions not to clean them up. Gradually, she starts to challenge her husband's authority and, against his will, enrolls in school and sneaks out of the apartment to watch movies. Years later, she gives up everything completely, divorces her husband, and retires to pursue her life the way she always has envisioned it.

However, Oshinica realizes that she has not escaped tradition: she still does not own her body even after divorcing her husband. The sexual repression instilled in her by forty years of religious and cultural teachings prevents her from freely enjoying her body: "Ahora, después de algunos meses sin marido, mi cuerpo se va sintiendo solo y ni siquiera me he atrevido a coquetearle ni a un perro, de tanto hacerlo ya no se me da. No puedo mirar a la cara de un hombre y menos si me gusta" ("Now, after a few months without a husband, my body is getting lonely; I haven't dared to flirt with even a dog, after doing it so much it doesn't come out right anymore. I can't look at a man in the face, and even less so if I like him"; 178). Oshinica eventually overcomes her repression and develops into her own person. She dresses less conservatively and gets involved in a romantic relationship in which she takes complete control of her body and allows herself to enjoy it. Gilliam Rose claims that women like Oshinica reclaim their bodies as a means of resistance to the patriarchal system:

> I have tried to argue that feminist resistance to a certain kind of (historically and geographically specific) transparent space renders spatial images, such as 'territory,' especially resonant in feminist work. Transparent space can be contextualized in terms of the discursive and visual engendering of the feminine body and in terms of the increasing specularity of certain cultures; and its costs for women can be immediate and painful. [I] ha[ve] explored the construction by feminists of a different kind of space in which women need no longer be victims. (159)

Hisho que te nazca shows that Oshinica, rather than acting as a victim, learns to take control and enjoy her life. In the closing pages of the novel, she evaluates her life and feels triumphant because she has achieved professionally what she set out to accomplish before getting married: "He vuelto a mi camino, al que un

día, allá cuando era soltera, había vislumbrado. Cuando estos hijos míos sean grandes quisiera que se sintieran satisfechos de que su madre tiene una vida personal, aparte de ser su orgullosa madre" ("I returned to my path, the one I had envisioned one day when I was single. When my children are grown up, I would like them to feel satisfied that their mother has a personal life apart from being their proud mother"; 286).

Víctor, Oshinica's first lover after her divorce, introduces her to Julio Córtazar's novel *Rayuela* (185). The novel, which makes a huge impact in her life, promotes breaking away from established cultural norms. *Rayuela* advocates a departure from traditional rules; in fact, readers are encouraged to explore the text following any chronological or spatial order they wish. The novel relies on a fragmented chronology to develop a storyline that forces readers to break the traditional custom of reading from beginning to end. Oshinica abides by *Rayuela*'s recommendation and decides to incorporate its teachings into her life. She attends the Bet-El temple, a reformist Jewish temple in Mexico City, where men and women are allowed to sit together. This represents a tremendous change from her orthodox ways; at the temple she attended as a child, men and women sat in different places and women were forbidden to enter spaces reserved exclusively for men.

In *Las tierras prometidas*, the chronicle of her visit to Israel, Rosa Nissán shows herself as a woman who has cut ties with tradition and openly enters into a series of exclusively physical short-term relationships. She no longer considers her body a property guarded by the males in her life—father, husband, or lovers—and uses it for personal pleasure. Ironically, the men she meets have repressed their own desires and cannot freely enjoy the sexual delights the narrator offers. The text presents men as insecure, possessive beings who hold double standards. It confirms that relationships between the genders relate mostly to power and ownership rather than love, caring, or even pleasure. Seduction belongs in a ritual officiated by men where women must perform according to masculine desires.

In summary, Rosa Nissán's narratives introduce readers to several identity issues faced by people living between two cultures. The different narrators demonstrate that Jews living in Mexico must conform to two standards, the national and the Jewish. The novels posit that, instead of occupying two different spaces, Mexican Jews should inhabit the borders between both of them. Nissán's texts bridge the gap between two cultures that share a single space. The narrators deal with identity issues arising from their relationships with both Jewish and non-Jewish communities. They set out to voice their own personal concerns regarding identity rather than mimicking those of the community. The novels address equally Mexicans and Mexican Jews (or Jewish Mexicans) and confront the long-established traditions of anti-Semitism and patriarchy. Nissán, through her narrative construct, invites Mexicans to look beyond the stereotypes and

accept Mexican Jews as national equals. By challenging and questioning their traditions, she invites Jews to open up and allow themselves to leave behind their asphyxiating spaces. As Renée Scott writes, Nissán does not advocate for a breaking away from one's Jewish ancestry but, rather, for the forging of a new identity that allows for cultural fusion (608). Her narratives advise Mexican Jews to begin inhabiting a space between these two worlds and to embrace their dual cultural heritage.

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NOTES

[1] I would like to thank the Intramural Research Incentive Grants Program at the University of Louisville for the Research on Women grant that made it possible for me to research and write this article. I also wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues Mary Makris, Regina Roebuck, and Elizabeth Conrood Martínez who read and edited an earlier version of this text. Thanks, Mary, for your generous help and your great insightful comments. And, finally, I wish to thank Anne Greenfeld, Wendy Pfeffer, and Rosa Nissán for graciously and patiently answering the many questions that I posed to them while conducting the research for this piece.

[2] Estimated population figure provided by Judith Laikin Elkin, who researched the *American Jewish Year Book 96*. The count is accurate as of the end of 1994.

[3] Merkx observes that this national-origin identity does not play a major role in the definition of national identity among American Jews. He also notes that, based on recent reports, younger generations have begun to erase these lines of separation (7).

[4] For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Saúl Sosnowski's article "Latin American-Jewish Writers: Protecting the Hyphen."

[5] This does not mean to serve as a complete list, but I refer to the following: Sabina Berman (1955), Margo Glantz (1930), Ethel Krauze (1954), Sara Levi Calderón (1942), Myriam Moscona (1955), Angelina Muñiz-Huberman (1936), Rosa Nissán (1939).

[6] For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see F. González Crussi's article, "The Anatomy of a Virgin."

[7] On October 28, 1965, with the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, a pivotal, precedent-setting Vatican II document, the Catholic Church stated officially that it goes against church theology to blame Jews for the killing of Jesus and that its members ought to stop this anti-Semitic practice:

> Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be obtained, especially, by way of biblical and theological enquiry and through friendly discussions. Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the Word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ. Indeed, the Church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.

[8] For an excellent discussion of Sephardic identity and the Ladino language in *Novia que te vea*, see Yael Halevi-Wise's article, "Puente entre dos naciones: idioma e identidad sefardí en *Novia que te vea* e *Hisho que te nazca* de Rosa Nissán."

[9] In Ladino, it is the equivalent of the first personal pronoun.

[10] I refer to Hamiu de Halave, Rubinstein, and Yael Halevi-Wise.

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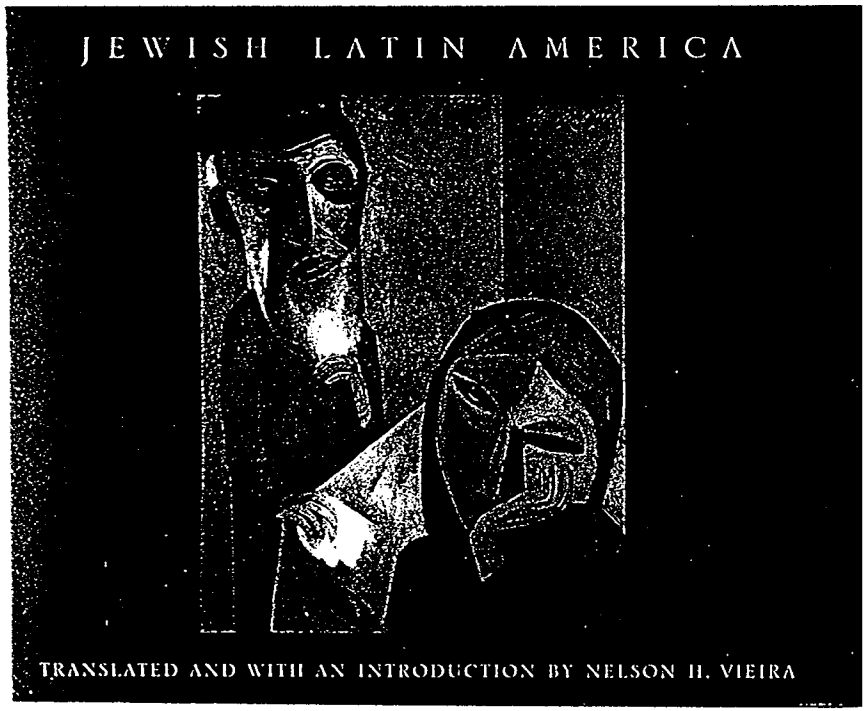
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SAMUEL RAWET

THE PROPHET

and other stories



University of New Mexico Press 1998
Albuquerque

THE PROPHET

All illusions lost, the only thing really left for him to do was to take that step. The gangplank already hauled off, and the last whistle blown, the steamship would weigh anchor. He again looked at the cranes wielding bales, the piles of ore and other minerals. Down below, people hustling and bustling and foreign tongues. Necks stretched out in cries toward those who surrounded him on the rampart of the upper deck. Handkerchiefs. In the distance, the honking of automobiles revealing the life that continued on in the city he was now abandoning. The sneering looks of some mattered little to him. At another time he would have felt hurt. He understood that the white beard and the long overcoat well below his knees made him a strange figure to them. He had become accustomed to that reaction. Right now they would be laughing at the thin figure, all in black except for the face, the beard, and the even whiter hands. However, no one dared challenge those eyes that commanded respect and instilled a certain

majestic air to his demeanor. With fists folded against his temples, he resisted interior escape into the serenity that had brought him to this point. Hearing the ship's muffled toot, he became fully aware of his plunging into solitude. The return, the only way out he had discovered, seemed to him empty and illogical. He thought, at the moment of hesitation, that he had acted as a child. Lately, the idea had been building into gigantic proportions and had culminated in his presence on board the ship. Now he was afraid of seeing that decision effaced by the glimmer of doubt. The fear of solitude terrified him more so because of the experience obtained in his daily contact with death. There was still time . . .

"Step down the gangplank, please, step down!"

The fat figure of the woman to his side turned upon hearing, or upon thinking that she heard, the words of the old man.

"Sir, did you say something to me?"

Useless. He knew the language barrier would not allow him to say anything. The woman's face changed with the old man's negative nod and supplicating eyes. With exceptions, the true recourse would be mimicry but that would accentuate the childishness that tyrannized him. Only then did he realize he had murmured the sentence, and ashamed, he closed his eyes.

"My wife, my children, my son-in-law."

Confused, he gazed at the group that kept on hugging and kissing, a strange group (even his brother and cousins, if not for the photographs mailed ahead, would also seem strange to him), and the tears then rolling down his cheeks were not of tenderness but of gratitude. He had known the older ones as children. Thirty years ago his own brother was little more than an adolescent. Here he had married, had sons and daughters, and had also seen his daughter marry. Not even after settling into the cushioned springs of the car the son-in-law was driving did his tears stop flowing. To the onslaught of questions, he responded with gestures, evasions, or else silence. Despite its age, his

thin but hard body had enabled him to work and, moreover, had saved his life. Now it swayed with the traffic's hesitations and never once did his eyes gaze upon the landscape. He seemed to be concentrating more on responding to the avalanche of tenderness. What was going on inside would be impossible for him to convey through the superficial contact now being initiated. He figured his silences were embarrassing. The silences following the series of questions about himself, about the most terrifying thing he had experienced. To forget what had happened, never. But how to belittle it, to eliminate the essence of the horror as one sat down to a beautifully set table, or as one sipped tea ensconced in elegant cushions and comfortable armchairs? The avid and inquiring eyes around him, hadn't they heard or seen enough to be horrified as well and to share his silences? One world alone. He expected to find on this side of the ocean the comfort of those like him who had suffered, but whom chance had marginally saved from the worst. And being conscious of that, they shared this meeting with humility. However, he had an inkling of a slight mistake on his part.

The apartment occupied by his brother was on the top floor of the building. Open to the sea, the veranda absorbed the nightly crash of the waves with more furor than during the day. There he liked to sit (having returned from the synagogue after evening prayers) with his grandnephew on his lap, both babbling nonsense. The child's fingers would get tangled in his beard and sometimes forcibly grope for a tuft of hair or two. Pincus would then rub his hard nose with his roundish and cartilaginous finger and both of them would let loose a carefree laugh. They would amuse themselves until the time the brother got home and they went in to dinner.

During the first weeks there was much commotion and many houses to visit, many tables to eat at, and in all the homes he felt indignant for being taken for granted as a *curiosity*. With time, once the enthusiasm and the curiosity had cooled down, he ended up spending time only with his brother. Actually talking only to him or to his wife. The

others hardly understood him, nor did his nephews, and even less so the son-in-law, toward whom he began to nurture a real aversion.

"Here comes the 'Prophet'!"

He had barely opened the door when the son-in-law's derisive words and laugh surprised him. He pretended as if he hadn't noticed the others' uneasiness. He had taken his time on the way home from the synagogue and they were already waiting for him at the dinner table. He glimpsed his brother's disapproval and one of the children's shortened laugh. Only Paulo (that's how they called the grandson, whose real name was Pincus) moved his hands babbling as though to complain about the lost playtime. Mute, he placed his hat on the rack, keeping only the black silk cap on his head. He still hadn't learned a thing about the language. But, being a good observer, even though he didn't dare say anything, by association he managed to memorize a few things. And the word "prophet," delivered with mischievous laughter as he came into the house, was becoming familiar. He didn't get its meaning. Little did it matter, however. The word was never uttered without an ironic look, a smirk. In the bathroom (while he was washing his hands) he was reminded of the innumerable times the same sounds were said in front of him. He made the connection with other scenes. From down deep surfaced the memory of something similar having occurred in the temple.

The mistake he sensed on the first day became more pronounced. The sensation that their world was really something other than his—that they had not participated in anything that (for him) had been the horrible night—was being slowly transformed into concrete reality. The dinner gatherings where he would remain in the background were to him quite tiresome. When the children were sleeping and the other couples came over to chat, he felt foolish listening to the tone of the conversation, the bawdy jokes, the numbers always being bandied about in reference to everything and, at times, to nothing. The war had stripped him of all his prior illusions and had confirmed

the precariousness of what once had been solid. The only thing remaining intact had been his faith in God and in religion, so deep-rooted that even during the most bitter ordeals he hadn't been able to expel his belief. (He had already tried, he knew, but in vain.) A year had scarcely gone by and he found himself still repeating monotonously what he imagined to be over and done with. The son-in-law's parasitic situation awakened in him feelings of hatred, and at great expense, he controlled himself. He had seen other hands making other gestures. But the manicured nails and the rings, the roly-poly body, the stupid laugh, and his uselessness intensified his overall disgust. How many times (long past midnight), on the veranda with his cigarette lit, he would let himself forget while listening to the vulgar (to him) guffaws uttered bilingually from one card game to another.

"So this is what it's all about?"

The others thought it was senility. He knew very well it wasn't. Monologues had been useful to him when he thought he was going crazy. Today they were a habit. When alone, he would release tension by saying one sentence or another with no meaningful connection, except for him. He remembered one day (right in the beginning), in the middle of some conversation, he had half-heartedly attempted some flimsy complaint by making some weak sign of protest, and perhaps his index finger did cut the air with gestures of ominous intentions. The same thing in the synagogue when the congregation's rudeness had disturbed a prayer.

"Those fat, bossy men of plenty don't belong here," he had murmured to himself one day.

Perhaps for that reason, the *prophet*. (Afterwards he had discovered its meaning.)

