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A.M. Klein and the Artistic Transmission of Ethnic Identity

In a 1943 letter to his colleague A.J.M. Smith, Montreal poet A.M. Klein complained of the tendency amongst critics to identify him primarily as a Jewish poet. "Why did they [...] have to go flaunting my circumcision?" he asked. "It's an adolescent trick—this whimsical opening of another man's fly."¹ Despite his protestation to such categorization, Klein was deeply concerned with, though not limited to, issues concerning his Jewish background and ethnic identity. Contrary to the implications of his letter to Smith, he was critical of Jewish artists who disregarded their cultural heritage, accusing them of having "nothing original to contribute."² After all, he reasoned, "one cannot create with another's genitals."³ Drawing on his childhood experience of Eastern European Yiddish culture as it manifested itself in twentieth-century Canada, Klein attempted to express the flavours of his own deeply felt ethnic inheritance in terms comprehensible to a general audience. Following his efforts to give voice to the Jewish experience in English, rather than in Yiddish, he reached out to do something similar for the French Canadians amongst whom he lived. Based on his firsthand experience of one embattled cultural minority, he felt that he had a unique ability to understand and express

¹ Quoted in: Usher Caplan, *Like One That Dreamed: A Portrait of A.M. Klein* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1982) 102.

² Caplan 102.

³ Caplan 102.

another. While his successes as well as his failures to achieve these lofty artistic goals have been widely recognized, he was among the first Canadians to acknowledge both the reality and value of ethnic self-identification as well as the necessity of sharing that experience.

Born in Ratno, Ukraine, in 1909, Klein moved with his family to Canada the following year and settled in the prominently Jewish district of Montreal centred around St. Lawrence Boulevard. The neighbourhood, sandwiched between the Francophone eastern half of the city and the Anglophone western half, comprised something of a third, immigrant-based solitude. As Klein's biographer Usher Caplan observes, "the separation of the English and French made Montreal a city of ethnic solitudes and a place where Jews could maintain their group identity more easily than perhaps anywhere else on the continent."⁴ At the time of the Kleins' arrival, the area boasted a rich Yiddish cultural life, which included religious, political and artistic institutions. While the intellectual and political topics of the day, such as socialism and Zionism, were hotly debated in forums such as the Yiddish newspaper *Der Kanader Adler*, it was the gentler, more nostalgic aspects of Klein's childhood cultural milieu that he later attempted to express in his poetry. As he once wrote to the Yiddish critic Shmuel Niger, paraphrasing Rilke, "all poetry is an attempt to recapture one's youth and even one's childhood."⁵

⁴ Caplan 20.

⁵ A.M. Klein, *Literary Essays and Reviews*, eds. Usher Caplan and M.W. Steinberg (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987) xiii.

Klein's nostalgia for the Jewish culture of his parents' home is perhaps best expressed in the poem "Autobiographical," which appears as "Gloss Aleph" in his late-career novel *The Second Scroll*. In this Wordsworthian rendition of childhood experience, Klein evokes the

Memories, like sparrows rising from
The gutter-scattered oats,
Like sadness sweet of synagogal hum
Like Hebrew violins
Sobbing delight upon their eastern notes.⁶

The poem may be, as William Walsh opines, "a pinch of late-romantic saccharine,"⁷ but as indicated in the references to Jewish liturgical music, as well as a further mention of "The Torah-dance on Simchas-Torah night,"⁸ it is a uniquely Jewish experience that Klein wishes to convey, not just an abstract nostalgia. In the oft-quoted "A Psalm Touching Genealogy," Klein further attempts to give expression to the feelings of cultural inheritance that so deeply defined his own personal sense of self. "Not sole was I born," he writes,

but entire genesis:
For to the fathers that begat me, this body is residence...
In exit and entrance all day pull
The latches of my heart, descend, and rise—and there look generations
through my eyes.⁹

Though the primary sensation articulated by the poem is one of physical or biological memory, the speaker of the poem takes the biological idea into the cultural and psychologically personal realm by including the Simchas Torah

⁶ A.M. Klein, *Selected Poems*, eds. Usher Caplan, Seymour Mayne and Zailig Pollock (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997) 87.

⁷ William Walsh, "A.M. Klein and the Condition of Being Jewish," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 19 (1984): 9-21. 10.

⁸ Klein, *Selected Poems* 87.

⁹ Klein, *Selected Poems* 77.

image also mentioned in "Autobiographical." By imagining ancestors that "circle, as with Torahs, round my skull,"¹⁰ the speaker transforms them from abstract genetic predecessors to an easily pictured group of men performing the yearly holiday celebration. The reference to this event creates a further multi-mirror effect, where one can imagine perpetually recurring groups repeating the ritual across the generations into the inscrutable past. As Walsh writes, Klein "has a Jewish capacity for living historically in the present, and for making the past a probing instant for analyzing, and then a constructive one for shaping, this moment."¹¹

While the culturally specific references to Jewish ritual in "Autobiographical" and "A Psalm Touching Genealogy" are fairly straightforward, in other works, such as "Portraits of Minyan" and "Heirloom," Klein employs more obscure references and terminology, a fact that incurred as much or even more criticism from Jewish as non-Jewish sources. "In order to really penetrate most of your poetry, it isn't enough to have the explanation of a particular word or name; it is necessary to have lived in the atmosphere which nurtures your outlook and gives it life. Here no dictionaries will help. One needs to have breathed the air of learning Gemara, of Chassidism, of Jewish folklore," wrote Niger to Klein after the appearance of his first collection, *Hath not a Jew*, in 1940.¹² Though Klein recognized the difficulty that Niger raised, he was quick to defend his artistic project. "It is, in a word,

¹⁰ Klein, *Selected Poems* 77.

¹¹ Walsh 11.

¹² Caplan 87.

the problem of synthesis between cultures," he wrote back, acknowledging the obstacle he faced. He continued:

But, in English literature, references to a so-called alien culture is not a novelty. Milton's *Paradise Lost* presupposes great biblical knowledge [...] To amalgamate factors, therefore, of two cultures does not to me appear to be an impossibility [...] Joyce's *Ulysses*, where every chapter has its counterpart in a similar chapter of Homer's *Odyssey*, is to my mind a completely successful literary merger of the values of two cultures.¹³

Whether or not Klein succeeded in his own attempt at a literary merger of cultures is a matter of continuing debate. According to Pierre Anctil, "to fully appreciate Klein's work, the reader must be well versed in Judaic studies and in several languages, know how to appreciate all literary genres and be an expert on the subject of the immigration of the Ashkenazi Jews from eastern Europe—a formidable assignment indeed."¹⁴ Then again, to fully appreciate the works of Joyce a great deal of scholarship is required as well. And while Klein may not have achieved the literary status of Joyce, the ongoing popularity of his work amongst both Jewish and non-Jewish readers of Canadian poetry indicates that at least to some extent, he too succeeded.

Klein's reference in this letter to Joyce's work was also far from coincidental. Since his days as an undergraduate at McGill University, when *Ulysses* was still illegal, Klein was fascinated with Joyce's work and continued to study it for much of his life. As Caplan observes, "Klein always believed in

¹³ Caplan 87.

¹⁴ Pierre Anctil, "A.M. Klein and His Relations with French Quebec," *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader*, eds. Richard Menkis and Norman Ravvin (Calgary: Red Deer P, 2005) 351.

some mystical affinity between the Jews and the Irish.”¹⁵ Though he laboured for many years over Joyce’s great text, it was not his writing about *Ulysses* that was to gain him the greatest recognition. Rather, his most celebrated work was his 1948 Governor General’s Literary Award-winning collection, *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems*, in which he addresses primarily his French Canadian neighbours.

On the one hand, Klein felt an affinity for the French-speaking Quebecois population similar to that which he felt for the Irish. Like the Jews, they had been cast as the social inferiors of the country’s Anglo-Saxon elites, and they too had their own language and unique culture that they celebrated and upheld. As Anctil notes, “perhaps he had an intuition that these two peoples shared a difficult experience in common in their recent history, and that they had acquired little in a world where neither force of arms nor strength of numbers belonged to them.”¹⁶ On the other hand, Quebec Jews had often been the target of populist anti-Semitism, a side of the relationship Klein did not altogether omit from his writing. While, as Caplan notes, “anti-Semitism in the province of Quebec emanated from intellectual and ecclesiastical quarters far removed from the average citizen” and “individual relations between Jewish and French Montrealers were normally quite friendly,” there were also “occasional outbursts of rowdy hooliganism,” which saw the two populations at odds with one another.¹⁷ At no time was this more

¹⁵ Caplan 52.

¹⁶ Anctil 351.

¹⁷ Caplan 26.

problematic than during the Second World War, when the overwhelming French Canadian political position was of non-intervention in Europe. The mayor of Montreal, Camillien Houde, even went so far as to say that “in the event of a war between England and Italy, French Canadian sympathies would rest with Italy.”¹⁸ Later to be imprisoned for his defiance of conscription, Houde declared that “the French Canadians are Fascists, not by name, but by blood.”¹⁹

While Klein had previously admired Houde for his populist sensibilities, these statements naturally distressed him, especially in light of his awareness and sensitivity to the plight of Europe’s Jewish population. While his most explicit political statements were reserved for the editorial pages of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (of which he was the long-standing editor), his pained feelings regarding the perils of ethnic identification—something he had long celebrated—found their most poignant expression in “Political Meeting,” a poem dedicated to Houde and part of the *Rocking Chair* collection. (Houde was later to thank Klein, naively, for the dedication.) Unlike the more elaborately constructed poems contained in the collection, “Political Meeting” uses an understated lyrical simplicity to drive home its worrying message. “Where are your sons?” questions the charming orator in the final stanza. “The whole street wears one face” the poem continues, “shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises / the body-odour of race.”²⁰ While such ominous overtones of

¹⁸ Caplan 82.

¹⁹ Caplan 82.

²⁰ Klein, *Selected Poems* 117.

racial tension leave one of the strongest impressions in the collection, they are by no means representative. In fact, the majority of the poems in the *Rocking Chair* celebrate French-Canadian culture in the same sentimental way that Klein celebrates Jewish culture, particularly the rural nostalgia of the titular piece. However, poems such as "Political Meeting," as well as "Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga" illustrate Klein's awareness of the prejudice and tragedy that ethnic affiliation can occasionally engender. In addition to the anti-Semitism endured by Quebec Jews at the hands of their neighbours, the suffering of First Nations peoples and the wholesale destruction of their way of life indicated that the loss of a traditional culture was just as frequently to be mourned as its perpetuation was to be celebrated. As Linda Rosmovits writes, "no matter how great his desire to believe in the effectiveness of art as an autonomous realm, Klein's poems simply cannot resist the historical onslaught. Invariably, history comes crashing through."²¹

Despite such misgivings, however, the collection also included some of Klein's most ambitious efforts towards cultural synthesis, such as "Montreal," a poem written in a unique idiom intended to be comprehensible in either French or English. "Indeed, Klein's topographical poem is the embodiment in poetry of mingled languages" writes D.M.R. Bentley, "of his humanistic commitment to community and to communication."²² Though the poem's main effort is the depiction of the multilingual and multicultural metropolis, it is also very much

²¹ Linda Rosmovits, "History and the Poetic Construct: the Modernism of A.M. Klein," *Canadian Literature* 126 (1990): 87-102. 90.

