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Preface

It is with pride and pleasure that I write this preface to the 2017 issue of *Dorot*, the undergraduate journal of McGill's Department of Jewish Studies. Caroline Bedard is completing her second year as the journal's editor-in-chief. It is wonderful to read the outcome of the hard work she and her collaborators put into these pages.

The five essays included here cover a broad range of topics and do not shy away from challenging moral and political questions. Lara Rodin, for example, lucidly analyses the politics of the question "Who is a Jew?" in Israel—a focal point of the tensions between the country's secular and religious constituencies. Meanwhile Joan Meyer examines the question "Who is an anti-Semite?" through the prism of Jean-Paul Sartre's famous *Portrait of an Anti-Semite*, published in 1945. Her interest in Sartre's argument isn't merely historical, however. She shows how the text remains relevant to identify and fight the anti-Semitism we encounter today.

Likewise intriguing are Sophie Panzer's piece on the echoes of Jewish and Christian messianic motives in Neil Gaiman's novel *Coraline* and Rhiannon Turgel-Ethier's historical reconstruction of the attempt made by the Soviet government between 1918 and 1948 to use Yiddish language instruction to

"Russify" the Jews living in the Soviet Union. Lauren Kranc, finally, takes a critical look at the role of women in 20th century Yiddish literature.

I have learned from and greatly enjoyed the insights that these five young student-scholars provide into the vibrant research going on in the many fields of Jewish Studies—from politics and sociology to literature and history. I am confident that you will enjoy their essays just as much!

Carlos Fraenkel

Chair, Department of Jewish Studies

McGill University

Introduction

It is a pleasure and an honour to present the 2017 edition of Dorot: The McGill Undergraduate Journal of Jewish Studies. The five papers included in this edition showcase the wide range of topics with which Jewish Studies students engage during their undergraduate years at McGill. Lara Rodin discusses the difficulties that exist in the Israeli political arena due to different definitions of Jewishness and of what it means to be a Jew. She highlights Israel's struggle to define Jewishness in such a way as to balance the interests of religious and secular groups within the state. Furthermore, she employs several court cases to demonstrate the very real impact of this struggle on individual Israelis.

In a personal composition, Joan Meyer addresses anti-Semitism's modern-day manifestations. She explores connections between modern-day anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitism described by Jean Paul Sartre in his 1945 work *Portrait of the Antisemite*. More specifically, Joan demonstrates that Sartre's ideas and observations about anti-Semitism as presented in *Portrait of the Antisemite* continue to be relevant today and should be understood by both gentiles and Jews.

Sophie Panzer examines religious influences in Neil Gaiman's novel *Coraline*. After establishing the novel's ties to Biblical narratives as well as to Grimm fairy tales, Sophie discusses the incorporation of particular religious material into *Coraline*. She devotes a large part of her analysis to Gaiman's use of Mosaic and Christian messianic rhetoric in relation to his novel's main character, Coraline.

Rhiannon Turgel-Ethier deals with Yiddish-language schools, which existed in the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1948 and were established by the Soviet

government. Rhiannon traces the schools' development, with particular focus on reforms to the Yiddish-language curriculum as implemented by the Soviet government in 1931. She explores the schools as a means by which the government attempted to Russify Soviet Jews through "Yiddishization," and she evaluates whether this attempted Russification was successful.

Finally, Lauren Kranc offers an analysis of the role of women in twentieth century Yiddish literature, focusing on Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Shalom Asch's *Uncle Moses*. Lauren posits that the female protagonists of these two texts symbolize unfulfilled promises in Jewish history and promote a view of women as weak and powerless. Each woman ultimately sacrifices herself to a powerful male authority figure with the belief that this sacrifice will guarantee the promise of prosperity for her community.

This edition of Dorot could not have come to fruition without the contributions and support of many individuals. The edition has benefited greatly from the hard work and insightful editing of assistant editors Lindsay MacInnis and Rayna Lew as well as copy editors Patricia Neijens, Danya Firestone, and Alon Faitelis. Their efforts have been crucial to completing the journal and are much appreciated. Jennifer Guan must be thanked for her beautiful cover page art, which depicts Klezmer musicians.

Thank you to Professor Carlos Fraenkel, who offered enthusiastic support throughout the entire process of putting together this year's edition, just as he did during the putting together of last year's edition. Also, thank you to the all the students who expressed interest in Dorot and sent in submissions.