He thought about changing a little his topics of conversation and began to narrate stories about what he had once denied. But now it didn't seem to interest them. Condescendingly (they didn't understand what degree of sacrifice that meant to him) they listened to

him at first and no tears were missing from the women's eyes. Afterwards, noticing their annoyance, indignation, he thought he discovered reproof in some looks and second guessed sentences like these: "What do you expect from all this talk? Why do you torment us with stuff that has nothing to do with us?" There were wrinkles of remorse when they remembered someone who was connected to them, yes. But these moments were brief. They disappeared as a crease does in a rubber doll. It didn't take long for such behavior to become obvious, albeit masked.

"You are suffering from all this talk. Why do you insist so?"

He shut up. And more than that, he became silent. Very seldom did they hear a word from him, and they didn't notice that he was putting himself into a marginal situation. Only Pincus (that's what he called him) continued to braid his beard, rub his nose, and tell endless stories with his round eyes. Uselessness.

The sea brought back sad memories and launched enigmatic ones. Solitude upon solitude. At times, he asked himself about his capacity to last in an environment that was no longer his. The whoosh of the waves. A small finger plunged into his mouth and then a laugh at the jolt. An unrestrained laugh. Did he have the right to condemn? Not really, if this was pleasurable reward after the torment. No, he couldn't even condemn himself if for some reason he gave in, despite his age. But the others? Blind and deaf in their insensitivity and self-sufficiency! He'd then get up. He'd walk through the rooms, examining the household comfort for signs of contrast he knew beforehand did not exist. He lured himself into useless arguments. And from down deep came a bitter and disappointing taste. The days piled up in a routine manner but the time in the synagogue on Saturdays was painful for him. With his prayer book open (unnecessary since he uttered all the prayers by heart), he would close his eyes to the intrigues and would remain to the side, always to the side. On his way home, he would admire the showy colors of the shop windows, the skyscrapers disappearing in the distance with the turn of his neck, and the incessant crawl of the automobiles. And in the midst of all that, solitude weighed him down, the spiritual state that had not found any affinity whatsoever.

He knew his brother's good fortune to be recent. In one of his rare moments of rest, he had told him about the years of struggle in the suburbs, and triumphant, with sweeping gestures, he capped his story with the success of his present security. More than any other sensations, that one affected him profoundly, echoing deep inside. He realized that any kind of affinity was impossible since their experiences were totally opposite. His, bitter. The other's, victorious. And in the same interim of time!? God, my God! Nights of insomnia followed. He tried to reach the conclusion that a feeling of envy had burdened him with hatred. Impossible. Being really honest with himself, he easily saw right through that conclusion. And stood by the opposite one, the more difficult one. The forms in the dimness of the room (he slept with the grandson) composed scenes he didn't expect to see again. Horrible and skeletal daybreaks. Anguished faces and prayers flying away from human ashes. His wife's figure wrapping her shawl at the last minute. Where are the eyes, where are the muted eyes that disclosed the animal cry? Roguish laughter. Card games. Numbers. Look at the "prophet" over there! And faces of laughter, giggling at the overcoat draped on the chair. Impossible.

The increasing cries made him notice the time of departure. He looked at the docks. Slowly the strip of water expanded with the final gestures of good-bye. He tightened all the muscles in his body. When the family returned from the resort, they would find his letter on the table. And the protests would be useless because they were too late. He had taken advantage of their two-week absence. The passport with his tourist visa (after, they were thinking about changing it for a permanent one) made his plan easy. The money he owned was all spent

on the ticket. Return. The maid found it a bit strange to see him leave with his suitcase. But she attributed the fact to the eccentric figure who in the beginning had instilled in her a little fear. Plans? He didn't have any. He was simply going in search of the company of people who were the same, the same, yes. Perhaps in search of the end. The energies this step demanded had wiped him out, and his debilitated state had brought some doubts. And facing the irremediable, his frustrated eyes swelled in the anxious attempt to quell his tears. Already tiny by now, the figures waving good-bye. The mountainous background, bluish in the midday sky. Green blocks of little islands and spray on the bows of the barges. (There are always seagulls. But he couldn't see them.) Again, his fists closing and moving crosswise, his head resting in his arms, and the black figure, in the form of a hook, trembling in tears.

THE PRAYER

At the entrance to the courtyard, the remains of a wall nobody ever bothered to raise after it was knocked down by a truck, Zico assembled the gang of boys.

"There, the old woman, over there!"

Turning the corner, the black shawl wrapped around her neck while her rough hands stiffened on either side of her body, weighed down by two immense packages. The quick pace, firm footsteps of heelless shoes, cut across the line of vision of the startled boys who only saw her marked profile and her grey hair pulled back into a bun. They never had the courage to look her straight in the eyes, and when they threw the first stone, scraping her feet, they expected to hear her half-baked babble but encountered only a pale expression and a twisted mouth. The anticipated and frustrated pleasure left them always wanting more. That's why they looked at her sideways, or sometimes spied on her through the window. There wasn't anyone like her

in the building. Zico, the oldest, guaranteed it. He knew the thirty or so residents of the tenement and never had he heard speak of a similar case. The old woman arrived suddenly, just a few days ago, silently. She arranged her belongings, which a black man had carried on his head, in the one room apartment in back, and without having spoken to anyone, she came and went, mute, her shoes damaging the corridor's rotting woodwork. Only once did they hear her voice. On the second day after her arrival she went to ask for matches from old Genoveva, who was lighting her pipe, seated on a bench and taking a break from her washing. Genoveva opened a half closed eye, freed her mouth and smiled with a half dozen teeth scattered over her gums. She found it hard to understand what the foreigner wanted. "Please . . . Lend . . . ," her fingers scratched the palm of her hand, and in her pleading eyes a fear of the laughter the neighborhood kids were mustering. "I make . . . ," strange mimicry expressed haltingly, the missing word. Genoveva stretched her arm which the old woman grabbed tightly and taking the matchbox she raced off. The noise of their voices rattled her. Brito, the boldest, aped her gestures and jumbled his words, while the others, in back, laughed foolishly. "You . . . good-for-nothing . . . *sheygetz* . . . " The bun turned around and elicited a hailstorm of jolting responses. Worse. The laughter increased. The joking as well. Brito, scratching his belly, guffawed, continuing the dialogue with shrills and howls, interspersed with some barking. While she climbed the steps, a rock scraped against her ankle. The turn of the bun poured forth a pale expression and the twisted mouth. Sudden silence. Brito scratched his belly in slow motion until he stopped.

Instantaneously a heaviness immobilized them until her sturdy steps were again heard on the floorboards of the corridor, and Genoveva's frightening scream:

"Out on the street right now, you low life!!!"

She fell down on the bed alongside the packages. A relief rose from her fingertips, ran up her shoulder blades, and escaped through

her mouth in a sigh. She rubbed her face and burning cheeks. She was neither used to this kind of sun, nor to this type of drudgery. The perspiration made her feel uncomfortable inside and from her armpits a soggy triangle ran to its vertex at her waist. Taste of sand in her mouth. Her elbows on her knees, her face in the palm of her hands, she panted, parched, grim, sad. The black shawl on her thighs flooded her vision. Friday! Four o'clock! My God! She turned her face. Through the closed window came a wave of heat, floating on to the bed, the table, the junky bureau, beating and beating again against the walls, concentrating solidly upon Ida's body. A desire to stay there chained to the bed, to fuse fatigue and solitude. Friday. Four o'clock. My God! She broke through her inertia by tearing off her shoes. She slid her aching feet into her slippers and breaking through her lethargy went to the sink. Friday.

She lifted the cover of the pan and a steaming smell of cooked meat warmed her face. She stoked the coal stove, revived the fire with more coal and a fan, and in a pan of boiling water she dumped the two slices of fish. From the chest of drawers came a white cloth for the table. A different aroma flooded the room, now cleaned and swept. On the bed she ripped open the packages, arranging in boxes, the stockings, handkerchiefs, pieces of soap, packages of hairpins, shoelaces, ribbons . . . a whole world! Her world. On the wall Isaiah's praying eyes had been startled by the click of the photograph. Ida remembered the trouble in convincing him to keep the photo that was taken by surprise. Now, all yellowed, it hung on the wall, showing the blot of his beard, his arched eyebrows and those startled eyes. From the others nothing more had remained. Ida's eyes quivered with the memory. What a nightmare! On Fridays Isaiah would come home more happy, his face shining, and one drop of water or another from his beard would be a sign of the ritual bath. He would gently slap her on the back a few times, (Ida's face was red from the wood in the stove), and would go pray. Now only the photograph.

An uproar in the courtyard. Scampering throughout the building. Shouts, singing coming from the communal washbasin. A radio on the upstairs floor poured out sambas. Amidst the commotion, standing still by the window Ida was lost, without language, without voice. Forced into a life that never had been hers. Her whole body still aching from the walking. Climbing and descending streets, steps, neighborhoods. Walking. And being alone. Ida felt a tiredness flood her soul. Children, she had already had them, husband as well. From all that, only the photo on the wall remained. And herself. On her wrinkled face, a crushed suffering. She was forgetting. All of them died in the war. Rattled by the steam, the pan's cover beat to the samba on the radio. Without knowing how she disembarked in this port. She was leaving a whole existence behind. Ave-Maria coming from the upstairs floor and the room practically in darkness. At the beginning they invited her to stay at somebody's house, but as a novelty, a rare beast from other lands who has stories lasting for more than a month. The stories wore out. So did the kindness. Then came the tenement with a language she did not understand, kids making fun of her, the packages burdening her arms, and her legs registering sidewalks and rubbing together daily over a hundred doormats. The light from a streetlamp split Ida's face in two, diagonally. One eye blinded by the flash of light glowed moistlessly. Feeling her way, she dragged her feet to the light switch. From one drawer, unwrapping the flannel, she took out two silverplated candlesticks and caressed them tremulously. On the table, she arranged the candles without noticing some small eyes squeezed together, breath held, glued to the window. She tied an enormous white kerchief on her head and, with the candles lit, she closed her eyes and swayed her body back and forth.

"Didja see?"

"I saw! . . . The gringa acted in a strange way! . . . "

"You were a dope! . . . You should have thrown a rock at the window."

"Don't be a jerk! One thing is really bothering me . . . "

"What ?"

"This business with the candle . . . she had the lights on and some candles lit as well."

"Maybe she's hiding a dead body?"

A burst of laughter stirred the group that was sprawled against the stone wall. Only Brito didn't laugh.

"Nothing like that! . . . It's that . . . I don't really know, I'm afraid to say . . . "

"To say what?"

"Something . . . but, honestly, I'm afraid."

"You really are a sissy!"

"Your mother!"

"Stop playing games! . . . Let it out now!"

Brito's revelation dismayed the gang. Distrustful eyes, half afraid, they stared at the window in the corner of the tenement. A taste for adventure and a tiny memory of tall tales left them dumbfounded. Blackie John, a full eight years, scratching his head, found a way:

"The best thing to do is to tell the folks inside!"

A rustling went through the house from end to end. Startled eyes were followed by a slamming of doors, by steps trampling down the halls. Those arriving from work kept swelling the wave of activity, and from the upstairs floor steps clattered down the stairwell. Lickety-split, almost ubiquitously, the kids raised the tenement into an uproar. The excited women took the lead in the midst of the wailing from some cradle suddenly abandoned. The men, curious, followed behind, amazed by the novelty of the situation. One skeptic or another scoffed in derision:

"There's no such thing!"

A stream of language in a strange dialect, a wailing lament, escaped from Ida's door. Her voice was fiery and strong, nobody had heard her like this, and it produced a lump in the throat of the crowd

that was squeezing into the hallway. The suspicions increased. Rosa, of rugged hand and robust figure, struck her fist against the wood:

"Knock the door down!"

The palms of her hands covering her eyes and the kerchief on her head, Ida spurted out the prayer with her body swaying over the candles. Almost always she prayed in a low voice, her lips accelerated. Today, down deep, the cry of the prayer was a malediction and never before had her shoulders swayed so much. Today, Ida didn't beseech God, but with the same words, she yelled, offended. She neither sensed the noise nor the banging. The door was not completely shut and so it wasn't necessary to knock it down. Her heated voice, in measured pace, hadn't let her notice the crushing multitude that was filling up the room. In between her eyes and the palms of her hands, molded in the darkness, she envisioned the faces of Isaiah and her children, of Isaiah almost as a saint. When she lowered her arms, the multitude discovered her abundant tears. A silence left them immobile, and a sensation of uneasiness, discomfort, had dampened their spirits. Ida was a heap of nerves, slackened, without the strength to move her lips. She didn't even feel scared. A slight internal disturbance disclosed by a quiver of her head. Her wrinkled and weary face scanned the room. Her hands began to get ready for the mimicry and a furrow of supplication outlined itself on her mouth.

"Let's leave, my friends. It's nothing at all!"

A man's voice resounded, giving the signal to withdraw, and the squeaking of shoes through the doorway turned into a growing murmur outside the apartment.

"That's what prayer is over there in their country." The same voice. On the stairs going up to the next floor, the womenfolk milled around and Brito's mother gave him a beating:

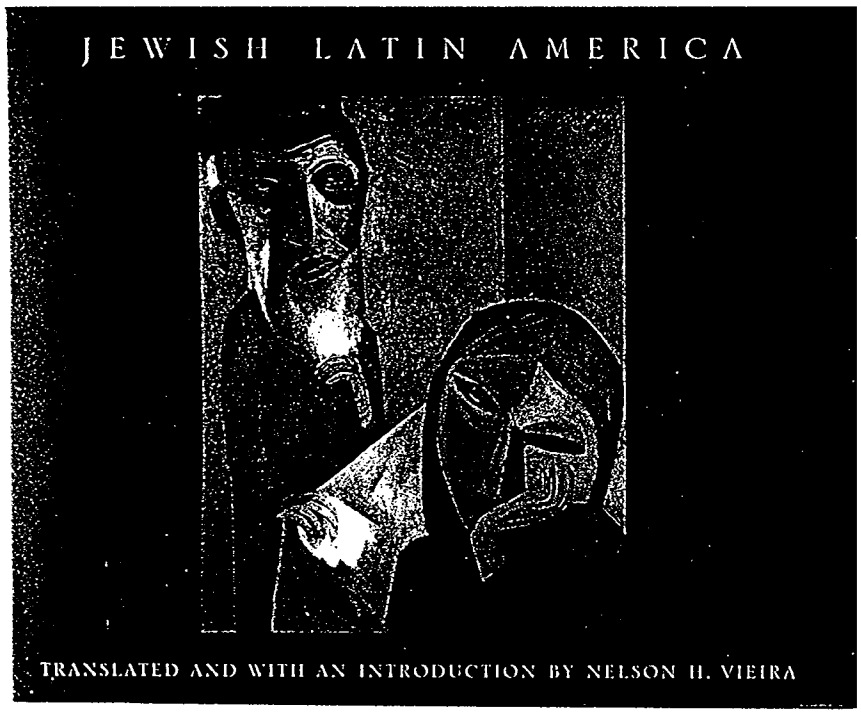
"That will teach you to spy into other people's window, that'll teach you!"

Ida standing still before the candles, her eyes on the flames, didn't try to straighten out her thoughts. The crowd inside her room, suddenly like that, appeared vague to her, and she wouldn't know how to explain it. Friday. The first Friday in the tenement. From within came a feeling of rupture, of something that had been lost with the shouted prayer. The four whitewashed walls seemed strange to her and as she tried to bring her prayer to a close, the murmured words came to her mechanically. A tightening in her throat made her let out with a sob everything that was eating her up inside. She felt hollow. Her thin fingers intertwined and with her two fists fused together she rubbed her forehead. Hollow. She blew the candles out one at a time, serene, calm. Seated in front of the candlesticks, Ida's eyes stared at the extinguished wicks, and tracing the line of the drops of wax, globules heaped into strange miniatures, her head toppled silently on to the white tablecloth.