²² D.M.R. Bentley, "Klein, Montreal, and Mankind," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 19 (1984): 34-57. 48.

concerned with the inner thoughts and feelings of its speaker. As in "Autobiographical" and "A Psalm Touching Genealogy," it is not merely the cultural fact that Klein wishes to portray but its personal significance as well. Thus the city's "ancient pavages and sainted routs," for example, are said to "traverse my spirit's conjured avenues."²³ In the final ecstatic lines of the poem the speaker announces that "here in these beating valves, you will / for all my mortal time reside!"²⁴ As Bentley observes, "in the magically transformed and transforming 'avenues' of his spirit the 'scenes and sounds' of the city can be seen and heard without exclusion or bitterness—in fact, with tenderness and acceptance."²⁵

If ethnic tensions in Quebec were a test of Klein's optimism, they were minor in comparison with the destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust. Foreseeing the eventual outcome of Nazi ideology in 1939, he wrote in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* that

it will mean the debacle of that fifth of the world Jewish population which has made some of the most outstanding contributions to our national and religious life, and the elimination of that group which more than any other in recent times has been the preserver and guardian of our traditions. We do not—we need not—dwell upon what it means in destruction, human misery, and death.²⁶

The confirmation of his fears led to some of his darkest poems, especially "Meditation Upon Survival." As opposed to the comforting ancestors of "A

²³ Klein, *Selected Poems* 89.

²⁴ Klein, *Selected Poems* 91.

²⁵ Bentley 48.

²⁶ A.M. Klein, *Beyond Sambation: Selected Essays and Editorials 1928-1955*, eds. Usher Caplan and M. W. Steinberg (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982) 59.

Psalm Touching Genealogy," it was now the recent dead who haunted his speaker, "giving to each of their nightmares my body for a bed."²⁷ Rather than a relatively benign group of patriarchs, Klein now invoked the recently murdered victims of the Holocaust, amongst whom the speaker of the poem feels his rightful place should be. The past that overshadows the work is thus not only one that is intensely personal, but one that is also incredibly painful. Sounding a note of despair for the culture he had so ambitiously and enthusiastically celebrated in previous poems, Klein writes:

What else, therefore, to do
But leave these bones that are not ash to fill-
O not my father's vault—but the glass-case
Some proud museum catalogues Last Jew.²⁸

Though the European bastion of Yiddish culture had been destroyed and its North American counterparts were quickly losing ground in the post-war years to the powers of assimilation, Klein found renewed hope and purpose with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Indeed, since his adolescence he had been an ardent Zionist, to the extent that his valedictory address upon graduation from Baron Byng High School was nearly censored when he "remarked how strange it had seemed then that among all the many flags that bedecked the new building the only one missing was the banner of the people who made up ninety percent of the student body."²⁹ Fittingly, Klein saw Zionism not just as a political imperative, but as a cultural one as well.

²⁷ Klein, *Selected Poems* 135.

²⁸ Klein, *Selected Poems* 135.

²⁹ Caplan 39.

According to Caplan, "he agreed with the 'cultural Zionist' Achad Ha'am that the land of Israel was not to be just a political haven for Jews, but rather a spiritual center for the renaissance of Jewish creativity around the world."³⁰ To this end he undertook one of his most cherished literary projects, the translation of the works of Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik. "Next to Joyce," Caplan writes, "Bialik was his greatest literary hero. Klein saw in him the idea model of the Jewish national poet, a twentieth-century biblical prophet, an elevated genius who nevertheless remained a true man of the people."³¹ Aside from his translations and newspaper editorials, however, it was in his novel, *The Second Scroll*, that Klein gives articulation to his hopes and fears regarding the future of Jewish culture in Israel. The narrator, ostensibly sent to tour the country in search of poets to include in an anthology, celebrates the possibilities of a rejuvenated Hebrew, but laments the barbarism of an immature literature and its utter rejection of the Diaspora culture that Klein had celebrated for so long. "It was an exciting kind of poetry," the narrator observes, "large-gestured, primitive, tribal, but its insularity repelled me, its reactionary mottoes stood as a wall against my enjoyment of its rich overhanging fruit."³²

While Klein was only 42 years old upon the publication of *The Second Scroll*, these hopeful, if highly reserved, notes were to be last of his creative

³⁰ Caplan 47.

³¹ Caplan 71.

³² A.M. Klein, *The Second Scroll* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000) 73-74.

career. Following a drawn-out mental breakdown and suicide attempt, he retreated into silence for the final decades of his life, seldom speaking even to those closest to him or venturing outside of his home. Despite his truncated career, however, his literary legacy continues to address a theme that is as relevant today as it was during his lifetime. Ethnic tensions and issues of identity continue to plague Western countries, and politicians and policy-makers continue to grope for a means of maintaining a diverse yet harmonious society. While Klein does not offer any concrete recommendations, he does offer an artistic example through his attempts to bridge languages and cultures and to understand the values of others as much as he tries to articulate his own. If there is one thing that Klein makes manifestly clear it is that seemingly anachronistic values such as religion and ethnic identity are still highly important, and can be a source of value and beauty rather than conflict or violence.

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Keeping the Door Closed: Canada's Restrictive Immigration Policies
towards European Jews during World War Two

1. Introduction

Holocaust survivor Oscar Morawetz was one of the few who fled war-torn Europe and successfully immigrated to Canada. While Brazil accepted 27,000, Argentina 50,000, and the United States 200,000, Canada offered entry to Morawetz as one of the meagre five-thousand Jews allowed into a country whose immigration policy systematically shut out Jewish victims of Nazi persecution. According to Morawetz, if Prime Minister Mackenzie King's Director of Immigration, F.C. Blair, had been German instead of Canadian, "he would have been the best Nazi the world has ever known."¹

This paper examines the Canadian government's restrictive policy towards Jewish immigration prior to and during the Second World War. It attributes core responsibility to Canadian political officials, specifically Mackenzie King and F.C. Blair, for enforcing anti-Semitic immigration policies that had their roots in similarly intolerant social attitudes that pervaded federal cabinets even before WWII. Yet many Canadian Christian and Jewish organizations did try to reverse prevailing policies and aid the small number of Jews who managed to reach Canada. Research on these efforts was spurred by

¹ "None is Too Many," *The Journal*, hosted by Mary Lou Finlay and Barbara Frumm, 6 Oct 1982, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 25 Jan 2007 <http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-71-1579-10644/conflict_war/echoes_of_auschwitz/clip5>.

the ground-breaking publication in 1983 of Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None is Too Many*.

2. Canadian Anti-Semitism Before the War

Before the official outbreak of WWII in 1939, Mackenzie King had already outlined his position towards the Jewish community of pre-war Europe. Admitting Jews to Canada, King wrote in 1938, would create "an internal problem" and "an international one," too, as Canada aimed to "keep this part of the Continent free from unrest and from too great an intermixture of foreign strains of blood."² Mackenzie King feared "riots if we agreed to a policy that admitted numbers of Jews," and other ensuing "difficulties between the Provinces and the Dominion."³ Anti-Semitism had already found its way into the rhetoric of the Canadian Prime Minister prior to the declaration of WWII. By equating Jews with "foreigners" (even when many were currently prospering in Canada), and assuming the public would protest in response to an open-door immigration policy, Mackenzie King was already disseminating anti-Semitism into society. Additionally, foreseeing potential federal-provincial rifts if Jews were to be admitted into Canada furthered the discrimination. It is therefore reasonable to assert that Mackenzie King and his cabinet ministers, who agreed with his views on keeping Jews out of Canada, save three members, set racist governmental policies prior to the Second World War. The few members of

² William Lyon Mackenzie King, diary entry, 29 Mar 1938, National Archives of Canada. <<http://king.collectionscanada.ca/EN/PageView.asp>> 24 Jan 2007.

³ King par. 3.

Mackenzie King's cabinet who favoured an open-door immigration policy on "humanitarian grounds" did not manage to influence the Prime Minister's decision to deny Jewish refugees entry into Canada, as that would threaten his aspiration to guarantee "the greatest happiness [...] for the greatest number in the long run."⁴

In September 1939, Jews were desperate to leave Germany and the widespread pogroms that plagued many western European societies. It was at this time that Blair himself wrote of his plan to sternly limit Jewish immigration into Canada. In Blair's words: the "pressure on the part of Jewish people to get into Canada was never greater than it is now, and I am glad to be able to add that after 35 years of experience here that it has never been so carefully controlled."⁵ This is yet another example of pre-war anti-Semitic sentiments echoing from the Canadian Parliament.

3. Was Canada as Bad as They?

The *S.S. St. Louis*, destined for Havana, Cuba, set sail on May 15, 1939. Aboard the ship, a total of 907 Jewish refugees left Hamburg in flight from Nazi Germany. After fifteen days at sea, the Hamburg-American *S.S. St. Louis* reached the port of Havana, where the passengers were to await a quota number, which would allow them to eventually enter the United States. Despite their immaculate paperwork and the exorbitant cost paid for the voyage, the Cuban government refused to permit the Jewish travellers entry

⁴ King par. 3.

⁵ "None is Too Many," CBC television broadcast.

into Havana. The passengers were mostly former well-off business owners, now only with an American entrance visa to their name.⁶ After the lengthy trip, Cuban officials had to physically prevent passengers on board the *S.S. St. Louis* from jumping over the walkway from the ship to the mainland onto Cuban territory.⁷ Various Jewish organizations appealed to Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Panama for help, but “within two days all the countries of Latin America had rejected” the ship.⁸ The United States, too, forbade the ship from docking on its soil; even the lobbying efforts of American Jewish organizations failed. These community institutions attempted to persuade President Theodore Roosevelt to grant the ship admission to America, but it proved useless. Weeks later, the ship still lacked a final destination; Canada became the only hope for its Jewish passengers.

A group of prominent Christian Torontonians sent Mackenzie King a telegram on June 7, 1939 with the intent of convincing him to allow the mostly middle-class Jewish refugees sanctuary in Canada. Their efforts, appealing to “true Christian charity,” requesting the Prime Minister to allow “907 homeless exiles” on board the ship entry in Canada did not prove successful.⁹ The 41 signatures on the telegram belonged to such prominent Christians as professors,

⁶ Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2000) 63.