This is my last year serving as editor-in-chief of Dorot, as I am graduating this June 2017. I have thoroughly enjoyed being editor-in-chief of this journal. I have been able to access some of the interesting research and writing being done by my Jewish Studies peers at the undergraduate level. Reading and editing my peers' work has allowed me to refine my own writing skills, and I have certainly gained knowledge about diverse Jewish topics. I am very glad to have been able to work on Dorot for the past two academic years. Just as I have had a valuable experience putting together this year's edition of Dorot, I hope the experience of reading it is valuable as well.

Caroline Bedard

Editor-in-chief

Defining Jewishness: Civil and Religious Tension in Israeli Politics

Lara Rodin

The question of "Who is a Jew?" is a cause for popular debate and is a source of significant tension in Israel's political and social ethos. Israel, the political expression of the Jewish nation, was built on the foundational values of Jewish peoplehood, land, and religion. The question of who is a Jew is fundamental to populating the land, its political leadership, and preserving the state's Jewish character. Since achieving statehood, the definition of who is a Jew has evolved in accordance with these often competing values.

In 1948, when Israel achieved statehood, the question of which aspects of *halakha*, Jewish religious law, should characterize the Jewish identity of the state was considered. David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel and leader of the prominent labour party, Mapai, sought to establish a relationship with the religious political parties. He hoped to achieve a compromise with these parties that would allow Israel to function as a civic, democratic state but continue to be a Jewish state by nature, made up of Jews and governed in some aspects by Jewish religious law. Unfortunately, Ben Gurion's vision of the compromise between religion and state proved difficult to achieve and impossible to maintain.

This paper will explore how competing interests between religion and state Israel has resulted in strict and incongruent definitions of who is a Jew. The

problem of defining Jewishness in Israel reflects the challenges that successive Israeli governments have faced in attempting to manage the role that religion should play in society. Through a comparison of Basic Laws and an examination of case studies, this paper will prove that the question of who is Jew remains a source of contention in modern Israeli politics and society and has implications on citizenship and personal status that ultimately affect social belonging and the democratic system of Israel as a whole. This paper will explore the root of the religious-national schism and will suggest how Israel may move forward in order to maintain both its democratic and Jewish nature.

Status Quo Agreement and Law of Return

Prior to statehood, the *Yishuv,* the governing body of the Jewish people in Mandate Palestine, grappled with tensions between civil state-building initiatives and the inclusion of religious authorities in state politics.[1] Religious parties advocated for the role of religion in the state, arguing that public life should be "in accordance with Jewish religious law, *halakha*."[2] As a result of pressure to include religious authorities in Israeli politics, Ben Gurion wrote a letter to Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon, the leader of the ultra-Orthodox party Agudat Yisrael. In this letter, Ben Gurion outlined the parameters by which religious authorities would continue to have agency over certain policies after

[1] C.S. Liebman and E. Don-Yehiya, "The 'Status Quo' Agreement as a Solution to Problems of Religion and State in Israel," in *Religion and Politics in Israel*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 31.
[2] Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel: The Second Republic* (Washington, D.C.: 2005), 348.

independence, similar to that which they possessed in Ottoman and Mandate Palestine.[3]

Though initially drafted in 1947, before the establishment of the state of Israel, this "Status Quo Agreement" letter signified the influence that would be maintained by the religious authorities and their rabbinic court systems regarding matters of personal status, Shabbat, education, and *kashrut*.[4] The agreement stated that Shabbat should be the clear, state-wide day of rest. This clause meant that, in accordance with *halakha*, all state-run institutions would be closed on this day. Additionally, autonomy over a state-supported religious education system was granted to Orthodox parties, and the government guaranteed that all state institutions would uphold the Jewish dietary laws of *kashrut*.[5] With regard to personal status, Ben Gurion vowed to "prevent the division" of the Jewish people by satisfying Orthodox law concerning the obtainment of Jewish citizenship.[6] This clause meant that the decision regarding the so-called fitness of a Jew's personal religious and national status would be made by "the religious political parties, the factions within them, and the rabbis affiliated with them."[7] *Halakha* defines a Jew as someone born of a Jewish mother and not belonging to another religion, or someone converted to Judaism according to Orthodox procedure.[8]

[3] Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "The 'Status Quo,'" 32.
[4] Daniel Shimshoni, *Israeli Democracy: The Middle of the Journey* (New York and London: 1982), 478.
[5] Shimshoni, *Israeli Democracy*, 478.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 357.
[8] Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel,* 3rd Ed. (New York: 2010), 606.