SAMUEL RAWET

THE PROPHET

and other stories



University of New Mexico Press 1998
Albuquerque

CHRISTMAS WITHOUT CHRIST

Tear a man away from his peace, his silence, his routine of cutting a slice of meat or taking a sip of ordinary wine on an extraordinary day, raise his criminal face stigmatized by who knows what habits, leave his body exposed inside-out in visceral nudity, a new buffoon fondled by the scourge of bruising caresses, chase the simian tail in his coccyx, chop off his ankles and in a burst of laughter split his capric skull, block his scintillating and ubiquitous eyes, root out his generating mass of ideas, conflicts, and sometimes feelings, amputate his sex and offer half to each one of the two mouths that stare at him with obscene grins, and from the ashes of his bones consumed by an unjust holocaust no vestiges are allowed, neither in the air, nor on the land, nor in the water, nor in the fire which precipitated them, nor in the remembrance of the one whose bones made these ashes. But then where to disperse them, where, if beyond the infinite there is another much bigger infinite? Thoughts? A speech made enthusiastically by

the half drunk who suddenly recuperates his clear-headedness? He wouldn't know how to articulate it. Only the surge of feelings as a reaction to what he had heard, and the figure of Nani in front of him, at the head of the table opposite him, the glass of wine held by tremulous and wrinkled hands, the head of an old woman connected to black shoulders of silk, her wrinkles stirred by a ravenous decrepitude, her rumpled complexion in the half-shadows of candles and the dim lights of the wall fixtures, her greedy fixation upon the amount of wine allowed. It is Nani who becomes the object of Nehemiah's, Nehemiah Goldenberg's gaze, while the others go on chatting as if nothing there had changed, and it is in Nani that he tries to catch a glimmer of support, some approval, if there is approval, a response, if one is forthcoming. It is Nani, remote, doting, alien to any logic whatsoever, fixated on the wine, seeking unconsciously to revive emotions, to warm nerves of buried dreams, but yet still dominating the table completely, it is in Nani that he wants to catch her total hatred, without subterfuges, within the truthfulness of her dementia. From what is now being said and from what will soon be said, he will not retain one word. His intention is the opposite. To retrace everything. To restore the sentences he heard the instant they were pronounced, and to reweigh them within their static context, without the usual connectives, without the purpose of communication. It is in Nani that he seeks to stop time, to stop it until it becomes immobile, so that, once inertia is surmounted, he will be able to invert the flow of time. Never to go against the current, but to contain its impetus, to subdue it, and to turn its course upstream. They were talking about Jews during that Christmas supper when Nehemiah, at first feeling constrained, was overcome by his sudden awareness of being the intruder invited there by his friend, and even more brusquely came the other conclusion: there was the whole universe, the others and he, experiencing the same clichés, and the same unsolvable contradiction. Only Nani had asked for more wine. Nani, Ana Castanheira de Miranda Campos, with her seventy-five years of physical energy ruling over her ten subjects at that far end of the dining room of a modern residence, with its grey and blue walls, its motley easy chairs, its anatomical benches, its amoeba-like vases, its immense picture window with its low sill overlooking the Bay of Urca, the mountainous crests and the reflection in the calm waters of the bay, and the contrast between the meter-and-a-half pine tree, already divested of the holiday gifts, and a baroque Christ halfway up the wide mural on the wall facing Nehemiah, in back of Nani. They were talking about Jews during that Christmas supper, near the multicolored pine tree and facing the Christ eternalized in the spasm of his last terrestrial pain. And there they were to Nehemiah's left: Albino Fontoura, Nani's son-in-law, importer and representative of various state industries; Lenita, a brunette sportswoman of seventeen, green inconsequential eyes, daughter of Albino; another son, already married, Luís (a successful politician on his very first election, a vest adjusting a roly-poly body, temples and forehead radiating an eternal calmness), and his wife, Vera, daughter of a career senator, a thin, angular, and melancholy face, straw hair, a slender neck boxed in the two burrows of her small décolletage; Sílvio, brother of Lenita and Luís, Nehemiah's friend, and fellow teacher in the same junior high school, a neutral face, brown hair always in place, timid, self-absorbed. To the right: Mrs. Miranda Campos Fontoura, Nani's daughter, fifty-five years of calmness in the apathy of a not-too-aged face, of successful childbirths, of serene emotions, with an indefinite glow of one who always wanted to operate on the outside but who never thought of taking a step toward the door; Eneas, her son, and Albino, her oldest, the thirty-five spry and victorious years of a prosperous lawyer with a lucrative practice of abundant lawsuits, and his wife, Malu, Marta Cavalcante Fontoura, a placid, domestic expression as she reclines her head, a woman who only asks for a pillow or a kiss in order to fall into an indifferent sleep; Labieno de Miranda Campos, another of Nani's sons, suspiciously forty, a delib-

erate and serious voice, but somewhat satiny, teeming with emphatic modulations, a critic of the plastic arts and the secretary of a professional magazine, almost bald, manifesting obesity in his rounded chin and gestures, one who spends the day walking on thick rugs; Vânia Fontoura, sister of Albino, forty years old, dirty blond hair, skin from the indolence of sunbathing at the beach, legally separated, pretty, uninhibited. Facing him, Nani, with her wine glass between her fingers and her lips drawn back in the anticipation of pleasure. And he, Nehemiah Goldenberg, thirty complex and troubled years, history teacher, nonconformist, restless, bearing in his actions the despair of obscure causes and the serenity of those already lost; neither light nor dark hair, two eyes, a forehead, a nose (an illusion, the straight and classic line from the bridge of his eyebrows down to his lip?), a mouth, a face, two hands, two legs, a torso, and a chest, and a member in his groin. By dint of constant abstractions, Nehemiah had already immobilized all of them even though nothing at the table reflected the process of capturing their previous state. Amidst hands that spread, that criss-cross knives and forks, that lift greenish glasses, or that dab the napkin on their lips—here is the static group of his design. His own organism keenly feels a bit of the effort squandered, inasmuch as he had not deprived himself of drink, but his determination infuses him with vital juices and internal stimulants, enlivening his arteries and muscles, leveling two tensions. His left hand holds the fork, his right hand stopped the cutting of the knife and let the blade stay carved in the slice of pork roast. And acknowledging his impulse, he is ready to go ahead with the inversion of the facts, with the capture of lost fluxes, with the reconquest of one instant, that alone will make it possible for him to weigh cumulative arguments.

"Jews are very charming, very charming. And an extraordinary political sense. Marx and Rothschild, Disraeli, and Bernard Baruch . . . An extraordinary political sense. They have the world in their hands." In the mouth that now chews, in the juxtaposed lips, oscillating in

the periodic contact with molars, Nehemiah reviews the primitive expression and rethinks Luis's eloquent gesture. The ceremonious tone, the clearly articulated sentence, the vacuity of the traditional resources (is this how nations govern themselves?), the "high falutin" use of tongue-twisting names, that's the level of comprehension. The smooth caress with the taste of an ironic slap but which, at the moment for decisions or for positions in jeopardy, will come crashing down like a harsh blow.

"Great financiers, entrepreneurs!" In what lucrative ventures were they useful to you, or in what swindles did you manage to outwit them? If by chance, Albino, if by chance you one day suffer a setback in that game which is the same for you as it is for them, and if by chance one of them benefits from your loss, somebody always benefits, will you say the same thing? Or will you look deep down, or not even so far, for the crudest expression, the clear-cut, decisive invective with the implication of a final verdict without appeal.

"And what shrewdness? Admirable!" To what shrewdness are you referring, Eneas, to the one most familiar to you, to the one you practice on a daily basis, by offering an eternal subversion of facts, ideas, concepts, proofs, to the one you manage, under the impact of well-planned rhetoric, to obfuscate the truth of some mistake, without the need for any metaphysical speculation as to whether or not to own up to this truth, to the one which by artful means eliminates the evidence, to the one that brings tears to your eyes in proportionate abundance according to your revenue or to your reputation, to the shrewdness that creates doubt, and from this doubt you extract the yes or the no, according to your interests, to the shrewdness that draws adequate subtleties from these bulky treatises that decorate your shelves, to the one which, in the name of some ethic or logic, represents the negation of these; is it to that shrewdness, Eneas, you are referring?

"But weren't the Jews the ones who killed Christ, Papa?"

Lenita was not able to repress the question which for her externalizes the unpleasantness of that presence; she manifests her reaction of antipathy that is caused by who knows what. Something in his eyes, in his mouth, in the movements of his hands, in the awkwardness of his helping himself to the food, in the lack of assurance with which he lifts the platter or fills his glass. She had already seen him several times in discussion with Sílvio, and she was turned off by her brother's subservience, always agreeing, incapable of offering opposing arguments that wouldn't be demolished by four or five harsh, cutting remarks; so in her head she mulls over thoughts in search of one that appears to her to be decisive. And what surfaced was the summary of millennia, the gross but effective crystallization of so many doctrinaire philosophies. The embarrassment causes a brief hiatus in the conversation. Everyone bent forward awaiting some aside, some gesture that would serve as pretext to make the response magically disappear. And the yes or the no answer could be said by anyone of them, even by him, Nehemiah. Would it be worth it? Atavistic reminiscences of frightful feelings befall him as he contemplates the Holy Week procession of the old country. The day condensed into hatred, the idea made into word, yes, and action. Perverse alchemy, intending to redeem the body while showing the claws that *all of us* have already clenched at one time. And in that phrase all theological arguments end, there the consequence of piles of ethical propositions is summed up, there the greatest soritical logic comes to a close: blood.

"And what works of genius did his death not inspire. Michelangelo, Rouault . . . "

Ironic or evasive? The smooth tone of the sentence fills the atmosphere heavily with tinges of hidden sordidness. Labieno stares at Nehemiah as if expecting some gesture of gratitude for the finesse used to get around the sudden silence. Laughter and the clinking of silverware attest to their relief at the somewhat improper but spiritu-

ous "out." Nehemiah looks straight at Labieno and confronts him with his undisclosed intention. The crease in his lips maintains the half-concealed smile, full of implied meanings that did not escape the other man's thoughts. Hence the greater repulsion. Names thrown out like that, under what pretext? He didn't want to go around generalizing, but for some time he was already bothered by those names, or similar ones, stated with nervous ecstasy. More than representing enthusiasm he saw the shell of erudition covering the same identical end: sordid and brutish. Crazy mannerisms in the face of a phenomenon that didn't go below the epidermis; feverish agitation without the true feeling of solemn emotions, without the stroke of drama felt in the most audacious attempt; merely an external vibration to mask a marginal, sterile, cynical, hardly ambiguous, plan. Useless to debate his theory when the other's face becomes blank and Labieno's hand presses the napkin to his mouth.

"Mister Nehemiah, you don't even seem Jewish. You enjoyed the roast pork so much." Malu smiled at him with the indulgence of one who comes to the aid of the needy, while Eneas approves of his wife's good sense in what he would call a *tactful move,* inspiring the stranger's admiration. But the smile disappears when in Nehemiah's expression there is no perceived reception for the praise. A bit more polished, and he would have made some gesture of gratitude. But the assumption about the ethos of those people coming-from-who-knows-where takes away the pleasure of being so courteous. Anything else would not be expected.

"Oh, . . . Oh, Mister Nehemiah, you've become broad-minded, isn't that so? The essential thing is being true to one's spirit, faith . . . tradition."

On another occasion he would have answered her with different gestures and, with different feelings, he would see her beautiful profile, her sunburnt skin, her tender eyes, the vertical line of her neck, and

the natural curve of her shoulders. Her hair radiating natural highlights, her mouth a little wide, slightly aggressive, but sincere in the modulation of hidden conformities. And in an undertone, he could whisper to her an affectionate "nonsense." Urges and words still lingered inside him. However, why bother now? Vânia emerged amidst the ordinariness of clichés, automatic affection in a dimly lit bar, her three daily thoughts mulled over and over prior to floundering in some corner. He felt her momentary interest. There was something exotic about him, a variant amidst the monotony of identical types. He noticed her graceful way of placing her hair at the back of her neck and her hand resting gently near his. He controlled himself.

"A little more wine, my daughter!"

Nani was asking for wine. It is Nani who becomes the object of Nehemiah's gaze while the others continue to chat as if nothing there had changed, it is in Nani that he tries to incite a spark of support, some approval, if there is approval, a response, if one is forthcoming. It is Nani, remote, doting, alien to any logic whatsoever, fixated on the wine, seeking unconsciously to revive emotions, to warm nerves of buried dreams, but yet still dominating the table completely, it is in Nani that he wants to unleash total hatred, without subterfuges, within the truthfulness of her dementia. In her he sees the historical continuity that doesn't acknowledge any form of adaptation, that consciousness already formulated, inflexible, not making room for readjustments or doubts, insensitive to the most concrete sign of her failure because she possesses the absolute truth. There exist in her fingers reminiscences of medieval intolerance and the determination of the most rigid of contemporary politics, there exists in her thumb the impulse of tetrarchs facing the vanquished lying in the arena. Nehemiah knows that words will mean nothing when the thumb is turned upside down. And Nani sips her wine.

On the wall the crucifix. The half-opened eyes, a serene shadow under the eyelids, the lips almost closed. The arms and the legs

stretched and nailed to the cross. The shriveled belly, furrows along the line of the hips, and the hard muscularity of the thighs. Nehemiah looks at the long hair covering the forehead, the curly beard split into scrolls in the middle of the chin.

Would the answer come from you? Human or divine, you die repeatedly for our lives, and we always die your death. Your greatest apostle had an inkling of the eternal symbiosis, when, wanting to justify and save us, perhaps, planted the seed of our degradation in our simple presence as witnesses and pawns at the moment of global forgiveness. You and I live perpetual death and resurrection throughout the centuries. When your most dedicated servants, and even more dedicated are they to other inspirations, strive to do the best in their zeal: we die. When others more gentle, whose tenderness does not shun the hyena or the criminal, receive us with benevolence: we live as marginals, hated and feared, even though in our hand no other weapon is left except the last coin of some booty stamped and approved by somebody who gave it in your name. Prophet, they extracted from you the quintessence of your world vision, and with it forged the greatest era of exuberant thought: the Middle Ages. But of your life, they kept the moment in which you now exist: agony. Based upon your agony they staked out the universe and wove banners in its name, and when the ire of so many crowns begged for a palliative, there we were. And why are we to blame, if when they seek you out in your most simple form, in your earliest belief, they always find us? If Jeremiah's lament anteceded the Sermon on the Mount, if Amos's indictment preceded the response to the rights of Caesar? And afterwards came the new belief, and even those who no longer remember that agony, upon seeing us, remember that many times that's why we die: and so they kill us. And from this age-old confusion, procreated over a thousand years, when will we be released, you and I?

Sílvio serves him a little more wine. Nehemiah thanks him, turning his attention to his plate. He drives the knife in, cuts the slice and bites into it, followed by a swig of wine. Facing him, Nani gulps the glass down and stretches out her authoritarian arm.

"A little more wine! Today is Christmas!"

VOICES WITHIN THE ARK

The Modern Jewish Poets

EDITED BY
HOWARD SCHWARTZ & ANTHONY RUDOLF

IV Other Languages



1980

SPANISH

Juan Gelman

Juan Gelman was born in Buenos Aires in 1930 and is a leading member of the "new wave" Argentine poets.

Customs

We make a home so as not to stay at home
we love so as not to stay in love
and we do not die in order to die
we are thirsty and
have the patience of animals.

The Knife

My hand on your breasts the kitchen
resting at that hour the coffee
that boiled the talking in low tones
not to disturb the sweetness of our bodies
that were trembling and glowing
with a kind of light like the knife that you used
while it was in your hand.

The Stranger

My father would walk about for hours with a lit cigarette
in the darkness of the dining room and the patio plants
his wife would say to him "stop this walking around, José"
but he didn't want to eat or sleep or stop
his feet ran out on him one afternoon
he turned over and closed his eyes like a little bird.

Translated by Yishai Tobin

Isaac Goldemberg

Isaac Goldemberg was born in Peru in 1945. After a year in Israel, he came, in 1963, to New York, where he teaches Spanish and Latin American literature at New York University. Goldemberg has published a book of poems and a novel. His poetry has been published in the United States, Spain, and Latin America.