⁷ Diana Linden, “Ben Shahn, The Four Freedoms, and the S.S. St Louis,” *American Jewish History* 86.4 (1998): 419-440. 431.

⁸ Abella and Troper 63.

⁹ George M. Wrong, et al, transcript of telegram to King, 7 June 1939, W.L. Mackenzie Papers, National Archives of Canada, Toronto.

bishops, and reverends.¹⁰ News of the telegram made it to the *Globe and Mail* the following day, but still had little to no effect on Mackenzie King. At the time the telegram was sent, King was busy travelling with the Royal Family in Washington, DC. The Prime Minister's consultation with Blair about the crisis only encouraged his view: Blair's claim that "these refugees did not qualify under immigration laws" prompted the immigration minister to proclaim that "the line must be drawn somewhere."¹¹ And it was. The *S.S. St. Louis*, for lack of any other option, returned to Europe. The destinies of many of the passengers were brutal deaths in the concentration camps, gas chambers, and crematoria of Nazi Germany.

Similar to how Germany set out to exterminate the Jews, Cuba, each Latin American country, the United States, and Canada all refused to allow any more Jews onto their land. The refusal of these countries to grant refuge to the Jews made them accomplices in the resultant murders. German propaganda took advantage of the blatantly anti-Semitic immigration policies that led to the fate of the *S.S. St. Louis*. A German journal article in August 1939 claimed: "We are saying openly that we do not want the Jews while the democracies keep on claiming that they are willing to receive them—and then leave the guests out in the cold! Aren't we savages better men after all?"¹² This provided justification for the maltreatment of the Jews: nobody *really* cared about them, so the Nazis could justify the "solution" to their alleged "problem." One

¹⁰ Judith Robinson, "Forty Second Signature is Invisible," *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 8 June, 1939: 2.17.

¹¹ Abella and Troper 64.

¹² Linden 431.

could argue that if the Nazis were a ghastly bunch, then the Canadians in charge were appalling as well. The *S.S. St. Louis* crisis was the precursor to the Canadian immigration policy that was to become the most restrictive towards Jews than any other country's during the Nazi regime. According to scholar Irving Abella, co-author of *None is Too Many*, Canada "undoubtedly had the worst record of any country in the world."¹³

4. The Role of the Churches

With the controversial publication of *None is Too Many*, it was almost as if a secret had escaped. The largely untold story of Canada's restrictive immigration policies towards Jews during WWII was finally exposed in the early 1980s; this was a story that many received warmly while others did not. During a recent lecture at McGill University, Abella discussed the apologies he received from many Canadians on behalf of the government, as well as many antagonistic responses to his study. Students at Laval University wanted to know why Abella even bothered researching the subject; it was history, and history is over. However, according to Abella, the students were most likely unaware that around the same time as the publication of *None is Too Many*, Canada was dealing with the "Vietnamese boat crisis" and debating whether or not to grant sanctuary to Vietnamese refugees. Abella and Troper's seminal work prompted the Canadian government to take in the Vietnamese refugees,

¹³ "None is Too Many," CBC television broadcast.

since the current immigration minister did not want to be known as another F.C. Blair.¹⁴

The awareness raised by *None is Too Many* also spawned a new field of research into the role of the churches during WWII in Canada. Abella and Troper accused the churches of keeping silent as the Jews were denied entry into Canada. In response to this claim, questions were raised if this were really the case, and if so, to what extent. In *How Silent Were the Churches: Canadian Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era*, Alan Davies and Marilyn Nefsky set out to examine the role of Canadian Protestant churches during WWII. The authors accuse Abella and Troper of ambiguity: to whom were they referring in *None is Too Many* when they branded “the churches” as silent? Davies and Nefsky question whether or not Abella and Troper meant the congregations, organizations, the clergy, the elite, or all Christians, as these groups all reacted differently during the war.¹⁵ Additionally, Davies and Nefsky point to the vague definition of “silence.” For example, as a whole, the Quakers were literally silent but incredibly “noisy” in their actions.

Atypical when compared to other orthodox Christians, the Quakers aligned themselves with the Jews. Their belief that Nazism was harmful not only to Jewish people but “to all those living in Germany who believe in liberty and the right of conscience with we Anglo-Saxons, and especially the Quakers,”

¹⁴ Irving Abella, “Canadian Jewish History,” lecture, McGill University, Montreal, 25 Jan 2007.

¹⁵ Alan Davies and Marilyn F. Nefsky. *How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1997) 123.

thus placing the Jews and Quakers on a level playing field.¹⁶ Following *Kristallnacht*, the Quakers expressed outright anti-Nazi sentiments.¹⁷ In an article in *The Canadian Friend*, the Quakers maintained that “the fact that the victims [of *Kristallnacht*] are of Jewish or partial Jewish descent is not a factor in the thinking of Christians”; it was thus thought to be urgent to do “something tangible to demonstrate our fellow-feeling for these people.”¹⁸ Showing their support for the Jewish community, aid was also provided for the Jews in Germany on behalf of Quaker agencies. Mackenzie King’s anti-refugee policies hit home with the Quaker lobbyists; one such Quaker from Nova Scotia attempted to sponsor a German Jewish family of four but was unsuccessful, even after writing directly to Mackenzie King, Governor General The Earl of Athlone, and King George VI himself.¹⁹ Prominent Quaker spokesperson Raymond Booth emphasized that the Canadian “refugee problem is not a Jewish one, but if it were, I would want to help just the same.”²⁰ Booth criticized government officials for being reluctant to let into the country’s borders “even those [refugees] who can make a definite and immediate contribution” to Canada.²¹ Beyond verbal criticisms of the government, Quaker organizations continued throughout WWII to donate clothing, ship food, and raise money for “those who have been driven out of European countries

¹⁶ Davies and Nefsky 117.

¹⁷ *Kristallnacht*, the “night of broken glass,” where the windows of many Jewish-owned businesses in Germany were smashed by the Nazis, took place on November 9, 1938. Along with the defacement of Jewish shops and synagogues, numerous Jews were taken to concentration camps or beaten to death that night.

¹⁸ Davies and Nefsky 118.

¹⁹ Davies and Nefsky 119.

²⁰ Davies and Nefsky 120.

²¹ Davies and Nefsky 120.

because of their Jewish birth."²² It is clear that the actions on the part of the Quakers in response to Hitler's atrocities and Mackenzie King's carelessness played a large role in aiding the Jews of Europe. Davies and Nefsky describe the "Quaker preference for action rather than speech" as a reason why Abella and Troper failed to address this group's assistance.²³ Other scholars also tackle the silence on the part of the Quakers, describing their path as one of "few words and many deeds."²⁴

As a whole, in the 1930s and '40s, the churches were grappling with the concepts of traditional anti-Semitic sentiments and the new ideals of tolerance and interfaith partnership. This created an environment whereby some Canadian churches were essentially unsure of their views towards the Jews. Some of them, therefore, arguably responded to the Nazi persecution with "too little too late."²⁵ As expected, the more conservative churches were, the less willing they were to express any sympathy or aid to the Jews in need. However, this was not always the case; some fundamentalists and evangelicals fervently opposed Nazism and made strong demands to rescue the Jews. Judaism's denial of Christ affected the Protestant reaction to Nazism; hence some Protestants were unresponsive or even willing to accept Hitler's atrocities towards the Jews. Despite their inaction regarding the barring of European Jews from Canada, few Canadian Protestants expressed anti-Semitism to the same extent as the Nazis. The theology of many of the Christian churches

²² Davies and Nefsky 121.

²³ Davies and Nefsky 122.

²⁴ Davies and Nefsky 122.

²⁵ Davies and Nefsky 123.

unquestionably preached negative tendencies towards the Jews, therefore encouraging some practising Christians to not only ignore the Holocaust but also to campaign for Jewish conversions.²⁶ Reactions among Canadian Christians were diverse. Many, such as Robert Booth of the Quakers and certain fundamentalist leaders, expressed ardent opposition to Hitler's attacks on the Jews and Mackenzie King's restrictive immigration policies. It was these Christians who stood up for their strong values of human rights, and helped shape the modern Canadian church, now much "wiser than in the past."²⁷

5. The Role of Canadian Jewish Organizations

The Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada (JIAS) was one organization that showed strong resistance to Mackenzie King's quota of Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. Established in 1920 as part of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), the efforts of JIAS depended heavily on the Canadian Jewish community, many of whom still had relatives in Europe. However, the dissolution of the CJC almost immediately after its creation increased the power of JIAS until the CJC was re-established in 1933.²⁸

Because of its relatively close relationship with government officials in the 1930s, JIAS was able to approach the Canadian government when it felt it necessary, such as when regarding employment opportunities for German and

²⁶ Davies and Nefsky 131.

²⁷ Davies and Nefsky 131.

²⁸ Uta Eichler, "Between Despair and Hope: The Work of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society in the 1930s and 40s." Masters thesis, Queen's University, 1998. 8.

Austrian refugees.²⁹ Despite their influence, the impact of the Great Depression on Canadian society created exclusionary immigration policies for virtually all those that desired to come to Canada, not just the Jews. However, after the effects of the Great Depression became more muted, JIAS took an active role in assisting Jewish refugees into Canada while simultaneously pressuring the Canadian government to respond to its aims. An undated memorandum was sent to immigration authorities from JIAS with the goal of persuading “the government to admit more German-Jewish refugees into the country” on the grounds the refugees were skilled and adaptable.³⁰ Executives among JIAS advocated for “more humane” immigration laws, condemning Mackenzie King’s exclusionary policies in the early 1930s.

Thomas Crerar was appointed chair of the Department of Mines and Resources in 1936, a position that held him partly responsible for coordinating Canadian immigration. Although he “displayed a certain degree of sympathy towards the Jewish refugees,” Crerar still enforced existing anti-Semitic government policies by failing to persuade Quebec cabinet members to allow Jewish victims of persecution entrance into Canada.³¹ Anti-Semitism in Quebec was especially strong, partially because of the Catholic Church’s well-known and official negative stance towards the Jews. Even in 1933, according to the minutes of a JIAS meeting, French Canadians were, as a collectivity, the most outspoken group “against the plans for the settlement of German Jewish

²⁹ Eichler i.

³⁰ Eichler 11.

³¹ Eichler 12.

refugees in the country."³² Mackenzie King was more concerned with national unity and the threat of Quebec separatism. He consequently catered to Quebecers and their anti-Semitic sentiments.³³ The Canadian government's restrictive policy towards the Jews was an unexpected one for Jews living in Canada, and the extent to which the policies were pursued was the greatest surprise of all.