In 1950, the Israeli government passed the Law of Return on the premise that automatic citizenship in Israel should be the right of every Jew.[9] *Hok Hashvut* (the Law of Return) signified an important political attempt to define Jewishness in Israel, rooted in the value of the ingathering of exiles.[10] The Law of Return stated that every Jew could be granted the right to immigrate to and settle in Israel, promoting widespread immigration, but the law did not actually define the term "Jew."[11] In 1970, the Minister of the Interior amended the Law of Return to state that anyone "born to a Jewish mother, having no other religion, or who has undergone conversion" could claim Jewishness and obtain automatic citizenship in Israel.[12] The lack of specification regarding conversion opened up space outside of the *halakhic* definition for immigration to Israel.[13] Further, the amendment stated that immigration to Israel would be granted to "the child or grandchild of a Jew, to the marriage partner of a Jew, or the marriage partner of a Jewish child or grandchild."[14]

Both the Law of Return and the Status Quo Agreement have caused great division among Israelis regarding the nature of what defines a Jewish person in terms of state politics, national unity, and preservation of the state's Jewish

[9] Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 86.
[10] Israel First Knesset, "Law of Return," in *Israel in the Middle East*: *Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present,* ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 102.
[11] Bernard Reich and David Howard Goldberg, *Political Dictionary of Israel* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 238.
[12] Asher Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp and Their Influence on the Deepening Religious-Secular Schism at the Outset of the Twenty-First Century," in *Critical Issues in Israeli Society,* ed. Alan Dowty (Westport, Connecticut: 2004), 78.
[13] Reich and Goldberg, *Political Dictionary,* 238.
[14] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 83.

character.[15] According to religious Zionists, who ground their understanding in *halakha*, Judaism is both a religion and a nationality.[16] Meanwhile, secular Israelis focus their attention on immigration and settlement building and have historically defined Jewishness more liberally. They understand Judaism to be a declaration of culture, ethnicity, religiosity, and nationalism. The Status Quo Agreement's regulations regarding personal status (*ishut*) of citizens in Israel compared to the revised Law of Return depict the tension inherent in the differences between *halackic* and civil definitions of Jewishness.[17]

Though automatic citizenship in Israel defines Judaism relatively liberally under the Law of Return, the institutions of marriage, divorce, conversion, burial, and other matters regarding personal status in Israel have been "consigned to religious law."[18] This has effectively resulted in two separate understandings of who is a Jew in Israel.[19] However, it is evident in certain cases of enhanced public pressure that the application of religious law can be mitigated through the Supreme Court, which does exercise authority above the rabbinic court.[20]

[15] Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "The 'Status Quo,'" 31.
[16] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 353.
[17] Isaac Olshan, "Jewish Religion and Israeli Democracy," in *Israel in the Middle East*: *Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present,* ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 94.
[18] Sachar, *A History of Israel,* 603.
[19] Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 87.
[20] Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "The 'Status Quo,'" 38.

Civil-Religious Tension in the Political Arena

Issues of personal status have characterized the debate between the secular and religious camps in Israel.[21] This debate has been framed in terms of the nature of public life versus private rights, in light of the principle of democracy.[22] There is a general consensus among Israelis that Israel should be a Jewish state, but the extent to which religious authority should affect civil life is a conflict that has plagued the nation since statehood.[23] In the realm of Israeli politics, it has been difficult to achieve a compromise with regard to the place of religion within the state without either the religious or secular parties feeling that their rights are being infringed upon. The difficult problem of defining Jewishness in Israel illustrates this tension between religion and state.

The nature of Zionism, rooted in the concept of emancipation and autonomy for the Jewish people, could not separate Jewish character from Israeli nationality.[24] Though retaining Jewish qualities is crucial to maintaining a Jewish state, religion poses a threat to democracy when it holds a stake in public policy.[25] In order to safeguard democratic values, individuals in Israel are free to live as they please in their private lives, yet laws are created to promote freedom of all religions and protection of religious rights.[26]

[21] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 83.
[22] Charles S. Liebman, *Religion, Democracy and Israeli Society* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 80.
[23] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 349.
[24] Shimshoni, *Israeli Democracy*, 36.
[25] Liebman, *Religion*, 20.
[26] Israel First Knesset, "The Debate on a Constitution," in *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present,* ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 96.