Bar Mitzvah

My father comes to see me on Friday night.
He scrubs my ears,
brushes my smelly suit,
and drops two vitamins down my mouth.
On Saturday he shows up with sleepless eyes,
makes breakfast
and polishes my shoes.
He takes my best shirt out of the closet
and gently dresses me like a divorced mother.
He takes my hand,
and we quickly pass by a church door.
Hunched over, almost touching the ground, we walk back and
forth down endless streets,
chasing off flies as they land on our faces.
Three old men, a tray of sardines and tomatoes, wine,
a loaf of white bread wait for us at the Brena Synagogue.
The rabbi makes me climb up to the *bimah*
the old men smile at me,
praying through their beards.
The rabbi nods for me to start the prayers,
instead I kneel down,
ashamed, my father blushes,
an old man points to a few words in the Bible,
I begin to stammer,
I look at my father out of the corners of my eyes,
my old, gray father celebrating this rite curled up like a fetus.

The Jews in Hell

As the story goes,
the Jews bought for themselves
a private spot in hell.

In the first circle,
Karl Marx sits on a wooden bench
using his hand as a fan.
The prophet Jeremiah
fights off the heat by singing psalms.

In the second circle,
Solomon carefully studies
the stones from His Temple.
On some yellowing rolls of paper,
Moses draws hieroglyphics.

Christ dreams of Pontius Pilate
in the third circle.
Freud's clinical eye
follows every move he makes.

In the fourth circle,
Spinoza edits
a history of the Marranos.

In the fifth circle,
Jacob wrestles with a devil.
Cain and Abel
treat each other like brothers.

In the sixth circle,
Noah rides drunk on a zebra.
Einstein searches for atoms
in the space between rocks.

In the final circle,
Kafka tilts his telescope
and bursts out laughing.

Translated by David Unger

José Isaacson

José Isaacson is an Argentine poet whose works have received numerous awards. In addition to his six volumes of poetry, he has published critical anthologies and essays.

Pre-positions

I stand in front of the tree,
before the tree.

Those green pulses
come to me from the tree
measure me.

A beat among beats
I establish a relationship
The wavering of my pencil
is its measure.

All of its space
reduced to between.

Every measure
and every excess
hurt me.

Naked,
like a wave
that insists on flying,
it is useless
to invent a shell,
stiff shields,
plans that cannot be distorted.

History
consumes all
and it is useless to imagine
a time without time,
eternal
like a dead heart.

Only the beat
and the between
have left us.

The wavering of my pencil
designs
the limits and defeats.

I know
that I cannot leave you.
You are my witness
and my testimony
and I dedicate these words to you
because one March afternoon
you gave me
a between
a beat.

Translated by Yishai Tobin

Noe´ Jitrik

Noé Jitrik was born in Buenos Aires in 1928. He has published two volumes of poems and numerous essays. Since 1960 he has been a professor of Argentine literature in Cordoba.

Addio a la Mamma

The nights here are usually clear and the shadows
are like the noise, that is, that burns
the tremulous subjectivity and raises an ambiguous fear,
the confused fear that harasses childhood.

I will be asked from where I come, what I am pursuing:
I should have said it a long time ago,
when things could still be said,
without great sufferings but with desire instead,
when I could speak.

My ingratitude was reproached and I stood up,
and I ran through an intense street with closed eyes,
I walked about the night places,

I spoke with residents of the night,
and everywhere they insinuated sadness to me,
and among everyone someone would always suggest love to me.

No one can know it, no one can find this direction
if the separation was not sunk between his shoulders,
if he didn't share, even lightly, this calamity.

What misfortune the ones called without an answer,
to walk through padded places for hate and feeling,
and, broken, with doubt inserted in the heart
and crumbs of past glories in the pockets;
What misfortune to see the women, eating other meals,
breathing as if without air other atmospheres,
and no longer being the usual child,
no longer being the submissive lamb,
the soft child that death would respect.

How can these things be told, who would believe them?
One howls explanations and always begins again,
goes out of the way with a phrase, with the ability,
handles an intelligent drink
but sooner or later they will put their finger on his shoulder
and say, discovered! with a thick voice,
to which very little can be added.

It is clear that one can travel
and beautify the memories for new publics,
spending sleepless nights awaiting the miracles of tomorrow,
or one can grow old, but grow old, what a story!
it never occurs to you that this could happen.

Definitively one accepts, pale from terror,
that it is the same to die anywhere
and by any death.
All of us recognize this save for the police,
everyone receives caresses everywhere even if it isn't the same,
we all look for freedom, and are about to know what it consists of,
but we pursue each other and then look for consolation,
silence, audience, a promise
in the women that call from life
assuredly because they give it.

One way or another, someone announces death,
someone is in charge of telling mother that she'll never see us again.

Translated by Yishai Tobin

Ruben Kanalenstein

Ruben Kanalenstein was born in Uruguay and emigrated to Israel in 1965. He is the author of one book of prose, Abraham in Ur, *and one book of poetry. He currently edits a Spanish-language newspaper in Jerusalem.*

Jerusalem

Two Jerusalems rise up
before my eyes
one
of the poor
without God
and the souls
of abandoned youth
and corrupt politicians
sold to any god
    (it's all the same)
and the other
the streets where
talisman vendors
do not walk
stairways to the greatest heights
and underground
    (they're the same).

Kafka is a dentist
on Ben Yehuda de Kuds street
and Marcuse
a plumber
the neighbor of a crazy old woman
who never tires of asking
like any Jewish child
when Shabbat is.

My hand remembers them all,
I write with my hand,

with this same hand that touches the rock.
with this same hand that caresses the circle.
With this same hand
I shake the hand
of the Yemenite
of Ein Karem
of the mysterious Armenian
of the Old City
where the Wall is,
where the Tomb is,
where the Amulet is,
where the Market is.

And the wind is spirit
—the windmill of Al Kuds—
the wind is the Other
the one who keeps silent
the one who respects my solitude
and yours.
The wind is the Other
—the one who no longer forgets,
the one who no longer compares,
the one who covers the mirrors,
the one who knows a fear
and that *Ein Sof**
and Atman
are written in the same language.
Jerusalem is also mountains
and houses
and peoples
and stairways
and dangerous vegetation
and the rock full of myths
and the history
and the shrewdness
and the filth
that is the depth of all history
and words in Judezmo and Arabic
and sighs in Hebrew

**Ein Sof* ("Infinite") is the Kabbalistic term for the unknowable aspect of the Divinity.

and fatherless silences
without direction
with balls, nevertheless
the same irresolution.

Jerusalem is also students
passing from geometry
to the Talmud
and from the Talmud
to war.

I laugh at everything
and, nevertheless,
those forgotten words
in an immense room
referring to the Temple
(to the One and Only)
and one hundred years of liberation
have not been able to prepare
the base
the landscape
the scene
for a new temple
in the debris of That One.
"We have arrived too late
for the gods
and too early for the being"
but religion is not
what one makes with his solitude
but what one makes
with his people
and all the rest is commentary . . .

The Temple
(where the Menorah
and the Candelabra
will no longer be a metaphor
nor the sea
a parable)
my hand will seek out
yours there,
the other will wink at us
we will be one.

Peace will not be
an agreement
but the harmonious
memory
of the presence,
the prophets
without remorse
will be farmers
and we will fall again
in the beginning.
For this is what we look for
in Jerusalem,
the beginning,
the reason of the beginning
and the beginning of reason,
the inauguration of hope.

Translated by Yishai Tobin

José Kozer

José Kozer was born in Cuba in 1945 and presently resides in New York City where he teaches at Queens College. He has had two books of poems published, the most recent entitled This Jew of Numbers and Letters. *His poems and short stories have appeared in literary magazines in Spain, Latin America, the United States, and Canada.*

Cleaning Day

All the awnings at home had to be pulled down,
all the windows in the neighborhood had to be shut,
before it felt safe on Thursday
to throw the front door wide open.
and then the disinfectants, the mothballs, Abraham's footsteps
wiped out my grandfather's guilt-ridden body,
they all announced mother's slippers shuffling through the rooms,
polishing the seven arms of the candelabra,
sorting out the silverware for the dairy and meat,
pressing down the potato pancakes of the Exodus, of abundance,
while the street outside was an uproar of dark women full of fire,
the street burst into the wild triple beat of a Cuban bongo,
and three pretty girls danced, stirred the quivering ass of a song
while my mother doggedly straightened the mirrors.

The Store in Havana

The store in Havana has turned to dust,
dust covers the imported Irish linen,
and my father, dust-coated Jew,
comes home each day with a rye loaf under his arm.
He comes home day after day, always looking the same,
his eyes crossed from measuring bolts of fabric,
he's not a sea captain rolling his eyes,
he comes back home, a rugged but carefree volcano.
Father arrives and we lunch with our eyes on the ceiling,
I've never seen water seep in, I don't see any fish or potted plants,
my mother polishes the carved edges of the furniture again,
she changes the sheets from last Thursday,
we haven't seen a flower in any of our bedrooms.
All the stores in Havana have been shut,
the workers, all fired up, have started marching;
again, the old dust-coated Jew, my father,
carries the Ark of the Covenant on his way out of Cuba.

Translated by David Unger

My Father, Who's Still Alive

My father, who's still alive
—I haven't seen him but I know he's shrunk—
has a family of brothers dead in the ovens in Poland.
He never saw them, learned of his mother's death
by wire, inherited nothing from his father,
not even a button. Who knows if he inherited
his father's ways.
My father, who was a tailor and a communist,
my father, who wouldn't talk, sat by the terrace
to no longer believe in God,
to have nothing to do again with men.
He resented Hitler, resented Stalin.
my father, who once a year had a shot of whiskey,
my father, sitting under the neighbor's apple tree
eating the neighbor's fruit
the day the Reds entered the village
and made my grandfather dance like a bear on the Sabbath
light up a cigarette and smoke it on the Sabbath.

And my father left the village for good.
He left swearing forever against the October Revolution
insisting forever that Trotsky was a dreamer
and Beria a criminal,
shunning books forever, he sat a small man on the terrace
and told me that the dreams of man are
but a phony literature,
that history books can lie because paper
can hold anything, my father
who was a tailor and a communist.

Translated by Jorge Guitart

Alejandra Pizarnik

Alejandra Pizarnik was born in Buenos Aires in 1939 and died by her own hand in 1972. In 1954 she returned to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in Buenos Aires to pursue a career in philosophy, which she later forsook to study painting. She published eight books of poems and numerous critical works, stories, and plays which have been published in America and Europe.

The Mask and the Poem

The splendid paper palace
of childhood pilgrimage.
At sunset the tightrope walker
will be placed in a cage
she will be taken to a temple in ruins
she will be left
alone.

Dawn

Naked
I have lain in beastly days.
The wind and the rain erased me
like a fire, like a poem
written on a wall.

Who Will Stop His Hand from Giving Warmth

for Aurora and Julio Cortazar

Who will stop his hand from giving warmth to the small lost
child? Cold will pay. Wind will pay. Rain and thunder will pay.

She had opened her eyes she alone
for a moment of brief life
for a moment of seeing
in her brain small flowers
dancing like words in the mouth of a mute.

She undresses in the paradise
of her memory
unknowing of destiny's fury.
She is afraid of not being able to name
what does not exist.

With her dress on fire
she leaps from star to star
from shadow to shadow.
She dies of a distant death
she who loves the wind.

Translated by Alina Rivero

The Tree of Diana

1
I've jumped from myself to dawn.
I've left my body near the light
and I've sung the sadness of what is born.

2
only thirst
the silence
no meeting

watch out for me my love
watch out for the silent one in the desert
the traveler with the empty glass
the shadow of your shadow

3
for a minute of brief life
the only one of open eyes
for a minute to see
little flowers in the brain
dancing like words in the mouth of a mute

4
she undresses in the paradise
of her memory
unaware of the vicious destiny
of her visions
afraid of not knowing how to name
that which doesn't exist.

5
jumps with a flaming shirt
from star to star,
from shadow to shadow
dies from a distant death
she who loves the wind.

6
These bones shining in the night,
these words like precious stones
in the living throat of a petrified bird,
this beloved green,
this warm lilac,
this heart only mysterious.

7
no more the sweet metamorphosis of a child of silk
sleepwalking now in the cornice of fog
her awakening from a breathing hand
of a flower that opens to the wind

8
to explain with words of this world
a ship carrying me came out of me

9
you have built your house
you have feathered your birds

you have hit the wind
with your own bones

you have finished alone
what no one has started

10
like a poem buried
of the silence of things
you speak so as not to see me

11
when I see the eyes
that I have in mine tattooed

12
I have been born so much
and suffered twice over
in the memory of here and there

13
in the fabulous winter
the dirge of the wings in the rain
in memory of the water fingers of fog

14
Zones of plagues where the sleeping one eats slowly
her heart of midnight.

15
sometimes
sometimes perhaps
I will leave without staying
I will leave like someone who goes away

16
in the cage of time
the sleeping one sees her eyes alone

the wind brings her
the soft response of the leaves

17
further away from any forbidden zone
there is a mirror for our transparent sadness

Privilege

I
The name they gave me is lost
its face wanders all over me
like the sound of water in the night,
of water falling on water.
And its smile is the last survivor,
not my memory.

II
The most beautiful one
in the night of those who leave,
oh, desired one,
your not returning is endless,
you a shadow until the day of days.

Apart from Oneself

Autumn is the blue of the wall: being sheltered by little deaths.
Each night, in the duration of a scream, a new shadow comes.
Alone
the mysterious autumn dances. I share its fear of
a very young animal on the
first night of the hunt.
The woman traveler not yet born, how does she cross
the river of death?
I tear myself down from my double meaning.

Vertigos or Contemplation of Something That Is Over

This lilac loses its leaves
Falls from itself
hides its ancient shadow
I'd die from these things.

Translated by Yishai Tobin

Jorge Plescoff

Jorge Plescoff was born in Santiago, Chile in 1940 and has been living in Jerusalem since 1969. He edits several literary magazines and has published five volumes of poetry. A selection of his poems has been translated into Hebrew.

The Ladder Has No Steps

My knee against the ground
the left one
in order to recite dead prayers
our age
over a bed of rock
a veil
the tenuous veil of anxious reason.

The ladder has no steps
nor dreams
Jacob only wanted to play.
In front of my house a smiling slide
and the children
their knees on the ground.

Whoever prays creates mist
without incense
without churches there are no prologues
nor zeros
a process is misplaced in the equation
the sun repeating
its tender warmth

Tongues of Fire

Tongues of fire, I say.
I say white moon, waiting.
I call out wheat,
a rocky projection of wit,
a foreign reef of the cry.
I look at the sky weeping
in the damp eyes of the stream.

The painted desert, I live
painting whole shadow, I live,
frames from dyed carob wood,
a background of indigo, almost blind.

I say moon, I see white,
a foam of sea of sky
over fire, consumed.

Violins in Repose

Life
anthology of bewilderments
something definitive?
almost dramatic
in death
lightly imposed
reversible perhaps.

I renounce her, the earth
like a finale
I don't want her near
neither mine
nor me
she compressed.

Don't sell me water
by the weight of its color
nor the harmonic contortions
of wings
I prefer violins in repose
to some undefined yearning.

Ourobouros

How many skies does the earth hold?
One.
The spheres hide their feelings.
Men are a wonder
like a pit in a funeral.

Does the arrow fly straight?
It depends on the thought.
In an empty space
wheels put silence into gear.

Is emptiness a body?
The measure of time.
Two centimeters a point
and the secret is enclosed there.

Of the spheres?
No, of knowledge.

What is the value of knowing
if it is the anathema of heaven?
If we cut down all the trees
the serpent will fall to the ground.
Let Eve cut off his head!
Only then will the return
begin.