JIAS employed numerous methods in order to ensure the future of Canadian Jewry. Jewish Members of Parliament were sent a delegation, whereby special permits were proposed for families of German Jewish descent. Unsurprisingly, the lack of consent from the Canadian cabinet, even with Crerar's support, prevented the motion from going any further.³⁴ Despite its determination, the efforts of the JIAS were often unfruitful.

Many German Jews sent individual applications to JIAS, often requesting to take up farming. Numerous educated refugees had heard Canada was looking for farmers, and were "prepared to give up their professions and learn enough about agriculture to become farmers."³⁵ JIAS was also instrumental in establishing contact between Canadians and their refugee relatives, who were sometimes willing to help. As the number of applications for immigration to Canada surged after *Kristallnacht*, JIAS was unable to accommodate the rising number of persecuted Jews seeking refuge in Canada. One such reply to an application from a German doctor in 1939 begging for urgent help caused JIAS

³² Eichler 13.

³³ Eichler 109.

³⁴ Eichler 16.

³⁵ Eichler 21.

to express regret, writing: "We are terribly sorry that the restrictions that were imposed on immigration several years ago have not been lifted yet."³⁶ The same response was repeated by JIAS for what seemed to be every request; the organization was unsure as to how much they could help the now thousands of European Jews who applied to immigrate to Canada. Nonetheless, they assured the applicants they would continue to try. Even a personal letter from JIAS to Director of Immigration F.C. Blair regarding the specific case of a machinist and aviation mechanic from Vienna failed; Blair's department "replied that there was no position even for someone with these qualifications."³⁷ Additionally, the Canadian government refused to permit temporary refuge to Jews who had already arranged immigration to the United States, and simply wanted to wait in Canada until their quota number was called. Stripped of their German citizenship, the Canadian government found yet another excuse to deny Jewish immigrants entry into the country: they were stateless and therefore unacceptable regardless of their situation. Due to these stringent restrictions, often all JIAS could provide was advice; they often recommended settling in the United States or trying to gain access to Cuba.

JIAS was successful in granting some Jews refuge in Canada, after directly contacting immigration officials and obtaining Orders in Council. Groups of Jewish European children fleeing Nazism were assisted by JIAS from 1939-40, but the Canadian government only ended up accepting those children

³⁶ Eichler 26-27.

³⁷ Eichler 32.

with British citizenship.³⁸ Disagreements even erupted internally between Jewish organizations—the result of poor inter-organizational delineation of tasks—thereby creating more unnecessary disorder during a time of crisis.³⁹

6. Conclusion

The door was kept closed for many Jews following the Second World War; it was easier for former Nazis to enter Canada than Jewish refugees.⁴⁰ The efforts of prominent Christians pressuring Mackenzie King to allow the passengers of the *S.S. St. Louis* to enter Canada marked the beginning of an anti-Semitic government policy that ended not even sixty years ago. Among others, Quakers and Jewish organizations did all they could to help the Jewish victims of Nazism escape into a country also entrenched in anti-Semitism. They did all they could, yet only 5,000 Jews were saved, which is one-tenth of the number Argentina accepted, and one-fortieth of the United States. Ironically, European Jews during the Nazi regime were denied entry into a country that now prides itself on its constitutional multiculturalism.

Even after the horrors of the Holocaust became public, “the Canadian government continued its efforts to keep European Jews out.”⁴¹ According to many historians, half of the Canadians polled in October 1946 still wanted Jews to be excluded; the government was more concerned with reintegrating

³⁸ Eichler 113.

³⁹ Abella and Troper 13.

⁴⁰ “None is Too Many,” CBC television broadcast.

⁴¹ J.L. Granatstein, “Review of *None is Too Many* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper,” *American Historical Review* 84.3 (1984): 886-887. 886.

Canadian soldiers than making public the results of Hitler's atrocities.⁴² Canada's actions towards the Jews of Europe are inexcusable regardless of whether or not they claimed not to know what was really going on in Europe. It is plausible that Canadian government officials lacked concrete knowledge regarding the existence of Nazi death camps specifically, but they "certainly knew that Jews were being massacred by the millions."⁴³

The creation of Israel in 1948 prompted Canada to open its doors "only by a crack," but Canada did eventually begin to lift the barriers thwarting Jewish immigration.⁴⁴ However, just like the churches, Canada had done too little, too late. The Jews now had a homeland, a place that would accept them regardless of age, gender, or level of education. Nevertheless, Canada has learned from Mackenzie King and Blair's mistakes. History repeats itself in different forms, and such was the case with the Vietnamese boat people who were fortunate enough to be welcomed into Canada in the 1980s. It was a promise that Canadians and the world as a whole declared following WWII; that under their watch, another Holocaust would occur *never again*.

⁴² Janice Arnold, "Wartime Canada in no position to rescue Jews: historian," *The Canadian Jewish News*, 18 Jan 2007: Community section.

⁴³ "None is Too Many," CBC television broadcast.

⁴⁴ Abella and Troper 285.

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Montreal Jewish Life and the Truth about *Lies My Father Told Me*

1. Introduction

If the issue of Canadian culture is a thorny topic, full of debate, tension and, according to many, ambiguity, the same is no less true of Canadian Jewish culture. Does a specifically Canadian Jewish culture even exist, scholars have been prone to ask, one that is both distinctly Jewish and identifiably Canadian? If the corpus of research in the field of Canadian Jewish Studies is any indication, there are academics who believe this is indeed the case. Yet, the issue is still contentious. Even figures such as Concordia University's Norm Ravvin, an intensely pro-active advocate of Canadian Jewish Studies, candidly admits that Canadian Jewish culture is not a widely recognized fact. It is, Ravvin confesses, quite the contrary—a marginal aspect of mainstream Canadian literature, film, and theatre.¹

Nevertheless, a flash of discovery during my childhood, the viewing of *Lies My Father Told Me*,² introduced me to Canadian Jewish culture, and was sufficiently powerful to leave me with a memory that engendered my lifelong fascination with Jewish Canada and, consequently, an ongoing exploration of cultural memory and its conflicted relationship to nostalgic fantasy. It is an

¹ Norman Ravvin, introduction, *Not Quite Mainstream: Canadian Jewish Short Stories*, ed. Norm Ravvin (Calgary: Red Deer P, 2001) 15.

² *Lies My Father Told Me*, dir. Jan Kadar, perf. Yossi Yadin, Len Birman, Marilyn Lightstone, Jeff Lynas. Pentimento Productions, Pentacle VIII Productions, 1975. Ironically, *Lies My Father Told Me*, while produced by a Canadian company and written by Ted Allan, a Jewish native of Montreal, was directed by European Jan Kadar.

open-ended exploration, but it has resulted in the conclusion that Canadian Jewish culture seemed to reach a zenith in Montreal during the early and mid-twentieth century. This was a historical moment that was effectively reiterated by a small number of writers who had the good fortune to live through a profound epoch in Jewish life, and the skill to extract timeless, universal truths from this particular moment in time. With their access to the heyday of a cultural phenomenon and their talent, they immortalized a picture of Canadian Jewish life in a fashion that created recognizable images without reducing the imagery to vapid cliché or vacuous banality.³

2. Discovering "The Main"

By the time I was seven I already understood that, if Canadian Jewry possessed any mystique whatsoever, it was rooted in the busy thoroughfares of Montreal where Yiddish-speaking newcomers to the True North had once muddled their way through life in order to claim their place in the Canadian mosaic. This revelation came to me the night my parents took me to a 1975 screening of *Lies My Father Told Me* at Vancouver's Ridge Theatre, a *bona fide* movie house on Arbutus Street that showed films, not just blockbusters. Whether or not I even knew about Montreal prior to that night when I sat mesmerized by the cinematic version of Ted Allan's 1949 short story, I cannot

³ It is important to note that the image of Montreal Jewry that has, in many ways, endured is based on a narrow idea of Canadian Jews as descendants of a Eastern European, Yiddish-speaking tradition. In fact, for the last few decades, Montreal, along with Toronto and other major Canadian cities, has had a steadily growing Sephardic Jewish population. Nevertheless, popular conceptions of Jewish Canada are often founded upon a petrified notion of early twentieth-century Montreal Jews and the writing, journalism, television, theatre and film that has focused on that era.

say. But, for many years to come, Montreal was my personal barometer for evaluating the authenticity of all things I considered Jewish.

In 1975, I was well aware of Jewish immigrant life set against the gritty backdrop of new-world hustle and bustle. I was a great fan of the Sydney Taylor series, *All-of-a-Kind Family*. In some indescribable way, those cheerful novels, which romanticized one Jewish family's journey through the wilds of immigrant life on the Lower East Side, gave me one of my earliest, and probably most formative, conceptions of *real* Jewishness. It was not as though I was devoid of European Jewishness within my own reality. Three out of four of my grandparents and a potpourri of aunts and uncles spoke English with unmistakably foreign accents; accents inflected with Russian, Yiddish and Polish that I interpreted as quintessentially Jewish. In my mind, they effused old-world *Yiddishkeit* in everything they did, even if it was not of the Sabbath-observant variety—from *lichtbenching* on Friday night to drinking their tea from tall, glass cups. Nevertheless, Vancouver, Jewishly, was somewhat of a desert. A local version of The Main⁴ did not exist. The synagogues were stately, not *heimish*. There were few Jewish shops, and only one kosher store, Leon's, run, not by a local, but by a man from New York and his family. In close proximity to each other were Harry and Jerry's drug store—a Jewish-owned, primarily Jewish-patronized business—Kaplan's kosher-style deli, a few offices belonging to Jewish organizations, and the Jewish Community Centre. This did not

⁴ In the first part of the twentieth century, Montreal's Jewish community referred to St. Lawrence Boulevard, a major downtown thoroughfare, as the Main. The street's official name was later changed to Boulevard St. Laurent.

compare, however, to the humming throngs and establishments that cluttered Sydney Taylor's Grand Street. It was not even a pale imitation. Then I saw *Lies My Father Told Me* and I understood that our very own Canadian Yavneh⁵ existed, it was just considerably due east.

The film *Lies My Father Told Me*, as I recall it, is the story of a young Jewish boy caught between his English-speaking, acculturated father and his pious, European grandfather. The boy, consistent with all narrative expectations, identifies with his grandfather and considers their Sunday morning expeditions through the cobbled streets of Jewish Montreal—the grandfather is a traditional horse-and-wagon peddler—to be the highlight of his life. The boy adores his grandfather, his time-worn religiosity, his exoticness, and not unimportantly, his horse. The father, conversely, as portrayed through the son's gaze, is a ne'er-do-well, down-on-his-luck slouch who belittles Judaism, mocks his father-in-law and behaves like a thug. As the film suggests, however, there is no beating back the hands of time—or assimilation. The beloved Zaida becomes ill and disease takes its course. The father thus seizes the opportunity to likewise send the horse on to its eternal rest. The little boy, we come to understand, will now have to adjust to the world of twentieth-century Canada in a way that his grandfather could not.