The Ministry of Religions was created in order to protect the affairs of each major religious group within Israel, guaranteeing the commitments made by leading secular parties to the religious parties.[27] The democratic system set up by the provisional government of the *Yishuv* is highly criticized for having given orthodox institutions political space to "impose matters of religious interest on the nonreligious citizen."[28] The ministry, other rabbinic councils, the Chief Rabbinate, and the rabbinical courts were affiliated with both Zionist and non-Zionist religious political parties.[29] Though they had limited control over most state affairs, the religious parties "tightly supervised and monitored every expression of institutionalized Judaism in Israel."[30]

As the British partitioned Mandate Palestine in 1947, the desire of religious Zionists to create a "Torah state" rooted in Jewish interpretive law became ever stronger.[31] Religious Zionist (*Mizrachi*) parties grew in fervor and envisioned a "Land of Israel, for the People of Israel, In Accordance with the Torah of Israel," pointing to the Chief Rabbinate as the ultimate source of religious and political authority.[32] Religious parties held a significant number of seats in the Knesset and remain important partners for stability in government coalition.[33]

[27] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 377.
[28] Olshan, "Jewish Religion," 94.
[29] Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "The 'Status Quo,'" 36.
[30] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 377.
[31] Liebman, *Religion*, 41.
[32] Ibid., 50.
[33] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 358.

Ben Gurion's leading labour party often made concessions to meet the desires of the religious parties.[34] The religious parties bartered labour party support on the condition that the government in power met certain *halakhic* demands. Ben Gurion vowed his party's support of the *Mizrachi* National Religious Party (NRP), agreeing that religion was responsible for the survival of the Jewish people.[35] The participation of religious parties in state politics signified the importance of the connection between the Jewish religion and the Jewish state, a value religious *and* secular Jews held in common. In an effort to define the parameters of the relationship between religion and state, Ben Gurion promised that the religious parties of the Zionist Organization would maintain authority over Shabbat, *kashrut*, education, and personal status.

Following the Status Quo Agreement, there was a backlash from secularist and civic nationalist parties, who believed that citizenship and status should be granted in a more liberal sense. Despite this criticism Ben Gurion held his ground, claiming that the agreement was in Israel's "national interest" and that it was a "small price" to pay for government stability.[36] However, shortly before his death in 1973 Ben Gurion admitted that he was mistaken in granting religious authorities control over personal status issues.[37]

Following independence, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation clarifying matters of personal status. The legislation expanded the 1950 Law of Return to

[34] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 378.
[35] Shimshoni, *Israeli Democracy*, 38.
[36] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 378-9.
[37] Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 78.

include the 1952 Law of Citizenship, which granted citizenship to every Jew, his or her spouse, children and grandchildren, as well as the 1953 law, which established the authority of rabbinical courts with regard to matters of marriage and divorce.[38] Israel's "gates were open to all national (ethnic) Jews…the Law of Return made this clear," however the Law of Return had failed to define the term "Jew" in its national and ethnic sense.[39] The incongruity between definitions of Jewishness in the amendment to the Law of Return, the Law of Citizenship, and rabbinic personal status edicts allowed the Rabbinate to deny suspected non-Jews full religious rights to marriage, divorce, and burial that were available to members of the religious or national (ethnic) Jewish community. The "various meanings of Jewishness" entrenched in these revised Basic Laws have caused many problems in the Israeli political arena, as "Judaism may be thought of as a religion, a nationality, a culture, or all these and more" depending on the context.[40]

In Israel, the Chief Rabbinate does not recognize marriages or conversions preformed by Conservative and Reform Rabbis, and civil marriage does not exist. As a result, "many couples find that there is no state-sanctioned institution through which they can marry."[41] Under the Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction (Marriage and Divorce) Law of 1953, the Rabbinate controls the definition of who is a Jew with respect to marriage, divorce, and burial within the state on the basis

[38] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 353.
[39] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 603.
[40] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 353.
[41] Ibid., 351.

of *halakha*.[42] Non-Jewish religious authorities have similar power for the Christian, Muslim, Druze, and other citizens of Israel. As a result of the Orthodox Jewish control over personal status issues in Israel, "religion, then connotes social belonging…not only theological belief."[43]

Until the 1980s, the National Religious Party and Agudat Yisrael were seen as the ultimate political actors in Israel's national-religious affairs.[44] Toward the end of the twentieth century, the success of the Sephardi ultra-Orthodox party, Shas, brought with it more visibility in government ministerial positions and a harder line with regard to the *halakhic* definition of personal status.[45]

Case Studies in Defining Jewishness

The various political definitions of Jewishness have resulted in the religious-secular schism that plagues the political system in Israel. The ongoing debate on the relationship between Jewish religious and national identification is evident in the cases of a number of Israelis who have faced challenges and restrictions regarding their ability to participate in life cycle events.