Translated by Yishai Tobin

David Rosenmann-Taub

David Rosenmann-Taub was born in Santiago, Chile in 1927. He studied harmony, piano, and composition at the School of Musical Art and Sciences; and style, aesthetics, and Spanish literature at the university of his native land. In 1948 he received the prize of the Chilean writers' guild; and in 1951, the prize in poetry conferred by the University of Concepción. In 1975 half of his unpublished work was stolen —more than five thousand manuscript pages; and the poet's mother, on being informed of what had happened, died. The poet then abandoned all activity alien to his creative work. In 1976 he published the first section The Spoils of the Sun *in Buenos Aires. In 1977 he toured Europe and returned to Argentina on the occasion of having his poem* The Sky in the Fountain *published, a poem composed over a period of twenty-five years. He is now residing in his Santiago, dedicating his time to the completion of a poem begun in 1947,* Country Beyond.

Sabbath

With her eyes closed
before the candlesticks flickering
with Saturday, my mother. The half-light
flatters her lines. The hour

between the lighted vigils fades away.
The dead shake loose: like carnival
crowds, merciless as candlesticks,
mirrors wander. Since Friday

agony has been greedy. In the glass
and muddled with noise, the sun,
a phylactery of farewell, believes it dreams.

The house is a sob. The horizon
cuts across the house: the face of dusk
wanders between the never and the never.

To a Young Girl

Nectar, puff of sails, lily,
sprout hidden under the dress,
indescribable cloud.

Decoy pigeon, golden day,
sprout hidden under the dress,
indescribable mist.

Sunflower, swan, sandhill,
sprout hidden under the dress,
indescribable grave.

Prelude

Afterwards, afterwards the wind between two mountains,
and brother scorpion rising on his legs,
and red tides swelling over the day.
Ravenous volcano, halo without dominion.
The vulture will die: easy punishment.
Afterwards, afterwards the hymn between two snakes.
Afterwards the night we do not know
and a lone body lying in gentleness
silent as light. Afterwards the wind.

Reconciliation

The house dawned:
they worked miracles—brooms, brushes,
buckets—
with cabinets and provisions
and mosaics and groins and loft:
soap water
attacked
floors, walls,
ceilings.

Among the white groves
I brandished the baptism, joined the blood.
What a synagogue
prevailed
in the rough!
Adornment
of new-fallen snow in the teasing
shirt, in the tight pants,
in the foreskin fury of the sheets,
in the sharply pressed solid-gold slacks,
in the demanding heretic limbos,
in the hostile
trap of the splendid
festival shoes.

And I left.

Ages passed.

I come back,
tumultuous, a thief, with the first fruits
of breathless silence.
I reveal myself,
a reef, naked,
completely on an equal footing,
newborn
on newborn: tepid cold.

Oh quiet tongue
of the friendly tableware,
of the waterlily bowls! (Do they still
leave stains?) Oh
library: lintels!
Oh bedroom! Who's
in the rectangular mirror of the vestibule,
in the oval mirror of the dining room,
in the infinite
mirror of the breast?

Elegy and Kaddish

You happen to get well
I'll greet you
and I'll not show it. Shovelings . . .
Loads of them . . .
of which sod, heaven is made.

I compensating you there.
I might try another madness, perhaps
the way of secrets:
draw yourself out
in a prayer of vinelike light.

Happy yoke, you swallow
praises
of footstools,
you'll drain away the years.
Alas,
you exist for me,
cervix,
or settle my disputes.
Foolish, foolish tale!

Stop me from saying it—for goodness' sake—
for your blood.



If you go around in the square: you went:
nefarious with careful untidiness,
joy of removing the honey,
for you aren't among the circles of the tombs:
because that easy, brotherly Saturday
delayed a Sunday to eternity.
And my poem will have no meaning.

Moral Ode

Will God, always cold, have a temperature?
Cosmictear:
you break me apart and crush me,
a cohabitation of salts,
without shedding your allelujah.
Will God, always cruel, tire on the way?
Cosmictear:
how you puncture bloods
and fingernails.

Translated by Charles Guenther

Mario Satz

Mario Satz was born in 1944 in Buenos Aires, where he lived until 1966. After several years in Europe, he settled in Jerusalem in 1970 where he completed the writing of Sol, *the first volume of* Planetarium. *He is continuing with* Luna, *his second novel.*

Fish

From the center of the room to the center
of the ceramic teapot with its leather grip,
in which tea is boiling in the spring equinox,
dried out, wrapping a lightbulb heir of the sun
and its positive flux,
the fragile screen and its layer of fishbones,
the moonfish, no hills or crates: what is up is down,
in Japan or Egypt, for Thoth or Basho, dragging
over the lonely sand like a poem, what is up is down.
A legend of white horns drops from the sky and dives
underwater
and inner light is born in a pearl, sponge or the star
of the marine bulb.
From the floor to ceiling, in the House of the Universe,
the moonfish, quiet, lighting the darkness of the tea.

Coconut

The soul of a coconut can't live
without the outer bitterness of its body;
and above, among the palm tree leaves, the earth
is still its bark.
And primordial water swims in its interior,
hidden, fresh and darkly gestated by the sun;
a water or milk or blood under the green bark,
which peeled is like the peeled earth: hard,
arid, impenetrable.
But the earth cannot live without water
nor can the coconut's snow abandon its mountain,
and its soul is only its body inside out.
So all death is nothing but rupture and separation;
so all life is nothing but unity, a seal
that lips can reveal sealing again; water
or milk or semen under a testicle, one is rhythm
and identical, one is height and one is vision;
for the heart looms toward the eye's center,
moving its wheel through the mouth of the iris.
And there the palm tree grows in its mirror, high
in the sky's center.

Lemon

And the lemon is tall. The sun is tall, and descends
with light, the lemon descends toward us, and
through it
we rise, going above in its fragrance, in
the violent
aspiration of air spreading our lips,
in the light
and grave pressure from which the earth emanates to
leave us spellbound,
to bewitch us.
A lemon is a proof of faith, of faith in the sun;
and that aroma shot out with a burst of wind,
a burst of seabreeze, a burst of muttering between hills,
is the lemon's voice talking to us.
We ought to dance under the lemon tree's icy
perfume;
like those huge yellow and black butterflies
coupling in the leaves, wiping dust from their wings
on blossoms.
We ought to dance with our heart turned outward like the
lemon's navel, with its pores open during the day,
closed at night; and we ought to see ourselves dancing!
So that truth be the fruit man eats,
the sun he drinks and shadow witnessing the great
presence of its body,
the broad tension of its hidden throat.

Reciprocity, tall wisdom of life!

And silence is not enough: let the word seize
and impel us to a star seeking its sun, the eternal
axis of its life.
A lemon is a proof of faith, of faith in the sun.

Translated by Willis Barnstone

Cesar Tiempo

Cesar Tiempo (pseudonym of Israel Zeitlin) was born in Russia in 1906, but was raised in Argentina. In addition to his poetry, he has written novels, plays, essays, articles, and literary criticism.

The Jewish Cemetery

Deaf to the bustle of the street, soporifically
happy and free from upsetting changes,
they repose facing the world with hooked noses
these terminated souls of the Jewish line.

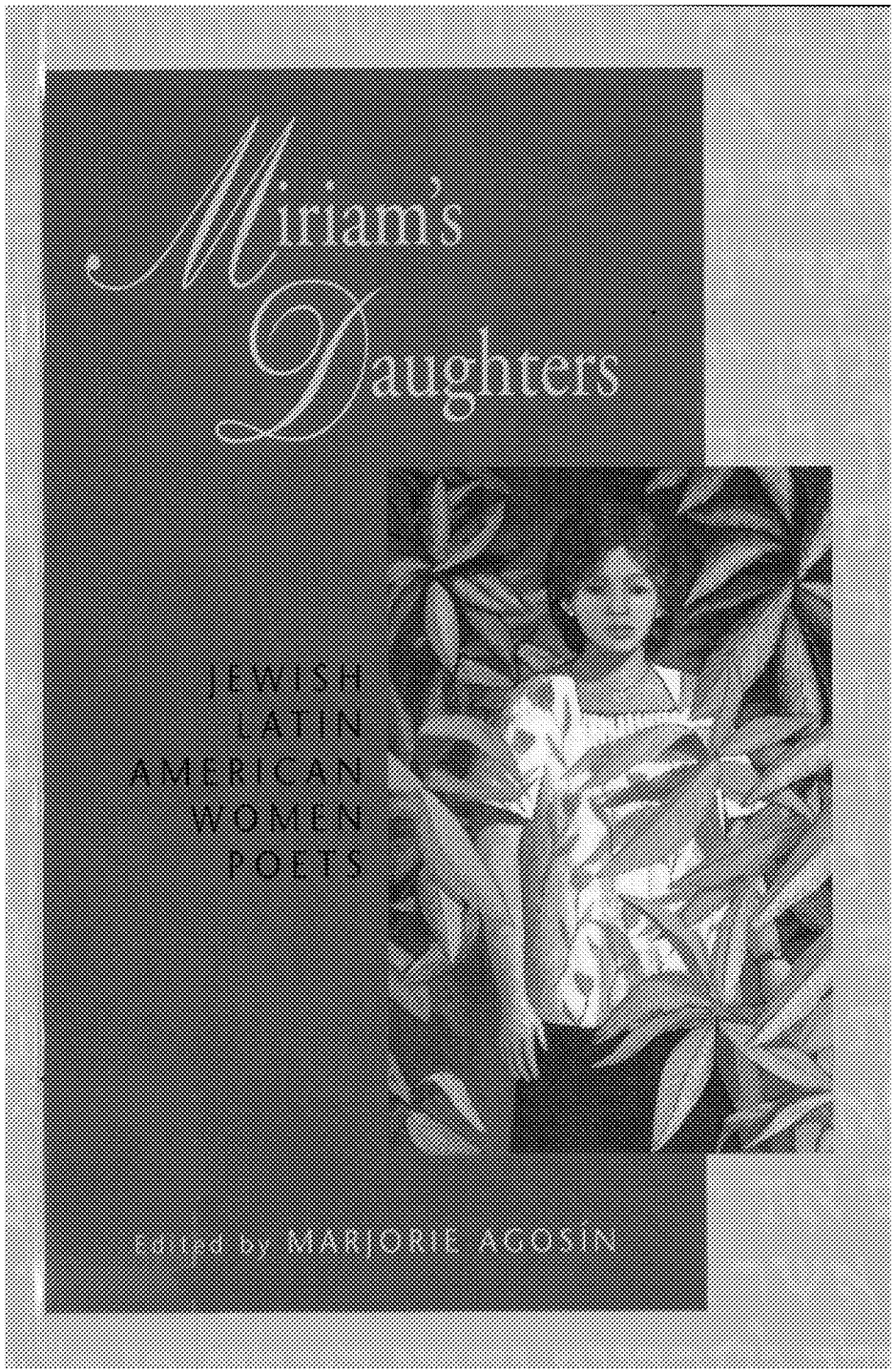
Their ships definitely sunk now, bridges burned
after the voyage through streets without turnings
they made these beds and this prostrate city
to spend their final sleep in perfect relaxation.

The moans of old women loud with pain
do not perturb this satisfied, supine world
where the burning beat of the moaning "moles"
is sung for a fixed price including breast beating.

The days dance lazily here,
renascent flowers add their grace
and the "schnorrer," now a landlord too,
is in the ground next to aristocracy.

While the night displays its medals
above the heavy calm of this dwarf city,
the semite congregation sleeps free of vain ambition
confident that life will not begin tomorrow. . . .

Translated by Angela McEvan-Alvarado



Miriam's Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets

Bilingual Edition

edited by
Marjorie Agosín

Roberta Gordenstein
Translation Editor

HERMAN SHER Publishing

MANUSCRITO

suelen llevarlo entre oro fino molido
azul de altas torres y grana embebida
en impecable bolsa de cuero repujado
a galope de algún impaciente alazán

tocan la aldaba de manera conocida
el ritmo de los nudillos es la clave
un ligero silbido los anuncia

Solitarios
son los solitarios portadores
de la palabra nunca antes pronunciada

la que ha sido grabada en apretadas páginas
la que aún se apega a la letra
de derecha a izquierda

manuscrito de tensa escritura alada
entre los dedos fragmentadas las frases

límpida imagen de arroyo que corre
múltiple espejo de fuente serena

el manuscrito viaja de mano en mano:
por unos leído, por otros escuchado
por todos en la memoria preciada

de tenue polvo de estrella es la distancia
de imantadas sendas del alba es el camino

dicen que no hay recodo que no lo nombre
ni de un extremo a otro verso que lo olvide:
estepa, sabana, desierto, laguna:
entre alcázares y cúpulas de cebolla
el manuscrito no corre sino vuela:

ellos, los solitarios
se encargan de que llegue
aún antes de la oración primera,
aún antes del rezo del alba.

MANUSCRIPT

they're used to carrying it in fine milled gold
blue like tall towers and engrossed garnet
in a beautiful pouch of engraved leather
on an impatient sorrel galloping fast

they sound the knocker in the accustomed manner
the rhythm of knuckles being the well known clue
a slight whistle announces their presence

lonesome
the solitary bearers
of the word never before pronounced

the word that was engraved in tight pages
the one that still goes by the letter
written from right to left

manuscript of tense winged writing
the sentences fragmented in between fingers

clean image of a running brook
multiple mirror of serene fountain

the manuscript goes from hand to hand:
read by some, listened to by others
and by all revered in memory

the distance is measured in slight stardust
the road goes through magnetic morning paths

they say no turning fails to name it
and no verse could forget it, from end to end:
steppe, savannah, desert, lagoon:
among palaces and onion domes
the manuscript does not run, it flies:

they, the solitary ones
make sure it gets there
even before the first prayer
even before the morning psalm.

Translated by Aurora Camacho

OBSESIÓN

Sin obsesiones
no se puede vivir,
no se puede viajar,
no se puede tomar el té,
no se puede salir al destierro.

Es la Gran Carga.
Es la Gran Riqueza.

Es la mente vuelta del revés y del derecho.

Es lo que mantiene
en pie al hombre.

En el exilio hay que ser obsesivo.

Para sobrevivir hay que ser obsesivo.

Para sobrevivir en un campo de concentración
hay que ser todavía más obsesivo.

Para ser judío hay que ser obsesivo.

Obsesivo por la vida.
Para que aún en la muerte triunfe la vida.

¿Y yo? Que tanto temo a la muerte.
Yo, sefardí de 1492 y de 1939.

Doblemente exiliada.
Doblemente judía.
Doblemente española.
Una sola vez mexicana.
Mexicana en 1942:
trasposición de 1492.

OBSESSION

Without obsessions
one cannot live
one cannot travel
one cannot have tea
one cannot go into exile.

They are the Great Burden.
They are the Great Wealth.

They are a mind turned inside out and outside in.

They are that which keeps humans
upright.

In exile one must be obsessive.

To survive one must be obsessive.

To survive in a concentration camp
one has to be even more obsessive.

To be a Jew one must be obsessive.

To be obsessive about life
so that even in death life will succeed.

And I? The one who is so afraid of death?
I, a Sephardi from 1492 and from 1939.

Twice exiled.
Twice a Jew.
Twice a Spaniard.
Only once a Mexican.
Mexican in 1942,
transposition of 1492.

Luego del exilio de Dios
y luego del exilio de la Tierra Sagrada.
Luego del exilio de pueblo en pueblo,
de ciudad en ciudad.

(De Zaragoza a Guadalajara, al Casar de Salamanca,
a Madrid, a Valencia, a Hyères, a París, a La Pallice,
al océano Atlántico, a La Habana, a Caimito
del Guayabal, a Mérida, a la ciudad de México.)
Vendrá el Gran Exilio Final.

After exile from God
after exile from the Sacred Land.
After the exile from town to town,
from city to city.

(From Zaragoza to Guadalajara, to Casar de Salamanca,
to Madrid, to Valencia, to Hyères, to Paris, to La Pallice,
to the Atlantic Ocean, to Havana, to Caimito
del Guayabal, to Merida, to Mexico City.)
The Great Final Exile will come.