I do not have sufficient recall to note my immediate reaction to the film more than thirty years ago. What I can attest to, however, is the way in which

⁵ Cynthia Ozick, "America: Towards Yavneh," *What is Jewish Literature?*, ed. Hana Wirth Neshet (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994). In a 1970s speech delivered at the Weitzman Institute in Rehovot, Israel, the American Jewish writer and thinker, Cynthia Ozick, invoked the city of Yavneh to refer to "displaced Jerusalem." In a broad sense, Jewish tradition considers Yavneh the original paradigm for the Jewish Diaspora as it was the seat of Jewish religious scholarship following the fall of the Temple.

that film cemented my fascination with European Jewry, Montreal, turn-of-the-century Jewish immigration, Jewishness, and Judaism. Not many years later, I learned about the Holocaust from my Hebrew School and devoured, almost in one sitting, a Lucy Davidowicz children's reader about Hitler's war against the Jews. I discovered Anne Frank. Israel, the modern state, entered my consciousness. I attended *mincha/maariv* services with my grandfather after my Hebrew School lessons.⁶ I loved studying for my Bat Mitzvah. All of this, a hodge-podge of snippets from a mainstream Canadian Jewish childhood, seemed somehow connected to that evening at The Ridge and the screening of a movie about a world that had dissolved long before I was even born.

In grade nine, seven long years after my outing to the Ridge theatre, I read a book that further sealed my image of Montreal as the epicentre of the Canadian Jewish homeland, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*.⁷ In a 2001 article, written less than two weeks after Mordecai Richler died, Bill Gladstone argues that Canadian Jewish literature, despite its infinite debt to Richler, was a healthy and fecund tradition that would thrive far beyond Duddy Kravitz and St. Urbain Street. Such a body of prose and poetry may exist, though I am unaware of any Canadian Jewish novel written in the recent past with the

⁶ When I was growing up, my family belonged to the Beth Israel Synagogue in Vancouver, Canada. Although the *mincha* prayer service is, according to classic Jewish law, to be recited during the afternoon, with the *maariv* service following after sundown, our synagogue had a year-round *mincha/maariv* service every evening at six o'clock, which was conveniently timed to coincide with the conclusion of my afternoon Hebrew school lessons. Thus, I was regularly present twice a week and available—from September through June—at the commencement of the service to join my grandfather, and a dozen other elderly men, in prayer.

⁷ Please see: Mordecai Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Toronto: Penguin, 1959).

power to make a Jewish child from the far reaches of the Pacific Northwest experience such profound ownership of the Canadian Jewish experience.

In a compelling, and fairly despondent e-dialogue, B. Glen Rotchin and Harold Heft debate just this issue.⁸ Is there a Canadian Jewish literature beyond the writing of immigrant struggle or post-immigrant alienation that has meaning and significance? A literature, moreover, with the power to change lives, influence ideas, in short, to alter our Jewish consciousness? These questions were asked long ago in relation to American Jewish literature. In the 1970s, Irving Howe, a doyen of Jewish literary critics, proffered the gloomy forecast in his introduction to *Jewish American Stories*⁹ that assimilation would herald the death of powerful Jewish literature. Other critics, however, such as Ruth Wisse, were more optimistic and challenged Howe's prophecy with speculation about the potential for new direction and focus in American Jewish writing.¹⁰

These questions are endlessly complicated and warrant a whole library of responsa, but Heft makes one point that, in this context, is particularly worth scrutiny for its pertinence to Kadar's film. In asking whether struggle, be it social, ethnic, religious or otherwise, is a necessary catalyst for the creation of good art, he suggests that the subject is, ultimately, secondary to the artistic process. Heft elaborates:

⁸ Please see: Harold Heft and B. Glen Rotchin. "Towards a New Jewish Canadian Literature: An E-mail Discussion," *Parchment* 11 (2002-2003): 46-70.

⁹ Please see: Irving Howe, ed. *Jewish American Stories* (New York: New American Library, 1977).

¹⁰ Ruth Wisse, "American Jewish Writing: Act II," *Commentary* 1976, 11 May 2008 <<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/american-jewish-writing-act-ii-5673>>.

Richler's classmates at Baron Byng never knew that one day they would be representative of a major cultural movement—they were just there. Maybe that's why Jewish writers are failing to write major work these days—everyone's looking for that big Jewish subject [...] If we're suburban, then fine, we're suburban, let's see what that means in literary terms. If we're pampered, let's deal with it [...] If you went to Ruby Foo's for expensive wonton soup every Friday night, then that is no less a Jewish Canadian experience than Klein finding his father's white beard hair in "Heirloom."¹¹

Heft insists that Richler was not great because he was endowed with a resplendent Jewish environment from which he could fashion evocative settings, characters, narratives, conflicts, and crises. It was, according to Heft, through fine powers of imagination, storytelling and a genius for writing that Richler was able to transform his world into an influential literary universe.

However, Rotchin makes a different point that cannot be discounted. For writers that emerged from the Jewish ghetto, meaning Montreal, "being Jewish was a fact, not a choice. It simply had to inform their literary sensibilities because it was, in fact, who they were."¹² Furthermore, their works, similar to *Lies My Father Told Me*, often followed "journey[s] back to lost youth...reveal[ing] people as authentic as the settings in which they are captured."¹³ Rotchin specifically refers to A.M. Klein and Irving Layton, but certainly the claim applies equally to Richler and Ted Allan. In retrospect, it seems that the quality of *Lies My Father Told Me* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* that captivated me was that very "fact" of their Jewishness. It

¹¹ Heft and Rotchin 49.

¹² Heft and Rotchin 48.

¹³ A.H. Weiler "'Lies My Father Told Me,' Memories of a Jewish Boyhood," *The New York Times* 13 Oct 1975, 3 May 2008 <<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?>> par. 9.

was a quality that did represent “a major cultural movement,” as Heft would have it, but not the Jewish world in which I had grown up: a montage of an ultra-diverse Jewish community in a state of hyper post-alienation.

3. Montreal in the '80s: A Challenge to Jewish Nostalgia

The dissipation of that “fact” of “being Jewish” that Rotchin blames for the decline in powerful Jewish writing was also reflected in the cultural landscape of Montreal a few decades after the major waves of early twentieth-century Jewish immigration. At fifteen, I travelled to Montreal for the first time. I stayed in the suburb of Cote St. Luc,¹⁴ not the downtown Jewish ghetto, and learned firsthand that Jewish Montreal was no longer an ethnic novelty. It was bourgeois middle-class Canada. It had Jewish amenities to meet every religious and cultural need, but it was not suggestive of a different time and place. Downtown, too, was hardly the Jewish bastion of my imagination. Instead, it was a maze of hip clubs, swanky jazz bars and dark cafés. It was enthralling, to be sure, but not Jewishly redolent. After only a few days in the city’s summer haze, I went north to spend my summer at Camp Biluim, a Young Judea¹⁵ camp on the shores of Lac Mercier across from Mont Tremblant. I was expecting, at least to a limited extent, the rambling countryside of Duddy Kravitz’s youthful dreams. Instead, I found an upscale French-Canadian resort

¹⁴ For more than three decades, Cote St. Luc has been Montreal’s pre-eminent Jewish neighbourhood and its largest commercial centre, Cavendish Mall, is nearly as important to the community as St. Lawrence Street was to turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants.

¹⁵ Young Judea is, according to its website, one of North America’s oldest Zionist youth organizations. In Canada, numerous summer camps are part of the Young Judea movement, including Biluim, a leadership training camp for students entering the tenth grade.

area that seemed perfectly gentile and enlightened. Bigoted, crass, rude Richler countryside it was not. But my search was not over.

Two years later, as a first-year student at McGill, I took up residence downtown on campus at McConnell Hall. There were many students at McGill from Vancouver. Nevertheless, on a certain level, I knew my attraction to Montreal was connected to more than the adventure of travelling east, the university's academic reputation, and St. Catherine's notable nightlife. I wanted to discover the peddlers' alleys where colourful street-side transactions in a bumpy mix of Yiddish and English took place between Talmudic scholars, posing as vendors, and *Yiddishe mamas*, recreated as Canadian housewives. I wanted to explore the haunts of Jake Hirsh's St. Urbain's Horseman.

In searching for old Jewish Montreal, what I learned is that one needs to enlist the imagination to recapture a faded past. Boulevard St. Laurent in the late 1980s had traces of a Jewish past, eternalized in no small part thanks to Richler's works, and which paint a picture of 1930's Jewish Montreal north of Sherbrooke Street.¹⁶ Legendary landmarks, such as Schwartz's Deli and a few neighbourhood grocery stores were still in existence, but *dépaneurs*,¹⁷ and discount fashion and low-end furniture stores were far more prominent. Admittedly, the streets from Park Avenue all the way north to St. Viateur, as well as the buildings, sidewalks and lampposts, did seem to recall a Jewish

¹⁶ Zachary Baker, "Montreal of Yesterday: A Snapshot of Jewish Life in Montreal During the Era of Mass Immigration," *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, eds. Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil and Mervin Butovsky (Quebec: Vehicule P, 1990) 39.

¹⁷ *Dépaneur* (or *dep*, in slang) is the French term for corner grocery or convenience store.

past. The apartment buildings appeared relatively unchanged from the days recalled in Richler's collection of memoirs, *The Street*:

On each corner a cigar store, a grocery and a fruit man. Outside staircases everywhere. Winding ones, wooden ones, rusty and risky ones. An endless repetition of precious peeling balconies and waste lots making the occasional gap here and there. But, as we boys knew, each street between the Main and Park Avenue represented subtle differences in income. No two cold-water flats were alike and no two stores were the same either.¹⁸

Still, Duluth Street, once the heart of *the* neighbourhood, belied its Jewish heritage. Gone were the kosher butchers and Jewish bakeries. Instead, the street was dotted with Greek and Italian eateries and the *lingua franca* was nothing other than French.

Though the absence of that old Montreal was saddening, there were still treasures to be found amongst the ruins. First, thanks to my undergraduate studies that included eye-opening, life-changing lectures by Ruth Wisse, one of the founders of McGill's Jewish Studies Department, I had my first direct encounter with the work of A.M. Klein. Though *The Second Scroll*¹⁹ is a baffling, devilishly overwhelming text, it is also a magnificent work that exposed me to an erudite, Jewish tradition deeply steeped in knowledge, wisdom, culture and history. In bringing to life the golden era of Montreal Jewish life, *The Second Scroll* evokes a vivid image and the wonder of Montreal's Jewish roots. In the novel, these qualities merge and form a kaleidoscope of Jewish life that embodies the essence of authentic Jewishness—the "fact" of Jewishness—that I had first identified in Allan's film.