In 1958, Brother Daniel, a converted Catholic Carmelite monk, claimed the right to live as a citizen in Israel under the 1950 Law of Return.[46] A Polish Jew by birth and upbringing, Daniel Rufeisen took refuge in a monastery during the Holocaust and had since converted to Catholicism, but "still felt himself Jewish,"

[42] Israeli Supreme Court, "Jewish Religion and Israeli Nationality: The Brother Daniel Case," in *Israel in the Middle East*: *Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present,* ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 174.
[43] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 352.
[44] Shimshoni, *Israeli Democracy*, 136.
[45] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 74.
[46] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 353.

if only by nationality.[47] According to *halakha,* Rufeisen was a Jew, as he was born to Jewish parents and received a Jewish upbringing.[48] However, the Supreme Court decided that the definition of a Jew should apply to those who are loyal to only the Jewish faith.

Both the Supreme Court of Israel and the Chief Rabbinate ruled that Brother Daniel was no longer a Jew because of his choice to convert to Catholicism.[49] Rufeisen argued that Jewish nationality and religion could be separated and that he retained the right to Jewish identification by the *halachic* definition of Judaism. This important personal status case resulted in the Court's distinction between *religious* Jewish identification and *national* Jewish identification. The case of Brother Daniel marked the first efforts of the Israeli Supreme Court to define the term "Jew" with regard to the Law of Return.[50] The Brother Daniel case had a significant impact on Israeli policy, as it revealed the stark contrast between the Law of Return's national, secular meaning of the term "Jew" and the Rabbinate's *halakhic* definition of the term. The Court ruled that Israeli identity cards should contain both religious and national affiliation.[51] As a result, the Rabbinate controlled life cycle events and the Minister of the Interior controlled matters of citizenship.

The debate over whether the term "Jew" must be interpreted in "accordance with the *halakha*" was also relevant in the case of Benjamin Shalit, a

[47] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 604.
[48] Israeli Supreme Court, "Jewish Religion," 172.
[49] Ibid., 173.
[50] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 604.
[51] Israeli Supreme Court, "Jewish Religion," 174.

Jewish Israeli army officer who had married a non-Jew outside of Israel.[52] After Shalit's return to Israel, his children were not considered Jewish by *halakha*.[53] Shalit, wanting to register his children as Jewish citizens of Israel, struggled against the court system, whose definition of Judaism at the time required *halakhic* legitimacy. Shalit's children obtained Jewish national registration but were still withheld Jewish religious registration.[54] This granting of registration caused tension between religious parties and the Knesset, which "then amended the law to read that a Jew is one born of a Jewish mother or converted [Orthodox]."[55] After this distinction was made, Shalit's third child was denied citizenship on these grounds. Once again, the Israeli court system struggled to define Jewish national identity against Jewish religious identity.

The Shalit case made a significant impact on policy regarding the Law of Return. After strong reconsideration, in order to compensate Israeli secular nationalists like Shalit who suffered under the restrictions of the rabbinic court, the Law of Return was amended in 1970 "to grant automatic citizenship rights to Gentile spouses, to the children of mixed marriages, even to the adult descendants of mixed marriages."[56] However, the Rabbinate "continued to reserve to itself the purely religious questions of marriages and divorce."[57] This created many challenges for non-*halakhic* Jews granted citizenship in Israel, as

[52] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 607.
[53] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 354.
[54] Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 87.
[55] Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 354.
[56] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 607.
[57] Ibid.

they were unable to seek marriage, divorce, or burial rights under the Israeli Rabbinate.