Translated by Aurora Camacho

LAS TRENZAS DE LA TORAH

El pelito para Yom Kippur *atado de fiesta*
a un vestido de terciopelo azul trenzas
seda dulce de las trenzas hebreas o
es en el baño de la sinagoga
donde las señoras
descompuestas se lavan la cara el sombrero
descompuesto también de afeites
en el espejo espiando como madrinas
no como madres se acomodan
a la religión de sus familias
mujeronas de cartera pesada
a mí me empujan.
La nena del pelito judía
Tamara o Tamar
cómo la llaman
cuando hay que volver
sí tía espérame
ya voy ya me hago de miedo
la que rezo.

TORAH BRAIDS

Her beautiful hair for Yom Kippur festively tied
to a dress of blue velvet braids
sweet silk of Hebrew braids or
it is in the bathroom of the synagogue
where ladies
in disarray cleanse their faces of make-up
their hats in disarray also
in the mirror spying like godmothers
not like mothers they adapt
to the religion of their families
matrons with heavy purses
pushing me.
The young girl with beautiful Jewish hair
Tamara or Tamar
as they call her
when we must return
yes aunt wait for me
I'm coming I'm peeing in fear
the one who prays.

Translated by Roberta Gordonstein

ELIAHU

Cuando dijiste el Shmá Israel que cada vez quiso decir
otra cosa esperamos muchos minutos y él no llegaba, él que
no era nada (o bien era etéreo) pero hacía ruido
y se tomaba la copa de vino del medio de la mesa, él que te secaba
las manos que año por medio me tocaba lavarte, la palangana
preparada, terror a volcar el agua, risas contenidas
cuando las bendiciones eran cada vez más agudas, y yo
mirando la copa que no se vaciaba. Y sin embargo parecía
vaciarse hasta imaginar que él se emborracharía un poco
en cada casa, tomando de cada copa alta, única, brillante
en el centro de cada mesa. Millones de copas únicas esperando
en millones de mesas festivas y él que entró sin ser
visto cuando se abrieron las puertas que se le cerraron detrás.
Yo que estuve controlando sus pasos. Nuevamente
este año escuchamos el cuento del pan que siempre es otro
cuento, y de nuevo preguntamos las cuatro preguntas espiando
las pequeñas letras hebreas de olor a baúl, de olor
a viaje desde Rusia, a las barbas del bisabuelo Akiva que
espió la ceremonia desde el marco ovalado con su sombrero redondo.
Nadie supo nunca si las últimas canciones de la noche
eran las que él había inventado cuando se sentaba inclinándose
a recibir el shabat en la silla alta que guardaste hasta
que hijo por hijo se fueron yendo de la casa con corredor,
con terraza, con biblioteca de puertas de vidrio, con anchas
biblias olorosas, con los vestidos del casamiento en Brasil
cuando bajaron con náuseas del barco que después siguió
y llegó a Buenos Aires. Dos noches seguidas se repite la
ceremonia, en Europa se repite tres noches, algunas sectas
la hacen una sola vez pero cantan más alto, también
bailan. Nosotros a veces levantamos los brazos hacia el
cielo cantando alto y eso es tan importante como decir el
Shmá Israel siete veces antes de dormir, para adentro, nunca
en voz alta. Vergüenza de la propia voz diciendo Shmá
Israel. Sabiendo desde siempre que aunque sólo se pensara
sería escuchando, porque él escucha todos los hermosos pensamientos
y contesta en los pensamientos mismos como nadie puede hacerlo.

ELIAHU

When you said the Shema Yisroel that meant something different each time we waited a long while and he did not arrive, the one who was nothing (or rather was ethereal), but made noise and drank the glass of wine from the middle of the table, he who dried your hands that every other year it was my duty to wash, the wash-basin prepared, fear of spilling the water, laughter contained when each time the blessings became sharper, and I kept watching the cup that did not empty. And nevertheless it seemed to empty itself until I imagined that he would get a little drunk in each house, drinking from each tall glass, unique, brilliant in the center of each table. Millions of different glasses waiting on millions of festive tables and the one who entered without being seen when they opened the doors that were closed behind him. I was the one controlling his steps. Again this year we heard the story of the matzo that is always another story, and again we asked the four questions scrutinizing the small Hebrew letters that smelled like a trunk, like a journey from Russia, like the whiskers of great-grandfather Akiva wearing his round hat who contemplated the ceremony from the oval picture frame.

No one ever knew if the final songs of the night were the ones he invented when he sat down, reclining, to welcome the Sabbath in the tall chair that you saved until one by one the children began going from the house with a hallway, with a terrace, with a library with glass doors, with thick and odorous Bibles, with the garments from the wedding in Brazil when they disembarked seasick from the ship that afterwards continued on until it reached Buenos Aires. The ceremony is repeated on two consecutive nights, in Europe it is repeated three nights, some sects do it a single time but they sing louder, they dance, too. We sometimes raise our arms up to heaven singing loudly and that is as important as saying the Shema Yisroel seven times before sleeping, to yourself, never out loud. Ashamed by hearing your own voice saying Shema Yisroel. Always knowing that even if you only thought it, it would be heard, because he hears all the beautiful thoughts and answers in the same thoughts the way no one else can.

Nadie más que Adonai o Eliahu Hanaví que tomó de la copa alta, te secó las manos que este año me tocó lavarte, y sin hacer ruido cruzó por la ventana abierta y entró por la puerta abierta de cualquier casa donde la copa de vino lo esperaba en el centro de la mesa.

No one other than Adonai or Eliahu Hanavi who drank from the tall glass, dried your hands that this year it was my turn to wash, and without making noise passed through the open window and entered the open door of any house where the glass of wine awaited him in the center of the table.

Translated by Roberta Gordenstein

RETORNO II

Desde que se pegó el otoño a las calles húmedas de esta ciudad reconocible a través de los tangos no puedo más que caminar con los brazos pegados al pecho tratando de ubicarme en el día exacto de mi nacimiento porque desde hoy sé que los que bendijeron mi nombre con un rezo tomaban vino dulce en copitas y comían pescado frito para acostumbrar su alma a la presencia de una nueva alma que entonces no era más que un punto entre árboles, un soplo entre sólidos alientos, un gesto entre risas perfectamente nítidas.

Desde que se pegó el otoño a las calles húmedas de esta ciudad reconocible a través de los tangos, vuelvo a preguntarme por las primeras alegrías por las imágenes que llenaron una pupila aún no acostumbrada a la luz por los primeros contactos de la lengua con la solidez del mundo. Vuelvo a preguntarme por el sentido de todo lo que mágicamente existe hace veinticinco años desenvolviéndose con la naturalidad con que se pela una naranja y entiendo que cuando más se quiera saber menos se sabrá porque están cerrados los caminos que descienden del árbol a la raíz.

En esta tristeza de no ser más la que sentándose en las rodillas de un abuelo escuchaba la historia de la moabita Ruth está la alegría de encontrar en cada objeto un indicio de esta historia, el asombro de saber que la poesía no hace más que continuarla porque es a la vez la madre y la hija de la moabita Ruth.

Es la gran madre en cuyo vientre se genera el complicado tejido de palabras, es la hija que surge de ese vientre para reposar en la intemperie de la imaginación, en el esclavizado y libre campo del recuerdo.

RETURN II

Since autumn attached itself to the humid streets of this city recognizable because of the tangos I can only stroll with my arms stuck to my chest, trying to place myself on the exact day of my birth because from now on I know that those who blessed my name with a prayer drank sweet wine in shot glasses and ate fried fish to accustom their souls to the presence of a new soul that was then no more than a speck among trees, a puff among strong breathing, a gesture among perfectly neat laughter.

Since autumn attached itself to the humid streets of this city recognizable because of the tangos, I ask myself again about the earliest joys about the images that filled a pupil still not accustomed to the light about the first contact of the tongue with the solidness of the world. I ask myself again about the meaning of all that magically existed twenty-five years ago developing itself with the naturalness with which one peels an orange and I understand that the more you want to know the less you will know because the paths that descend from the tree to the root are closed.

In this sadness of no longer being the one who sits on her grandfather's knees listening to the story of Ruth the Moabite is the joy of finding a trace of that story in every object, the astonishment of knowing that poetry only continues it because it is at one and the same time the mother and daughter of Ruth the Moabite.

She is the great mother in whose womb the complicated weaving of words is generated, she is the daughter who emerges from that womb to rest in the openness of the imagination, in the enslaved and free field of memory.

Mi abuelo decía que mientras Ruth peregrinaba por los caminos de la tierra santa sus ojos—fijos en el cielo— vaticinaban las lluvias, dialogaban con los vientos y abrían el espacio necesario para que aparezcan las nubes.

Toda historia abre un espacio en el que podemos acomodar nuestros cuerpos haciendo la plancha sobre un mundo de personajes cuyas correrías dependen del destino azaroso de las palabras. Sin la historia del abuelo no hay Ruth pero sin Ruth no hay lluvias ni diálogo con los vientos ni polvorientos caminos de Moab por los que se bambolean camellos cargados de telas, de especias orientales, de pálidos niños que serán vendidos como esclavos y verán su vida como una monótona estela arrastrándose detrás de los remos que deben empujar.

My grandfather used to say that while Ruth wandered through the paths of the Holy Land her eyes—fixed on heaven—prophesied the rains, dialogued with the winds, and opened the necessary space so the clouds would appear.

Every story opens a space where we can accommodate our bodies and lose ourselves in a world of characters whose wanderings depend on the hazardous destiny of words. Without grandfather's story there is no Ruth but without Ruth there is no rain or dialogue with the winds or dusty roads of Moab where camels sway loaded down with fabrics, with oriental spices, with pale children who will be sold as slaves and who will see their lives as a monotonous wake dragged behind the oars that they must push.

Translated by Roberta Gordenstein

MEA SHEARIM

Besé a la tierra fría que es cielo y supe que la flor era sagrada como el sol, como las escaleras del barrio de las cien puertas *invisibles, que conducen a la eternidad sin nombre.*

Entendí por qué sus habitantes se llaman "los cuidadores de la ciudad," supe que cuidaban una ciudad invisible para mí.

Y ahora quisiera alabar el polvo de los zapatos hundidos en escritos antiguos, quedarme con el espejo de lo que está vivo reflejándose en mil espejos, la imagen absurda de lo que me rodea cuando me despierto (cuando mi imagen se despierta) (que es como decir aleluya) que es como abrir una caja redonda y reencontrar el celeste el amarillo el celeste, que es tratar de abrir una caja redonda y encontrarse con el cuadrado que rodea o invade y no deja ver el infinito inmenso que Heráclito envió ayer en una luz, desde Efeso en Turquía (ciudad invadida por los mares), que siendo cada vez otros son los mismos porque están encerrados en una caja redonda y conducen a la eternidad sin nombre (aquella que quiere y no quiere ser llamada con el nombre de Zeus).

Me vienen a la memoria aquellas caras que un poeta llamó "trabajadas por el tiempo." Las arrugas surcando los ojos amarillentos de mi padre están en la pantalla de esta pared para recordarme la muerte.

Filas de antepasados haciendo una ronda que se tragará a todos los hijos, una ronda inmóvil en la que los pasos de sus habitantes no avanzan, en la que no veo los ojos que el niño Cupido envió en una flecha para que un gesto único se vaya repitiendo en la galería tecnicolor de mi mente.

El recuerdo de ese gesto generará la ronda de la vida en la que mis antepasados bailen borrachos y las arrugas del padre indiquen la sabiduría y las manos ajadas de la abuela sean signo de haber pasado por un ritual doméstico pero santo.

MEA SHEARIM

I kissed the cold earth that is heaven and discovered that the flower was sacred like the sun, like the invisible stairways of the *neighborhood of the hundred doors*, which lead to an eternity without name.

I understood why its inhabitants are called "the caretakers of the city," learned that they cared for a city invisible to me.

And now I would like to praise the dust of the shoes submerged in ancient writings, remain with the mirror of what is alive reflecting itself in a thousand mirrors, the absurd image of what surrounds me when I awaken (when my image awakens) (which is like saying hallelujah) that is like opening a round box and finding again the celestial the yellow the celestial, that is trying to open a round box and finding oneself with the square that surrounds or invades and does not permit seeing the immense infinity that Heraclitus sent yesterday in a light, from Efeso in Turkey (city invaded by the seas), that being every time others are still the same because they are trapped in a round box and lead to eternity without name (that one that wants and does not want to be called by the name of Zeus).

Those faces that a poet called "forged by time" come to memory. The wrinkles furrowing the yellowish eyes of my father are on the screen of this wall to remind me of death.

Lines of ancestors making the rounds that will devour all their children, an immobile patrol where the steps of its inhabitants do not advance, where I do not see the eyes that boy Cupid sent in an arrow so that a unique gesture will continue to repeat in the technicolor gallery of my mind.

The memory of that gesture will generate the serenade of life
where my drunken ancestors dance
and my father's wrinkles indicate wisdom
and my grandmother's faded hands are the sign
of having passed through a domestic but holy ritual.

Nuevamente hay un tiempo para morir y un tiempo para vivir
una mano sobre un seno despierta las corrientes dormidas del cuerpo
el arco de una rodilla siembra la alegría,
abre para las mariposas un espacio infinito en el cual circular.

Again there is a time to live and a time to die
a hand on a breast awakens the sleeping currents of the body
the arch of a knee sows happiness.
An infinite space opens for butterflies to circulate in.

Translated by Roberta Gordenstein

ESTAR

Vigilas desde este cuarto
donde la sombra temible es la tuya.

No hay silencio aquí
sino frases que evitas oír.

Signos en los muros
narran la bella lejanía.

(Haz que no muera
sin volver a verte.)

EXISTING

You keep watch from this room
where the fearful shadow is your own.

There is no silence here
but phrases you avoid hearing.

Signs on the walls
narrate the beautiful remoteness.

(Don't let me die
without seeing you again.)

Translated by Roberta Gordenstein

LINTERNA SORDA

Los ausentes soplan y la noche es densa. La noche
tiene el color de los párpados del muerto.
Toda la noche hago la noche. Toda la noche escribo.
Palabra por palabra yo escribo la noche.

DEAF LANTERN

The absent ones whisper and the night is dense. Night is the
color of the eyelids of the dead.
All night long I create the night. All night long I write.
Word by word I write the night.

Translated by Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman

CUANDO ME ROBARON EL NOMBRE

fui una fui cien fui miles
y no fui nadie.
NN era mi rostro despojado
de gesto de mirada de vocal.

Camino mi desnudez numerada
en fila sin ojos sin yo
con ellos sola
desangrando mi alfabeto
por cadenas guturales
por gemidos ciudadanos de un país
sin iniciales.

Párpado y tabique
mi horizonte
todo silencio y eco
todo reja todo noche
todo pared sin espejo
donde copiar una arruga
una mueca un quizás.

Todo punto y aparte.

Hasta que un día
me devolvieron el nombre
y salí a lucirlo por los pasillos
del mundo.
Máscaras encontré
países perfiles adormecidos
lenguas golosas de novedades
absurdo.

Me dejé caminar así
hacia mi ningún lugar
hacia mi nada
por desfiladeros de huellas

WHEN THEY ROBBED ME OF MY NAME

I was one out of a hundred, out of thousands
and I was no one.
Deprived of gesture, gaze and voice
my face was reduced to the letters, NN.

In my numbered nakedness I walk
alone with them draining my alphabet
in eyeless and selfless rows
draining my alphabet
through gutteral chains
through civic wailing of a country
without initials.

Eyelid and partition
my horizon
all silence and echo
all bars all night
all mirrorless wall
nowhere to copy a wrinkle
a grimace a perhaps.

All a full stop and a moving on.

Until one day
they gave me back my name
and I went out to display it through the hallways
of the world.
I found masks
countries' drowsy profiles
tongues greedy for news
the absurd.

I let myself walk like this
toward my nowhere
toward my nothingness
through steep paths of

sin rocío
sin poder traducir
mis cicatrices.