¹⁸ Richler 44.

¹⁹ Please see: A.M. Klein, *The Second Scroll* (McClelland and Stewart: Toronto, 1951).

I was, moreover, infused with pride by Klein's writing. I discovered Klein almost concurrently with Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska, New York immigrant writers whose works on the Jewish immigrant plight were disparaging of tradition and unarguably bleak. Klein, conversely, was a romantic and, much to my naïve delight, portrayed an extremely hospitable Canada where life was typically comfortable and secure. European Jews might have looked to the United States as the *Goldene Medina*, but thanks to Klein, in my mind, Canada for Jews was a lot closer to Eden.

In truth, by the time I was a McGill student, signs of Jewish life were virtually extinct in the city's oldest Jewish neighbourhood, a few square blocks situated south of Sherbrooke Street in what is now gentrified Old Montreal and parts of Chinatown.²⁰ But, by embellishing my mind's picture of Montreal from the early 1900s with the street life depicted in *Lies My Father Told Me*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *The Second Scroll*, Montreal's nascent Jewish life seemed almost tangible, real and vivacious. Admittedly, though, my imaginative efforts were a struggle. During my tenure at McGill, I occasionally frequented the Bagg Street *schul*, a rare remnant of the old neighbourhood on the corner of Bagg and Clark Street. To imagine that this synagogue stood at the intersection of what was once an effervescent Jewish hub was a challenge. On any given Sabbath morning, the synagogue's services were attended by no more than twenty men, all over the age of 70, and their subsequent *Kiddush* consisted of little more than a few shots of cheap liquor and a plate of

²⁰ Baker 39.

ungarnished herring.²¹ So, while I was able to transform St. Laurent retailers such as Pascal hardware's storefront and Warshaw's grocery into an imaginary fantasy of Jewish carnival, when confronted with the concrete evidence of the neighbourhood's decline, my romance with the cultural grandeur of belated Jewish Montreal was, in fact, difficult to sustain.

4. The Lie: The Short Story, the Film, or Neither

This romance was further strained by my discovery of the original short story, "Lies My Father Told Me,"²² which Allan had written in 1949, more than twenty years before the film reached the silver screen. The story is brief and the movie's captivating reconstruction of early Jewish Montreal is barely perceptible. The film, as I remember it, is inescapably Jewish. The short story is, in contrast, predominantly a coming-of-age narrative, bearing more resemblance to a condensed *Bildungsroman* than a love song to the Montreal ghetto.

This was troubling for me. On the one hand, by the time I came across this work, my ideas of "the fact" of Jewishness had undergone dramatic reassessment, and arguably, sophistication. I was a graduate student in English literature, well-acquainted with a fair number of Jewish and Yiddish writers and a great admirer of luminaries, such as Shalom Aleichem, Isaac Bashevis Singer and his lesser-known brother, Israel Joshua Singer. Consequently, I was

²¹ On the Sabbath, a special blessing, *Kiddush*, is recited over a cup of wine: once in the evening and again during the day. The second Kiddush blessing is often accompanied by a light meal, which is an opportunity for the synagogue congregation to socialize and solidify its sense of community.

²² Please see: Ted Allan, "Lies My Father Told Me," *Canadian Jewish Short Stories*, ed. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990).

highly engaged in the contemplation of the qualitative difference between Jewish memory and Jewish nostalgia and the significance of this distinction. This was hardly a solitary effort. For instance, in the introduction to the collection of Jewish short stories that she edited in 1990, in which “Lies My Father Told Me” appears, Miriam Waddington identifies the creative snare of nostalgia and its effect upon writing:

“Although accents and gestures, yarmulkes, candle blessings, cantorial chantings, chicken soup and the like are all aspects of Jewish life, they have been so debased by commercial use that serious writers have usually avoided them.”²³

“Lies My Father Told Me,” Allan’s original story, was clearly, according to Waddington’s standards, the work of a serious writer; short on sentimentality, and maybe more important, couched in “transience and loss.”²⁴ Nevertheless, I was admittedly surprised and disquieted by the story. It pits an old-world Talmudic scholar of a grandfather against a faithless, ignorant son-in-law. The context is unarguably Jewish, yet the tone is almost stoic. What I yearned for were the “familiar stereotypes,”²⁵ melodrama and cliché—in other words, the easy nostalgia—that had made the movie so resonant. To its credit, the story, with regard to its style, echoes the heartbreakingly ironic mirth of Shalom Aleichem, whom Hillel Halkin lauds as being able to “confront the reader with [sic] reality in its full harshness, laughter being for him the

²³ Miriam Waddington, introduction, *Canadian Jewish Short Stories*, ed. Miriam Waddington, (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990) 11.

²⁴ Waddington 15.

²⁵ Richard Schickel, “Walton’s Ghetto,” *Time Magazine* 1 Dec 1975, 28 May 2008 <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,913796,00.html>> par. 3.

explosive with which he systematically mines all escape routes away from the truth."²⁶ Nonetheless, it did not strike me as a narrative that, had I encountered it at a much younger age, would have fuelled my Jewish imagination in the way it had been ignited in 1975.

5. Canadian Culture versus Jewish Culture

Sadly, neither the story nor the film feature prominently in either the Canadian Jewish, or simply Canadian, cultural landscape. Certainly, neither one has endured in the American Jewish imagination.²⁷ As noted previously, Ravvin has claimed that Canadian Jewish literature, excepting Richler's work, has never truly been incorporated into Canadian culture. This is not due to a dearth of texts by talented Canadian Jews.²⁸ Nor is it a result, insists Ravvin, of Canadian Jewish literature being too non-descript to constitute an independent literary trend. Even in earlier generations, when Canadian Jewish texts were loaded with Jewish substance and colour—again, the “fact” of Jewishness—works by authors such as Adele Wiseman, Chava Rosenfarb, and Henry Kreisel, were neither celebrated as important Canadian Jewish nor mainstream Canadian texts by the literary establishment.²⁹ Likewise, *Lies My Father Told Me* is given little recognition as a contribution to Canadian film. Its nominal

²⁶ Hillel Halkin, introduction, *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories*, trans. Hillel Halkin. (New York: Schocken Books, 1987) x-xv.

²⁷ A.M. Klein and Mordecai Richler (the two giants of Canadian Jewish writing), felt reasonably well-received in Canada but complained grievously about the neglect at the hands of their American colleagues.

²⁸ Bill Gladstone, “Will Duddy Kravitz Survive in a World Without Mordecai Richler?” *Forward* 13 July 2001.

²⁹ Ravvin 15.

impact is consistent with the peripheral influence of the majority of Canadian Jewish novels, short stories and poetry—making the film largely unknown. The exclusion of the film from the realm of significant Canadian culture is especially curious as the movie was nominated for best screenplay by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences,³⁰ and won a Golden Globe award for Best Foreign Film.³¹ Nonetheless, the film has nearly disappeared into obscurity. In fact, it is difficult to obtain a copy of the film from mainstream video rental shops or the film archives of most Canadian universities.³²

The disinterest in the film is even more noteworthy when compared to a similar American movie, the 1975 film *Hester Street*,³³ which starred a young Carol Kane. Based on the critically celebrated Abraham Cahan novel, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), it has endured far better than *Lies My Father Told Me*. It is more readily available³⁴ in university film archives and popular rental shops and was followed by the decidedly Hollywood movie,

³⁰ In 1975, Ted Allan was nominated for an Oscar (the more commonly known name of the Academy's award) in the category of Best Original Screenplay alongside Federico Fellini and Tonino Guerra (*Amarcord*), Claude Lelouch and Pierre Uytterhoeven (*And Now My Love*), Frank R. Pierson (*Dog Day Afternoon*), and Robert Towne and Warren Beatty (*Shampoo*). Pierson received the award.

³¹ The film's star, Jeffrey Lynas, who played seven-year-old David Herman, was also nominated for a Golden Globe award for Best New Star. The Golden Globes, a series of entertainment industry achievement awards, are presented by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association in an annual televised ceremony known for its opulence and Hollywood glamour.

³² While McGill University, the University of Toronto, York University, Carleton University and Ryerson University did have the video of the play that was based on the movie, Rogers Video, a large Canadian chain, was the only location where I was able to locate an available copy of the 1975 film. Blockbuster, another large chain, did not have any listing for *Lies My Father Told Me*.

³³ *Hester Street*, dir. Joan Micklin Silver, perf. Carol Kane, Stephen Keats, Mel Howard, First Run Features, 1975.

³⁴ In Jerusalem, where I live, *Hester Street* is part of the Hebrew University's film archive, but *Lies My Father Told Me* is not. Nor is it available at any other Israeli university film archives or at any of Jerusalem's major video rental stores.

Crossing Delancey,³⁵ which was not a marginal, independent effort, but a box office success with an adequate budget to attract a Hollywood cast headed by well-known actress Amy Irving. Both were directed by Joan Micklin Silver who, like Ted Allan, was the child of European Jewish immigrants. However, it was Micklin Silver's good fortune to be part of an American Jewish tradition that has been granted a folk-like aura in the cultural pastiche of the United States. As a result, American culture has celebrated her films, along with *The All-of-a-Kind Family* series, early American Jewish writing, and other testimonies to the Jewish presence on the Lower East Side. New York City's Tenement Museum, a popular attraction on the Lower East Side's legendary Orchard Street, is one ongoing example of how Jews have been integrated into the conceptual foundation of turn-of-the-century Americana. One of the museum's main highlights is the plight of Jewish immigrants from Europe, the living conditions they endured upon their arrival to New York, and the tribulations they faced as they scrambled to make sense of America.

A comparable tribute to twentieth-century Jewish life does not exist on Montreal's St. Laurent, Jeanne Mance or St. Dominique streets. Today, Jewish establishments are now situated in the neighbourhoods of Outremont, Snowdon, and Cote St. Luc. Their libraries, community centres, federation offices, kosher groceries, pizza restaurants, synagogues and *yeshivas* are all well-established facets of Montreal's contemporary Jewish life. They do not, however, echo with the unquestionably Jewish cadence of "the familiar

³⁵ *Crossing Delancey*, dir. Joan Micklin Silver, perf. Amy Irving, Peter Riegert, Reizl Bozyk, Warner Brothers, 1988.

peddlers' cry, rags, bones, bottles," the mantra of early Jewish immigrants, many of whom toiled as peddlers to earn a living and support their families.³⁶ The old neighbourhood even suffers from an absence of Jewish edifices. Buildings such as the striking Chevra Kadisha synagogue, once located on the corner of St. Urbain and St. Catherine, was destroyed in a 1920 fire and left no sign of the thriving Jewish community that once gathered within its confines.³⁷ Montreal's Jewish Public Library, founded in 1914 on St. Urbain, was eventually housed in an impressive structure on Esplanade. Today, with the library located in Snowdon, there is hardly a remnant of the library's downtown roots, and the Esplanade building is home to Compagnie Marie Chouinard, a renowned dance company, but hardly a new tenant that hearkens back to glory days of Montreal's Yiddish culture.

6. Conclusion: Did Allan Refashion Memory into Nostalgia?

Nostalgia may tint the past with a heart-warming glow, deny hardship and heartbreak and romanticize moments of happy intimacy, but it is effective. Harold Heft bemoans the cascading river of nostalgia that has poured forth from Canadian Jewish pens in the recent past. Although it is true that an overabundance of nostalgia, particularly the sort that blurs all sense of reality and perspective, is banal, Allan never expressed sentimental recollection of his native city or the Jewish milieu of his childhood. A communist from his youth, he fought in the Spanish Civil War. He was part of a Canadian division that

³⁶ Gerry Sinclair and Morris Wolfe, introduction, *The Spice Box: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Writing*, eds. Gerry Sinclair and Morris Wolfe (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981) 6.

³⁷ Baker 33.

aided the Republicans and served as the press officer to the troops of the famed Dr. Bethune, who fought alongside Mao Tse Tung against Chang Kai-shek. Moreover, he left Canada as his permanent residence in 1954 after learning that he was under investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) because of his communist sympathies. After leading a transient life, far removed from the bourgeois security that is often considered the breeding ground for sentimentality, it was only in the '70s that he finally settled permanently in Los Angeles.³⁸

Why then did this prolific, highly successful, award-winning writer turn time and again to autobiographical material mined "from his experience growing up in Montreal"?³⁹ There is no answer, only paltry speculation, yet, one could easily ask the same question of Richler and be inclined to offer a similar opinion. The "fact" of Jewishness that survived the Atlantic journey from Europe to North America, and was successfully transplanted into Montreal, seems to ring too true to resist. It is culturally, and certainly academically, unpopular to assign much importance to rose-tinted remembrances and ethnically trite narratives. But how does one assess this turn to the past when it is the substance of fine writing and, moreover, the foundation for a cultural, or even national, heritage that readers and audiences repeatedly identify as meaningful and powerful?

³⁸Andrew McIntosh, "Ted Allan," *The Film Reference Library*, 11 June 2008
<<http://www.filmreferencelibrary.ca/index.asp?layid=46&csid1=721&navid=46>> par. 5.

³⁹ McIntosh par. 5.

It seems, in fact, that there is no contradiction. Heft cannot tolerate yet another poem about Bubbe's chicken soup because that image is too flimsy, and at this junction in Canadian Jewish writing, too contrived. Allan and Richler, like Shalom Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer, did not write stories that hinged on the bouquet and aroma of their grandmother's broth. They told stories about people who were real, facing a world that was characterized both by hard-knocks and opportunity, transformation and re-creation. It was a world that was not easy, but not intolerably oppressive, where neither hard work nor success were shameful.

Thus, returning to Harold Heft and B. Glen Rotchin's earlier questions, is the element of struggle the key component in constructing a significant body of writing? *Lies My Father Told Me*, the film and even the story, undoubtedly benefit artistically from the environment of struggle inherent in their narratives. Is that their main attraction? I don't think so. In her debut novel, *The River Midnight*,⁴⁰ Canadian Jewish writer Lilian Nattel creates a shtetl world riddled with struggle. Does her novel exude the authenticity of Allan's tale? Few would, or have, argued that such is the case. In some ways it is "as overdrawn as an old Yiddish melodrama," as Roy Hoffman of the *New York Times* notes.⁴¹ Instead, authenticity in Canadian Jewish texts is often produced by writers who come from families, communities, or neighbourhoods where struggle is ever-present, but who have, nevertheless, found an adequately

⁴⁰ Please see: Lilian Nattel, *The River Midnight* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1999).

⁴¹ Roy Hoffman, "The Wild Ones," *The New York Times on the Web*, 28 Mar 1999, 11 June 2008 <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/03/28/reviews/990328.28hoffmat.html>> par. 11.

clear escape route. Laughter is one figurative example, to borrow Halkin's metaphor. On the one hand, these writers poignantly portray the difficult religious, social, cultural, linguistic and economic tensions of the Jewish worlds they depict. On the other hand, they see the complexities of these tensions and are able to translate them into fictional worlds abundant with possibilities that are sometimes wonderful, sometimes abhorrent, but never empty or irrelevant.

If one is to be candid, the truth is that it is impossible to know why Montreal has remained the most evocative allusion to Jewish Canada. Today, Jewish life in Canada is more organized than ever before, with a network of federations, synagogues, youth movements, Israel advocacy groups, political lobbies and much more. Still, in literature and film, the locus of Jewish Canada is downtown Montreal in an area that is now home to McGill University's student ghetto, Hasidic neighbourhoods, and young Quebecois cosmopolitans. Does that mean that contemporary notions of authentic Jewish Canada are primarily historical recollections embellished by nostalgic reconstructions of a disintegrated past? If so, popular images of a Canadian Jewish experience have little connection to any existing Canadian Jewish reality. They are, more accurately, the legacy of those who brought these images to life, essentially writers and, to a much lesser extent, filmmakers. Accordingly, it seems that Heft is at least partially correct. Great Canadian Jewish literature is not exclusively the result of cosmic forces that made Montreal's Jewishness—Rotchin's "fact of Jewishness"—the inevitable fodder for outstanding prose and

poetry. Rather, it is foremost the evidence of the rare ability of several classic Montreal writers to make that Jewish reality something enduring and genuinely poignant. Nevertheless, it seems counter-intuitive to deny that in some indecipherable way, a constellation of social, cultural, economic and less identifiable factors coalesced, starting nearly one-hundred years ago, to make Montreal Jewish life something that did inspire films such as *Lies My Father Told Me*; films that led a seven-year-old little girl to undertake an investigation of Jewish life that is still very much underway.

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Honouring the Fallen: Are Canadian Jewish War Veterans a Fading Memory?

In a recent survey of Canadian Jewish material culture, a curiously small number of war memorials honouring Canadian Jewish war veterans was uncovered. The findings of many visits to synagogues, cemeteries, and community centres have revealed a dearth of monuments of any type. There are, however, two significant memorials in stained glass dedicated to the service of these veterans: one is found at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, and the other at the YM-YWHA, Montreal's Jewish community centre.¹ In this analysis, the artistic themes, iconography, and placement of the windows will be examined in order to illustrate how the ideals and objectives of the institutions have been incorporated into the aesthetics of the works. While there are many examples of Holocaust memorial art works in Canada, there are fewer memorials honouring fallen members of the Canadian Jewish community. It will therefore also be ascertained how the underlying factors in the slight number of memorials in Canada all point to the preoccupations of the Canadian Jewish community after the war.

The members at Holy Blossom Temple in the 1930s had an assimilationist impulse. They wanted to become part of the professional, social, economic and

¹ There are two other commemorative windows of note that can be found in churches. There is a stained glass window at St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, which features a Star of David in honour of a veteran who served in the Black Watch, and another at St. Matthew's United Church in Inverness, Nova Scotia, which memorializes three Jewish veterans from that community with stained glass windows in its sanctuary. The Star of David commemorates Lt. M.T. Cohen, M.C., a Jewish officer in the 42nd Black Watch battalion who was killed at Passchendaele in 1917. Please see: Sandra Coley, "Memorial Windows in the Church of St Andrew and St. Paul," notes in church archives, Montreal, undated.

political life in Toronto and understood the location and grandeur of the building to be a means of upward mobility and acculturation into mainstream Canadian life.² *The Enlightenment Window* at Holy Blossom Temple on Bathurst Street in Toronto is placed in the gallery of the sanctuary. In 1944, Holy Blossom's Rabbi Feinberg realized his vision of 28 window installations. He had suggested that the eight windows framing the gallery on the upper level of the sanctuary should represent critical periods in Jewish history, while simultaneously reflecting the congregation's acceptance of liberal and contemporary positions within Judaism.³

The Enlightenment Window was donated in 1958 by the Rohr family, in honour of their two sons, Lionel and Martin, who were lost in the war effort.⁴ The theme of the memorial installation evokes eighteenth-century Germany where the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, began challenging orthodox Jewish tradition. This intellectual movement marked a shift in the attitudes of Jews toward their own religious traditions and the world around them.⁵ The writings of Moses Mendelssohn, depicted in the medallion at the centre of the window, argue that Jewish participation in the secular world need not involve a rejection of Judaism. His philosophies prepared the way for the Jewish

² Michael Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada," *Jewish Social Studies* 34.4 (1972): 322-342. 342. The building on Bathurst St. was completed in 1938.

³ Rabbi Abraham L. Feinberg, "Motif Stained Glass Windows," temple archives, Toronto, 22 Mar 1944. The remaining windows include references to festivals and holidays as well as the history of the congregation.

⁴ "Window Memorial to Brothers," temple archives, Toronto, undated. The window is a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Harry Rohr in honour of their sons Lionel, who was killed in a crash at Dauphin Manitoba in 1941 a day after he qualified for his wings, and his younger brother Martin, who was a physical training instructor and served in the RCAF and died of nephritis in 1954.

⁵ Paul Mendes-Flour, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980) 47.

emancipation from the ghetto and acted as a catalyst for the foundation of the Reform Movement. It is the only window in Canada that alludes to this period in Jewish history.

At the very top of *The Enlightenment Window* is the Hebrew inscription "let there be light *va ya hee or*" (Gen 1:3). This is an overt reference to the monotheistic tenet of Judaism indicating that God was central to the concept of creation.⁶ In the middle panel of the window, interfaith relations heavily endorsed by the Reform Movement are depicted through multi-racial images. As a symbol of cultural understanding, three different racial representatives are gathered around a bench that holds what appears to be a Holy Book. The Hebrew inscription below the bench reads "*shevet acheem gam ya had*" ("brothers living together in unity"), indicating another reference to the Reform Movement's interest in cultivating interdenominational relationships. During the interwar period, Reform Judaism shifted from a theoretical emphasis on prophetic ideals to the advocacy of specific contemporary issues, which included a commitment to interfaith relations.⁷

In the lower panel, a well-defined wrecking ball appears in chains. This image is suggestive of breaking out of the shackles of ignorance and bigotry. More important, it is indicative of the liberation of European Jewry from their spiritual ghettos as a result of the *Haskalah*. Juxtaposed to the inscription "let there be light," God's first commandment, is a rendering of the world thrown

⁶ Rabbi Jacob Eisen, "Holy Blossom Temple: The Adornments of Beauty," temple archives, Toronto, undated.