¡Ese nombre no es mío!
El mío

era cien era mil era todos
el mío
era cuerpo era vientre era voz
tenía vecinos silbaba
era diurno y nocturno
era un dios.

Se me ha perdido mi nombre!
por las veredas de un mapa
sin esquinas grité
entre puertas acribilladas de miedo.

¡Quiero mi nombre!
mi nombre propio curvo palpitante
¡Que me lo traigan!
envuelto en primaveras
con erre de rayuela
con o de ojalá
con a de aserrín aserrán.

Mi nombre enredadera se enredó
entre sílabas de muerte
DE SA PA RE CI DO
ido
nombre nunca más
mi nombre.

Enajenada de sujeto
no supe conjugarme
no supe recorrer
el abecedario de mis lágrimas.

dewless bones
unable to translate
my scars.

That name is not mine!
Mine

was a hundred was a thousand was everyone's
mine
was body was womb was voice
had neighbors whistled
was diurnal and nocturnal
was a god.

I've lost my name!
I shouted along the trails of a
cornerless map
between doors riddled with fear.

I want my name!
my own, curved, throbbing name
Bring it to me!
wrapped in spring
with an *r* for *rayuela*
and an *o* for *ojalá*
and an *a* for *aserrín aserrán*

My curling name got tangled
between death syllables
DI SAP PEAR ED
gone
a name never again
my name.

Alienated from my subject
I didn't know how to conjugate myself
or how to navigate
the *abc*'s of my tears.

Fui ojos revolviendo ayeres
fui manos atrapando jirones
fui pies resbalando
por renglones eléctricos.

No supe pronunciarme.
Fui piel entre discursos
sin saliva sin vestigios
de donde ni por que

ni cuando ni hasta cuando.

No podrás jamás decirlo!
jamás decirte, pensé.

Pero escribirás
escribiré sí
miles de ges de eres de eses
garabatos vicarios
hijos de mi boca
remolinos de deseos
que fueron nombres.

Escribiré
látigos negros para domar
otras salvajes mayúsculas
ahogándome la sangre.
Resistiré resistirás
con nombre y apellido
el descarado lenguaje
del olvido.

I was eyes looking back upon yesterdays
I was hands snatching at rags
I was feet slipping
through electric lines.

I didn't know how to express myself.
I was the skin between
dry and vacuous speeches
without saliva without vestiges
with no why or wherefore

no whensoever or whereupon.

You will never be able to say it!
never speak for yourself, I thought

But you will write
yes, I will write
thousands of *G*'s of *R*'s of S's
vicarious scribbles
offspring rising from my mouth
whirlpools of desires
that were once names.

I will inscribe
black whips to tame
other wild capital letters
drowning my blood.
With first and last names
I will resist you will resist
the brazen language
of oblivion.

NN: No Name
rayuela: hopscotch
ojalá: hope
aserrín aserrán: popular children's nursery rhyme

Translated by Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman

UNTHINKABLE TENDERNESS

Selected Poems

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles London

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the contribution provided by the Literature in Translation Endowment of the Associates of the University of California Press, which is supported by a generous gift from Joan Palevsky.

COMMENTARY VI (SAINT TERESA)

this secret union that takes place
in a very interior place in the soul /
that must be where you are / and where
delight and glory dwell and more

passing creatures / joined together as
the waters of heaven form a river that enters the sea / or
hands that come from opposite sides and join to make one /
or sustenance that sustains me / you are that for me

as wood is to the stick / although
greater pain remains afterward / and greater desire because
loving grows the more it discovers itself
the delight of you / and longings come like rays

that burn up and slow the dying / and soon
without knowing how or when / without
moving hand or foot / fire strikes and makes dust
of everything we breathe

at the interior of this passion /
pain runs loose like an animal
and pain too is a reminder of you / my country
to which I am tied and untied /

and rare absence / rare company /
that nobody is if not you /
and I am like someone suspended
neither touching the ground nor able to rise to the sky

like awareness of coming torment /
of suffering or wretchedness / which is a drop of water / in the great
ocean of the warmth of you / deep little butterfly /
free in the total light that you give

COMMENTARY XX

they took a man and they said
get rid of him but he doesn't die / they
raised up the heart of this man flinging him
against the world or pain

and there he burned for a while
and went out and did not revive like a puppy /
didn't even move his tail after
his struggle with the night / nor lift up his face /

nor say goodbye / nor turn green
nor write something in the air /
nor split like a tree /
nor was he converted into amber no /

nor did he cast a small shadow / nor did grass grow from him
nor did they use one of his bones to play the flute /
and the only music he made
was the rustling of his sadness

sadness as big as an animal /
big as your absence / big as the sky
where the birds were passing
trembling under the sun

FROM INTERRUPTIONS II

UNDER FOREIGN RAIN (FOOTNOTES TO DEFEAT)

(ROME / MAY 1980)

I write on a subject that nobody likes.
Including me.
There are subjects that nobody likes.
Po I-po

Earth is earth, clay is clay,
and the potter works the earth and the clay.
Thus he knows the beauty of his hands,
which are of earth and clay.
Pingala

I

It is difficult to reconstruct what has happened; the truth of memory struggles against the memory of truth. Years have passed; the dead and the hatreds pile up; exile is a cow that can give poisoned milk; some at least, it seems, can live on it.

Among the colony of Argentine exiles, apathy predominates, political and otherwise. Whether one works or not, studies or not, learns the language of the country or not, reconstructs his life or not. Women pass like rivers, whether one loves them or not, keeps them or not.

The need to self-destruct and the need to survive fight with each other like brothers gone crazy. We keep the clothes in the closet, but we have not unpacked the suitcases of the soul. Time passes and the way we deny exile is to deny the country we're in, deny its people, its language, to reject them as if they were concrete witnesses of mutilation: our land is far away, what do these foreigners know of its voices, its birds, its duels, its thunderstorms.

They are different from us. They don't really care about us. They do not suffer the injustice that happened to us. Even the most sympathetic feel vaguely embarrassed by us. That's their problem, but it affects us. As if the dialogue between foreigners on something apparently comprehensible—the pain of the one group—were cloaked by the others in shame, innocence, paternalism, custom.

We are not going to agree—ever. And many times we will be unjust, mistaking humility for arrogance, reserve for lack of commitment, the desire not to hurt for the will not to know.

How sick we are. We look for connections with the Prado, Santa Maria Maggiore, la Place de la Contrescarpe, el Paseo de la Reforma, the elevators of Caracas, London's Hyde Park. But they are meaningless connections and don't last. The wonder passes, the pain remains. Like the soul's fire, it remains.

It remains.

Could it be the same sky? It's not the same sky. Where would the Southern Cross be if not in the south? Isn't it the same sun? No. Doesn't it light up Buenos Aires? It lights it up hours later, when I'm not there. Color of another sky, foreign rain, light that my childhood never knew.

The voices of the dew look like the voices of the dew. A small tongue licks them and knows the difference. The dew of my south, or the tail of the comet or the crystal dawn on the breasts of the battle. It isn't the same dew that forms on the European Common Market, that most common of markets.

All men are human and if I can see this, everyone can. And vice versa, because all men are human. Let's include ourselves, humans. Let me make a place in myself for this strange world with its justifiable selfishness, its parking-meter decency, the honesty of its consumption, its fine, brutal individualism, its sad love, the dirtiness of its hygienes. What can I offer but rays of light that once lit up the struggle for happiness; the generosities of death, that is to say, of life; outbursts of happiness; this for-the-moment defeat.

Let us plow the earth hands joined. Perhaps a plant will grow from two faces, one that needs the water of both, that sees two distances from the same solitude. That way we will be truly together.

Rome / 5-9-80

II

What we can learn in exile is not given to us; it is given to itself, and deep in thought, turned inward, coiled around itself, dug in to itself, not us. Can we learn from it? Yes, we can, but what? Faces passing that turn away at the nape of the neck, that much we can see. We imagine, dream, intuit. Insofar as we imagine, we dream, we intuit. These cultures don't come to us open. Is it worth the trouble to make a great effort, open them, rape them, if necessary? Will we find something beyond confirmation of what they did to us centuries ago, what they have been doing to us for centuries? Have we time for that?

And the time our dead need and our living?

But we have time, time to not go crazy, to not be changed from who we are. To reveal the terrain of madness to the napes of those necks that crazily fail to see us; they depend on us to see themselves; they have no need of us; they stare eternally in mirrors, chasing shadows, back to back with each other. They come back to us when they are so lost they need pebbles or stones, something consistent so that they can keep wandering. They possess the will of air, the pendulum of the air, here today, here tomorrow too. Their air supply is short.

We drag our feet in rivers of dried blood, in souls stuck to the earth with love, we want no other worlds but freedom and we don't word that word about, knowing since many deaths ago it can be spoken in love but not about love, clearly, but not about clarity, freely, but not about freedom.

Rome / 5-9-80

III

I'm not going to feel ashamed of my sadnesses, my nostalgias. I miss the little street where they killed my dog, where I wept over his death, and I am still stuck to the bloody cobblestones where my dog died, from that I exist, of that I exist, I am that, and I'll ask nobody's permission to be nostalgic about that.

Perhaps I am something else? Military dictatorships came, civil governments and new military dictatorships, they took my books from me, my bread, my son, they wore down my mother, threw me out of the country, assassinated my little brothers, tortured my compañeros, undid them, broke them. Nobody pulled me out of the street where I am weeping beside my dog. What military dictatorship could do that? And what military motherfucker can take away my great love for those May twilights, when the bird of being hovers in the falling night?

It was not perfect, my country, before the military coup, but it was the stage of my life, the times that I trembled against the walls of love, the times I was a child, a dog, a man, the times I loved and was loved. No general is going to take any of that away from the country, from that little land I sprinkled with my love, whether a lot or a little, land that I miss and that misses me, land that no military can muddy for me or muddy period.

It's right that I should miss her. Because that's the way we always loved each other—she always asking more of me and me of her, both of us hurting over this pain we caused each other, and strong in our love for each other.

I love you, my country, and you love me. In this love we burn imperfections, we burn lives.

Rome / 5-9-80

IV

I am uprooted from you. My feet tread other lands, and it comes down to living in other lands without lying to myself, without lying. Fragile little plants can survive. The air is their friend—although it understands nothing about anything—and can nourish them, give them light. They'll go on breathing, the little plants.

I'll go and see them at night, listen to their breathing, their gazes that gaze back at me fixedly, fires that burn the wood of you, land that burns in every world, overflowing with you, difficult, so alone.

Rome / 5-9-80

V

some of the obligations of exile:
don't forget exile /
fight the language that fights exile /
don't lose sight of exile / or rather the land /
or rather the homeland or mother's milk or handkerchief
where our childhood vibrates /
don't forget the reasons for the exile /
the military dictatorship / the mistakes
we made in your name / against you /
land we are made of / land our feet
are covered with / like the dawn spread out /
and you / little heart who wants to see any morning
as oblivion / don't forget
to forget the forgetting

Rome / 5-9-80

VI

On the thickness of experience. There are discourses that come close to expressing thickness, that seem to express it, but a certain distance or absence, a note that is not false but off the mark characterizes them. The foreignness of these discourses — however universally they are accepted — certifies this bitch known as solitude all over again.

Can it be solitude that has no discourse? a bitch that barks at the moon, deaf from defeat, a satellite, a little corpse?

What language would solitude speak? He who has lost children, his morelife, what stones would he spit from his mouth? And who would pick them up as a sign of love, or understand, accept, welcome them, though they be heard through the window?

The solitude of the word. Rain cleans the countries of the soul. A word wanders through the streets frightened, trembling, not knowing where it is going — only where it has come from. There is so much blood afoot now under the new, clean rain, the fresh and innocent rain.

Rome / 5-10-80

VII

At what point will this exterior exile coincide with the other deeper, interior, anterior exile? At what point will these strange languages, foreign faces, voices, modes and manners, flesh out the ghosts of my own youth? Confused faces, semi-erased by insomniac dawn. Foreignest languages heard at the foot of a world that was missing, on sheets of dream spread by the night.

All that may be so. But back then no obscure language would say to me, *sepá, nienteafato, ferboten, nius, antunche*. They were the languages of not being, as trembling as newborns, no iron laws marked their folds, they could fly, unexpected.

No.

That other exile has nothing to do with it.

Maybe it was the exile of the future.

It was the exile of the stony present.

And right here and now they tear our past to shreds.

Rome / 5-11-80

VIII

We do not line up outside the dream factory. We line up outside the country. We are in a dream factory — eating, sleeping, loving are like dreams; every day we manufacture these dreams and through them we go on to the next dream or day.

I am dreaming of the via del Corso and my buddy Jorge of the rue de Mouffetard. Streets we've dreamed, back to back with us, that never will know us. We walk them day and night, pass through them, spill our blood on them, perhaps even weep in them, these stone dreams which recognize the feet of others.

Our ghostly look terrifies them. They dream that we do not exist, do not weigh upon them.

Foreign street that I dreamed: you undream me perfectly.

Rome / 5-11-80

IX

We line up outside the country, out in the open, it's raining, tongues of flame are licking the saints, skeletons pass by as if they were birds, a woman's breast drags the sky. The line snakes along for 14,000 kilometers. Argenguayans, Uruleans, Chilentinians, Paraguvians are all aboil. They're tugging on the South American night, their souls gnash in silence. That is their real work.

Rome / 5-11-80

X

You would be more tolerable, exile, if it weren't for so many professors of exile, sociologists of exile, poets, mourners of exile, students of exile, professionals of exile, good souls with a scale in hand, weighing the plus and the minus, the remainder, the long division, the 2 × 2 of this misery.

One man divided by two does not equal two men.

Who in the hell would dare, under these circumstances, to multiply my soul by one.

Rome / 5-11-80

XI

I close my eyes under this little Roman sun. You pass over Rome, sun, and in a few hours you will pass over what was my house and, leaving me behind, you will light up places where I am missing, places I claim as mine and that claim me.

And you're going to be warming them at the exact moment I'll be shivering with cold.

Rome / 5-11-80

XII

My father came to America with one hand in front and the other behind, the better to hold his pants up. I came to Europe with one soul in front and the other behind, the better to hold my pants up. There are differences, however. He came to stay; I came to go back.

There are differences, you say? Between the two of us we came and went, and nobody knows where it's going to end.

Papa—your cranium is rotting in the earth where I was born, a symbol of international injustice. That's why you spoke so little; you didn't have to. And the rest—eating, sleeping, suffering, making children—they were the necessary steps, natural, like filling out the forms for human existence.

I will never forget you, in the half-light of the dining room, turned toward the light of your roots. You used to talk to your land. You never could shake that land from the feet of your soul. Feet full of earth like a great silence, like lead, like light.

Rome / 5-13-80

XIV

I am one who arrives early for everything. I get to see how they empty the schools of the nocturnal cadavers of knowledge, how they throw disinfectant in the corners to cover up the odors of science.* I arrive early at the hospital, when they change the dead of the sheets. I arrive early for you, love, when in the light of your secret, you laugh without realizing it.

I don't arrive early by mistake, or out of fear or courage. The military is pissing on the Marxist-Leninist night and I've arrived early at this exile of mine. Early I hear the bird sing. Early I hear the bird suffer. And early I will leave my life.

Rome / 5-13-80

* In Argentina the naval training schools, known as *escuelitas*, were often used as torture chambers during the Dirty War. (J.L.)

XV

When some Europeans wake up to the business of Latin American exile, they put on a strange face, they vacillate, they grow pale as if reliving childhood terrors. Then they get a hold of themselves, recover their composure, recognize that solidarity is necessary, and above all, mutual solidarity. From the blood of many they'll arrange for an article or two, a course at the university, a small salary. Which lacks importance.

Paco Urondo died for the happiness of the millions who, not aspiring to write or become famous, want to live humanly. From Paco's remains a crow is eating, fabricating anthologies, teaching courses on Paco at the European university of B. Paco resembles more and more each day the millions who will one day triumph. The professor's feathers have turned green and he doesn't even look like a crow—he asks for potatoes if they want the lesson repeated.