⁷ Jane Herman, *The Stained Glass Windows of Holy Blossom Temple* (Toronto: Holy Blossom, 2007) 9.

into darkness in the period prior to the Enlightenment—a period marked by lack of worldly knowledge and superstition. As rationalism and the natural sciences brought humankind into modernity, the test-tube located behind the wrecking ball in the same panel also signifies a hopeful future filled with unlimited possibilities for the Jewish people in generations to come.⁸ When the window was commissioned, Canadian stained glass artists were showing a preference for the neo-Gothic style in their ecclesiastical works across the country and the *Enlightenment Window's* designer Peter Howarth followed this trend.⁹

Out of a desire for acceptance, the congregation at Holy Blossom Temple fashioned their architecture and stained glass windows after the tradition of the non-Jewish community. Similarly, the YM-YWHA in Montreal was built to accommodate an increasingly assimilated Jewish community that was moving towards the western part of the city. However, the Y facility served religious and secular Jews from all walks of life. The building at 5500 Westbury in Montreal that houses *The Shalom Window* was completed on May 14, 1950. *The Shalom Window*, placed high on the eastern wall of the main lobby, portrays how the Montreal Jewish community had become acculturated into Canadian life.¹⁰ The Y's traditions were predicated on providing a recreation facility

⁸ See: Feinberg. The artist was instructed by Rabbi Feinberg to include specific references to Reform Judaism and modern life.

⁹ Herman 7. Haworth, a noted Toronto visual artist and painter, was given the commission for all the windows except the *Moses Window* for Holy Blossom Temple. The *Moses* window was completed in 1946 by Lino Lipinsky, a relative of the donor Hanna Franckel. In the period between 1920 and 1950, Haworth produced works for more than sixty churches and schools in stained glass.

¹⁰ The original club was formed for the “purpose of developing young men physically—men proud of their Jewish identity” (14). The Y in later years reached out to all people, regardless of race, religion, age and economic class. Sherry Stein, *History of the YM-YWHA 1910-1985: 75th Anniversary Book* (Montreal: YM-YWHA, 1985).

offering communal and educational programmes and promoting the social, cultural, recreational, physical and intellectual needs of its Jewish members and patrons. The window's artistic style and iconographic content reflects how the YM-YWHA offered outreach programmes to support the war effort under the aegis of the Special War Services Program. Based on the Y's philosophy of catering to the needs of the Jewish community and its adaptation of services for supporting Canadian involvement in WWII, it was often perceived to be a home away from home. In 1939, the largest room in the facility, the Sportsman Lounge Trophy Room, was designated as the Active Service Centre for the YM-YWHA. The Y's quarterly publication, *The Beacon*, was sent to all of the armed forces, and Y members established the Montreal War Services Coordinating Committee to offer auxiliary services for the troops in Montreal and its outlying areas. Women functioned as hostesses in the Service Centre, which raised funds for the war effort. The monies collected were directed at providing food and other comforts for those serving in the armed forces. The Y Minstrels entertained and visited 81 camps and performed in front of more than 90,000 troops from every branch of the armed forces.

The Shalom Window's inscription at the top reads, in Hebrew, "shalom" and, in English, "for our country and human freedom." Around the margins of the windows, there are insignias of the various armed forces as symbols of Jewish acculturation. The use of English and army insignias are markers of integration since Jews fought side by side with non-Jews. The window is a reminder of the bond that exists between the Canadian Jewry and its fellow

citizens. As the window's central image, the *Chanukiah* becomes a mark of victory. Its ancestral roots indicate acts of bravery and the unflinching adherence to Torah law. It is also a reference to the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem during a rebellion in the second century. The *Chanukiah* is most often linked to the Chanukah story, where the miracle of light helped transform a military triumph into a theological teaching on the power of having faith in God. The lower inscription reads: "dedicated to our members who served in the armed forces 1939-1945." The menorah embodies yet one more interpretation, a tree of life—a symbol of Jewish existence. It commemorates the service of all the armed forces that fought together, striving to "record and pass on to future generations of Jewish Canadians the tragic story of those years of war." ¹¹

The Shalom Window was inaugurated on May 1953. It was determined that the Y had lost 153 members in the Second World War. All members of the YM-YWHA were encouraged to donate not more than \$100.00 each, so that more of the community could afford to participate in the campaign for a new window. Children proudly donated pennies from their allowances to contribute to the fund and ensure that those who served would not be forgotten.¹²

In June 2005, the window was re-dedicated as part of the festivities of the Year of the Veteran.¹³ The 153 names of members lost in the Second World

¹¹ Oscar Adler, *Canadian Jewish War Memorial Book In Remembrance* (Toronto: Canadian Jewish War Memorial Association, 2004) vi.

¹² Janice Kirshner, "The YM-YWHA continues its tradition of honouring veterans who have perished," *The Suburban* [Montreal] 19 Oct 2005: 18.

¹³ "Year of the Veteran," *Veteran Affairs Canada* 14 Dec 2004, Government of Canada, Ottawa, 18 June 2008 <<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=feature/yearofveteran05>>. The

War were permanently added to the memorial window. The Y also commemorates the fallen servicemen with an annual memorial service, which includes flag-bearers and a candle-lighting ceremony. It is well-attended by representatives from the Jewish War Veterans of Canada, the Royal Canadian Legion, the B'nai Brith Maple Leaf Lodge, the Holocaust Resistance and Partisan Fighters, as well as Jewish clergy and community leaders.¹⁴

The *Shalom* and *Enlightenment* windows were installed in a period during which Jewish communities across Canada were burdened with the costs of building new synagogues as a result of the shifting demographics of communities to the suburbs. Many Canadian Jews were pledged to paying down the mortgages of their new synagogues. Consequently, there was little left over for visual culture of any kind. As a result of the high costs of building, it is only after 1970 that the beginnings of a trend towards acquiring visual arts and material culture in synagogues and community centres appears. Moreover, the Jewish community immediately after the war was faced with the mass immigration of European Jews. The survivors of the Holocaust who arrived in Canada required employment and housing. A committee headed by Samuel Bronfman thus mobilized enormous communal resources. The committee spent nearly three million dollars towards the reception, resettlement and rehabilitation of approximately 11,000 Displaced Persons and some 4,000 to

Honourable Albina Guarnieri, P.C., M.P. explains that “The Year of the Veteran” was established in 2005 “to thank a noble generation of Canadians for the days of daring that earned an age of peace” (par. 1).

¹⁴ Kirshner 18.

7,000 other survivors who entered Canada between 1946 and 1951.¹⁵ In the midst of this readjustment of the rapidly burgeoning Jewish community, raising funds for Canadian veteran memorials was overshadowed by the community's campaigns to address the social concerns of the newly arrived Jewish immigrants.

In as much as the *Shalom* and *Enlightenment* windows are merely footnotes within the context of Canadian Jewish history, the fact remains that they are the only two installations in the country which point to the mindset of Canadian Jews during the period of 1950-1960 regarding war memorials. The Jewish War Veterans of Canada have recorded that 500 Canadian Jewish servicemen were killed. Since their remains lay in 125 different cemeteries all over the world, one contribution to the lack of monuments in their honour is the difficulty in commemorating them at their sites of burial. Since it signifies the coming together of Canadian patriotism and the Jewish mitzvah of *Zachor* (remembering the communal past), it appears that the government-endorsed memorial books for fallen soldiers at the Peace Tower in Ottawa was initially enough to satisfy the Jewish community's need to remember. Over the next few decades following the war, Canadian-born Jews only minimally caught on to the idea of cenotaphs for their veterans. There is also a scant number of plaques in community centres denoting local heroes.

It was not until the plans for a Daniel Libeskind memorial were made public in 2006 through the energies of The Jewish War Veterans of Canada that

¹⁵ Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2008) 403.

a national monument dedicated to Canadian Jewish veterans would come to be, at least in the planning stages.¹⁶ Numerous Holocaust memorials, on the other hand, were commissioned between 1960 and 1980 and placed in community centres across the country. It appears that the Jewish immigrants who settled in Canada had a need to memorialize, for themselves and the larger community, the catastrophic loss of their families and communities in a tangible manner. For victims of the Holocaust, memorials were a collective means of providing coherence, closure and even redemption.¹⁷

It is noteworthy that Canadian-born Jews did not choose to erect more public monuments in honour of their family members who served in WWII. Lou Van Delman, former Executive Director of the Jewish War Veterans of Canada, suggests that Canadian-born Jews were still reeling from the effects of the Canadian government's anti-Semitic immigration policy during the 1930s [please see Aviva Levy's paper in this issue—Ed.]. Public memorials are gathering places commemorating a variety of historical events, but they also bring together voices of dissent. Local Jews directly after the war feared that a memorial for their veterans would bring unwanted attention to the community and become the venue for acts of anti-Semitism.¹⁸

A final factor in why there are not more memorials in Jewish public spaces honouring Canadian Jewish veterans is that, as Gerald Tulchinsky

¹⁶ Daniel Libeskind is a world-renowned architect whose most recent Jewish commemorative work is the extension to the Jewish Museum, Berlin (2001). The memorial slated to be installed at the Earle Bales Park in Toronto has not been completed due to a lack of funds.

¹⁷ Franklin Bialystok, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal, Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's UP, 2000) 7.

¹⁸ Lou Van Delman, telephone interview, 18 June 2007.

argues, strong support for the war effort came from the far left. Many Jewish communists were therefore recruited in Toronto to fight a war against fascism.¹⁹ Since communist Jews were chiefly secular and not generally affiliated with synagogues, there was no Jewish community to mourn them.

In conclusion, what seems to have emerged after the war was the presence of two separate communities: survivors of the Holocaust and Canadian-born Jews. Both communities suffered losses and sought to honour loved ones but, for the most part, chose different directions in terms of the variety and use of cultural material. The European Jews placed monuments in cemeteries and sculpture gardens outside of synagogues. More recently, Torah mantles decorated with Holocaust-related themes have been commissioned, and smaller commemorative sculptures are beginning to appear in synagogue lobbies. After the war, the new immigrants thrived and took it upon themselves in smaller community groups to create memorials to validate their experiences. Canadian-born Jews, however, took a more muted approach and relied on their community leaders to assume responsibility. Consequently, they memorialized those lost with only a few plaques, notably in western Jewish community centres and synagogues, in addition to a mere sprinkling of small markers in cemeteries and the two aforementioned stained glass windows. During the post-war era, the Jewish community was weak and fragmented and submerged by efforts of recuperation.²⁰ As such, mobilizing community funds became a contentious issue. The images and themes in the *Enlightenment* and *Shalom*

¹⁹ Tulchinsky 376.

²⁰ Bialystok 15.

windows are therefore unique and significant in commemorating Canadians who gallantly fulfilled their function and upheld Jewish values within the context of national pride.