Rome / 5-13-80

XVI

They shouldn't uproot people from their land or country, not by force. The people remain grief-stricken. And the country remains grief-stricken.

When we are born they cut the umbilical cord. When we are exiled nobody cuts the memory, the language, the blood supply. We have to learn to live like bromeliads on air alone.

I am a monstrous plant. My roots are thousands of miles from me and no stem connects us, two seas and an ocean separate us. The sun shines on me while my roots are breathing in the night, suffering at night under the sun.

Rome / 5-14-80

XVII

I love this foreign land for what it gives me, for what it doesn't give me.

Because my land is unique. It isn't the best, it's unique. And foreigners respect it inadvertently, being who they are, being different, being beautiful in a different way.

I am moved by their beauty. I have nothing to do with their way of achieving beauty.

What's lovely is this: when they give me their beauty, they're also giving me the foreignness of beauty. Injustice, pain, suffering — they almost always intervene.

Here's to you, beauty. We are pieces of the universal journey, different, opposite, carried along by the same waves.

We will land on some beach. We'll build a little fire against cold and hunger.

We'll be passionate under the same night.

We'll see each other, we'll see.

Rome / 5-16-80

XVIII

The breeze blowing through the kitchen rattles the poster with the face of some silent film star on it. Mary Pickford, maybe. She is beautiful, her eyes shining softly, her mouth forming a half-smile, very tender, quiet.

Here, we too are silent actors. We have a soft shine, tenderness dirty with dried blood, like kids, a lot of silence around us.

In the orchestra section they prefer a sound film. Who made this film? On this side of the screen, our side, you can hear the dead letting go of their lives little by little like the sighing of dreams, the screams of torture, the shuffling of people in prison; injustice is a hellish roar under the clatter of military boots. Over on the other side pale ghosts are seen passing by, and no piano announces them.

I love you, Mary Pickford, and now I know you love me. The breeze comes through and rattles our paper love.

Rome / 5-17-80

XIX

I made a clandestine visit to Buenos Aires in May of 1978. The city was beautiful.

Actually, it was very beautiful during those days in May when the Porteño autumn opens itself to fire, a warmth of spring either dying or about to be born, you can never decide which.

They had advised me not to stroll about downtown, not to frequent my old hangouts. Naturally I did just that, strolled about downtown, visited my haunts. Who would know me?

Wasn't Paco already dead? Hadn't they disappeared Rodolfo and Haroldo? Hadn't they already killed Jote, Lino, Josefina, Dardo, Diana, maybe? The restaurant where my son wrote a poem on the ragged tablecloth — this poem:

> The black sheep grazes
> in the black field
> on the black snow
> under the black night
> next to the black city
> where I am crying dressed in red

—the restaurant was open, but my son they had disappeared two years before, with nothing known of him since. His wife was seven months pregnant when she was disappeared with him.

I read the newspapers of the day. In *La Opinión*—where I once worked, which I once founded—an intellectual leftist buddy (ex-buddy or ex-leftist) added his paid voice to the propaganda of the military dictatorship. The paper belonged to the military by then. The ex-buddy or ex-leftist, too.

Try as I may, I can't remember his name. He was a storyteller. Like his wife, who used to shit all over Rosa Luxemburg from a leftist stance. Having a leftist asshole didn't stop him from shitting the daily military bread.

Rome / 5-20-80

XX

To César Fernández Moreno

Here in Europe time is successive, nobody wears the suit he wore tomorrow, and nobody loves the girl he will love yesterday.

In my country Carlos would use the straw of a broom to kill the dictator so that he'd last longer. Paco will give his life so that things won't go on as they are, whatever future used to burn in our memories, the past was a continent that someday will be discovered.

Here nobody washed his mother's diapers. Nor does an old man shoot himself in the cradle, no crackpot interrupts the one-armed with no mouth, the dead with permits, the blind who don't say "see" and see.

Rome / 5-25-80

XXI

Dear Paco,

I am fixing myself something to eat in my kitchen in Rome. I am remembering years back—eight? ten, is it?—when we were fixing lunch in your pad in Ciudad de la Paz in Buenos Aires. You liked to call it your pad. El Moro had died and we decided that before we accompanied him to his next-to-last resting place, we'd make a little feast, as we had done so many times with him before the time came to take him to the cemetery.

In those days many people died of natural causes. El Moro died of sickness, but it wasn't so natural. He had drunk a lot in his lifetime, about twelve thousand liters more than we had, I figure, and the time came when he had to choose: either the ascetic life—no booze, no women, no cigarettes—or a quick death. He chose the second, out of moral elegance.

To the woman he loved, El Moro would write letters more or less like this: "The coachman is driving me slowly across the tundra, extending the versts that separate me from you," this crusty Porteño, born in the barrio of Belgrano, would write. "He is drunk, sobbing 'mamuschka, mamuschka'—it seems more tragic, more tender, than 'mamma mia, mamma mia'—and every so often he knocks down a few fingers of vodka that glass his eyes. Or do you say glaze? One eye, at least, is glass for sure. The left one probably, because the troika is traveling dangerously far from the right side of the road. Naturally he focuses his vision toward the left, toward what he can't see. I too have always leaned toward what I cannot see. The dacha of my childhood, my father, general of the nation, the roof that the cripple, Piotr Ivanovich, would repair. I love you, Kátienka, my memories of you are spiced with those marvelous blintzes you served me—as if they were children—with your little silk hands. Who knows what awaits me at the end of the journey. Surely, the estarosta at the gate of my estate. But I never want to see it again."

How we laughed over that.

I also remember, Paco, years later—four? five?—the secret meeting place in the barrio Constitución where we'd meet at times. And the gesture you made—right thumb pointed down, like the emperors of Rome—when you opened the door for me that time you had to tell me that the organization was sending me to Europe, abroad. Neither of us wanted me to go. Already fewer were dying natural deaths, and none of us wanted to leave the country, to leave what had started in our country.

And afterward they killed you. You were becoming deeper all the time, more human, more joyful. I keep thinking, for years I've been thinking—four? five?—that it would have been better if they had sent you to Rome. That way you would be fixing something to eat in your pad, remembering El Moro, remembering me, far or near.

I don't want to die in your place, although at times I'd like to be where you are. It's just that you once told me you were going to live to be eighty, and I believed you. And I still believe you.

Rome / 5-29-80

XXII

The moon falls on the terrace as if dead. Come to, little moon. Not all nights are going to be like this one, crumpled with boredom.

I remember one night you were watching me on high. You saw the whole operation and didn't say one word. To me it seemed you were in total agreement. Moon over Sardis, moon over the Buenos Aires waterfront.

Sappho loved you, of course she did. She said you had rosy fingers. I, myself, love your feet, which never tire of trampling this defeat, of macerating it night after night.

Rome / 5-30-80

XXIII

He who contemplates exile is absorbed by it. He will be able to talk about exile, but never about himself. If he confines himself to contemplation of it, he'll lose his hunger, he'll lose track of himself, of his roots, he'll forget his mother, he'll become an automaton, always in search of news. Then the worst happens—he stops desiring.

Desire is necessary to make a dent in contemplation, mix it, change it. That's the only way I know you, recognize you, exile, and you recognize me.

Rome / 6-20-80

XXIV

Exile is like an everyday otherworld, like a mistake. The persisting in a mistake from which truth can be born. The truth like a corrected error, that is to say, whatever error the truth corrects.

It's that old business of denying reality, whether in Caballito or Trastevere; whether in Villa Crespo or the Bulmish.

Man is an animal who flies. He travels back and forth over the heavens against the most terrible unreality, slowly and not fearing death. He remakes himself by denying himself. For a short time then he operates between two voids, seeing his face in the mirror, no more than an image projected across past and future, a face charged with the present, that is, with the battle between past and future.

Like an everyday otherworld.

Rome / 6-22-80

XXV

Europe was the cradle of capitalism, and the child in the cradle was fed on gold and silver from Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia. Millions of Americans had to die to fatten the kid, who grew strong, developed languages, arts, sciences, the ways of loving and living, further dimensions of being human.

Who says culture has no odor?

I stroll through Rome, Paris—what beautiful cities. On the via Corso, on the Bulmish suddenly I catch a whiff of Tainos devoured by Andalusian dogs, of Ona ears mutilated, of Aztecs vanishing into Lake Tenochtitlán, of the diminutive Incas broken in Potosí, of Querandí, Araucan, Congo, Carabalí, enslaved, massacred.

You don't smell old, Europe.

You smell of double humanity, the one that murders and the one murdered.

Centuries have passed, and the beauty of the vanquished still rots your brow.

Rome / 9-14-80

XXVI

In reality, what hurts me is defeat.

An exile is the tenant of solitude. He can correct his memory, betray, disbelieve, reconcile, die, triumph. In this last case his face will appear to be his own: full of betrayals, disbeliefs, reconciliations, deaths, and a lot of friends who died keeping the faith, who burn in the night, repeat their names, won't let you sleep.

They won't let you sleep for you to see the distance.

You rattle of bones, you.

So be it.

Rome / 12-9-80

COM/POSITIONS

(PARIS AND GENEVA / 1983–1984)

to josé ángel valente

EXERGUE

I call the poems that follow com/positions because I have com/posed them, that is to say I have added things of my own to the texts of these great poets who wrote centuries ago. it's clear that I don't pretend to have improved them. they have shaken me with their vision of exile and I have added — or changed or offered or woven in — what I myself felt. in the way of contemporaneousness or of company? of mine with them? or vice-versa? residents of the same condition?

in any case I have dialogued with them and they with me from the dust of their bones and the splendor of their words. I don't know which to extol more, the beauty of their verses or the vitality of the mouths that voiced them. but the two married and offered me a past again, they surround my present, and they gift me with a future.

such is the mystery of the human word. it makes its way, whatever be its language, along the same flight path between darkness and light, and thus makes of them one substance: its light is dark, its darkness is light. with each language, each people opens a mouth to enable this flight, and thus it learns the ebb and flow of its blood, and how much work it must do.

to translate is inhuman — no language or face allows itself to be translated. we must leave this beauty intact and add yet another beauty to accompany it. their lost unity lies ahead. it was thus with the tower of Babel — not essential discord, but a partial science of the word. reality has a thousand faces, each with its own voice and science, its own patience as well, so that the face and its word may rise up out of the fear that binds them into the love that unites them. time and its grief are as patience burning in the depth of the night, where every word is a cold star, the sun of its being yet to come.

THE CRADLE

they are lighting the candles of joy in the world /
they bring on the wine / as yet untouched /
like the dark virgin her hair already graying /
must you not kiss her with desire? /
how she has longed / in the vast night /
to be joined with your blood /
to celebrate these nuptials /
oh aged wine / your father was like the night /
but in my soul you will prepare a field
green as your mother / and gardens
alive with birds of every kind /
and between them and language there will be commerce /
and my verses will take on wings and more music
than all the gardens of baghdad /
oh red wine / in you there is no place for pain /
you are poured by a being of female parts
in the clothes of a man /
when she raised you on high / pure / in your pitcher /
splendors fell from her face /
black night became day /
and she served me a clarity
that blinded the eye / the memory /
if that light is mixed with light /
their union will bring forth another light /
the unseen / the ultimate /
now I subdue time / which has seated at my table
the receptacle of my desire /
that there be no absence between us /
I long for you / not the site
where the beautiful Hind / or Asma /
she of the round white breasts /
pitched her tent / planted her fragrance of night
of ardent milk / and who will live in a tent /
watching the passing camels and sheep? /
I want to live in you / wine / under
suns gone by / while your innocent wives
rock the cradle of my sleeping poems /

abu nuwas
(747?– 815? / baghdad-basora-al kufa)

PSALM

where are my walls? /
where will my dead find peace? / seed
sown in memory / or plant that
grows in silence / in you will I find peace? /
I know not myself / how can I know you? /
by what name can I call you? /
in truth what name does the lark call itself? /
you are the silence of words /
when I do not speak I am in you /
all I say to myself is the silence of you /
bird which flies not / ox
which plows not / sea which seas not /
sun that passes not through the sky /
are you this refuge that leaves me naked
in your great compassion? /
which causes me to tremble before you? / in you? /
blind with clarity / animal who grazes
in your grace? /

david

WHAT WILL COME TO PASS

he who has not gone over his past /
nor dug it up / nor eaten it / knows not
the mysteries that will come to pass /
he has never offered up his life / to
the mysteries that will come to pass /
sorrow will vanish / a great cloud of smoke
will rise up out of thirst / out of hunger /
out of injustice / loneliness / they will burn
like logs on a fire / the stars
will grow peaceful /
and all will be green /
like the mystery of pain /
like your breasts white
beneath the apple tree /

dead sea scrolls
(170 B.C.–A.D. 68)

THE EXPULSED

they ousted me from the palace /
I did not care /
they exiled me from my land /
I wandered the earth /
they deported me from my language /
but it accompanied me /
you separated me from yourself /
and my bones are extinguished /
living flames consume me /
I am cut off from myself /

yehuda al-harizi
(1170 – 1237 / toledo-provence-palestine)

THE PRISONER

gazelle / though you be distant /
you are nearer to my bones than I myself /
and though the world believe me a free man /
any word from your lips is my mistress /
and though I walk erect in the eyes of all /
I am prisoner of my loneliness for you /
fatherless / motherless / without bread or water /
naked in the sun of your distance /

joseph tsarfati (giuseppe gallo)
(?–1527 / rome-constantinople-rome-outside vicovaro)

SONG

why / beautiful one / do you send no messengers
to the one who loves you / to the one who suffers for you? /
perhaps you do not know that time means nothing to me? /
that time for me begins with you? /
we will be but fragments / now /
let me behold your face one more time /
I know nothing of my heart /
whether it has stopped in my breast /
or wanders in your environs / I beg /
on behalf of love to love /
that you remember the days of your desire /
as I cannot forget your nights of passion /
the waves of a sea of tears break between us /
a sea I cannot cross to reach you /
if you'll but approach the shore /
the waters will part at your feet /
oh / when I am dead and gone /
give my heart leave /
and listen to those tiny golden bells that
tinkle in the sweep of your skirts /
let me but live
to unite the myhrr and the incense
your feet have sown this winter season /
though your voice I cannot hear /
from its dungeon
my heart /
listens to your steps /

yehuda halevi
(1075 – 1141 / tudela-granada-toledo-córdoba-alexandria)

THE BATTLE

the finger that wrote in my blood /
and separated my blood from its ink /
said that the name of my soul is blood /
and ink the name of my spirit /
my soul makes camp in its color /
before a red mirror /
my spirit regards itself
in a black mirror /
and in my heart there was a battle
between blood / air / and ink /
earth / and ink defeated blood /
and I was happy / but never again
will I write in fire
with a flame

abraham abulafia
(1240 – 1291 / zaragoza-tudela-barcelona-rome-palermo-comino)

IN PRISON

my rings have fallen off / but not my fingers /
my splendor is not made of jewels /
my faith / my dignity I have
my soul which shines / the name
my father was named / and already
in this prison I hear a voice singing /
whether it be dove or swallow /
it asks that birds fly
to the window of the beloved / and
leave there the light of the tortured one /
that they return to the beloved the image of her /
which is life / which is he / which is untouched /
no steel can burn it /
the jailer cannot break it /
with thirst / with hunger / the prisoner
drinks the beloved in his tears /
the salt of her tenderness /
eats nights of love that burn on still /
the unfortunate one hides himself
in the night of solitary confinement
like an untimely bird /
the teeth of the rats make sounds /
fleas / other faceless beasts /
besiege him body and soul / he
thinks of time / sees
the word perhaps /
sees the word tomorrow /
under another sun / the sun /

todros abulafia
(1247 – 1295 / toledo-madrid)

THAT

(PARIS, 1983 – 1984)

some of these poems are dedicated to the following:

Osvaldo Bayer
Aurora Bernárdez
Arnaldo Calveira
José Martín Arancibia
José Angel Valente
Daniel Viglietti
René Zapata