Currently, the Orthodox Rabbinate's interpretation of who is a Jew is politically binding for all Jewish citizens, secular or religious, as they have a monopoly over Jewish marriage and divorce within the state.[58] In the past, not only did the Rabbinate control marriage, divorce, and burial within the state, but they also had a monopoly over conversion within the state, which was limited strictly to the Orthodox stream. The 1998 Conversion Law, espoused by the Neeman Commission, attempted to resolve the lack of clarity regarding the acceptability of Reform and Conservative conversion in Israel. It was decided that "there should be a unified governmental conversion procedure — according to the law of Torah."[59] Though the committee declared that in-state conversion would remain in the hands of the religious authorities, it recommended that an Institute for Jewish Studies be set up to "offer future converts a comprehensive outlook on Judaism" reflective of all three streams of Judaism.[60] The committee's Conversion Law, which determined that conversions in Israel would be preformed by the Chief Rabbinate under the teachings of all streams of Judaism, was a "historic compromise and achievement."[61] As a result of ongoing protest for the recognition of non-Orthodox conversion, in 2002 the Supreme Court ordered the acceptance of any conversion as valid for registration with an Israeli

[58] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 78.
[59] Neeman Comission, "Report on the Conversion Law," in *Israel in the Middle East*: *Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present,* ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 465.
[60] Ibid., 463.
[61] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 80.

identity card.[62] Despite these important steps toward a trend in denominational cooperation and recognition, the second-class status of non-Orthodox expressions of Judaism is an ongoing problem in Israeli politics with regard to conversion, marriage, death, and burial.[63]

Effects on Immigrant Populations

The challenges facing Israeli immigrants represent the constricting policies regarding personal status in Israel. The implications of these policies have had a significant effect on the mass immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. Russian families composed of intermarried Jews were granted citizenship under the Law of Return. However, most of these immigrants' children have struggled to be married once inside of Israel. Though these second generation immigrants are "full citizens under the Law of Return," they often cannot prove the *halakhic* Jewishness of their mothers and are therefore unable to be married legally in Israel and are even "denied burial rights."[64] Those Russian immigrants who were granted citizenship to Israel under the Law of Return are often not given *halakhic* admission to the Jewish people, which limits their capacity to participate socially in birth, death, and life cycle rituals and causes problems for their descendants' ability to wed.

One such example is the case of Anna Isakova, a Russian immigrant to Israel who, despite her contribution to Israeli medicine and politics, faced cultural alienation as a result of her desire to remain true to her Russian

[62] Neeman, "Report," 463.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Arian, Politics in Israel, 356.

heritage.[65] Isakova argues, "Israel has no intention of forming a comprehensive, contemporary Jewish culture," rather, "it is creating an independent Israeli culture which is limited by a discriminatory cultural doctrine."[66]

The creation of a category of Israelis who are disqualified from marriage based on religion is a phenomenon unparalleled by any other democratic state.[67] The impact of this disqualification has resulted in a significant number of Israelis who are in favor of civil marriage.[68] The political ratification of these opinions has caused recent upheaval and petition of religious authority over political questions in Israel, as it is clear that immigrants are retaining their "linguistic and cultural singularity" and are resisting gradual absorption into Israeli society.[69] The solution to this problem faces opposition both from religious Israeli Jews, who are stringent and difficult about the conversion process, and on the side of the immigrants, who do not wish to convert in order to obtain the same basic rights as *halakhic* Jews.

Mamzerim/Agunah

It is evident that the Status Quo Agreement has caused significant difficulties with regard to life cycle events for Israelis who meet the standard for Jewish identification under the Law of Return but who do not meet the Rabbinic, *halakhic* definition of Jewishness. According to *halakha*, "the bill of divorce must

[65] Anna Isakova, "A Russian Immigrant Looks at Israeli (or Jewish?) Culture," in *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present,* ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 468.
[66] Ibid., 469.
[67] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 83.
[68] Ibid., 81.
[69] Ibid., 82.

be drawn up by the husband" and "a woman who remarries without benefit of a *get* (religious divorce) is guilty of adultery."[70] These extreme laws have been an additional source of hardship and tension regarding cases of *agunah* and *mamzerim*.

The problem of *agunah* describes a woman whose husband has disappeared and cannot grant her a *get*.[71] This tragic social barrier is often the result of men captured in war or soldiers missing in action. The Israeli government's official position on marriage and divorce, bound by the *halakhic* observance of the Rabbinate, forces women who have experienced this deep tragedy to additionally face social and life cycle constraints, as they cannot legally remarry and any future children will be labeled *mamzerim*. A *mamzer* is a child born to a married woman by someone other than her husband.[72] A *mamzer* is allowed to become a citizen of Israel, but is restricted regarding marriage, divorce, and burial rights.[73] As a result of strict rabbinic rule against marrying *mamzerim*, marriage sanctions and lifestyle restrictions have afflicted the children of these so-called adulterous relationships.

In 1955, Miriam and her brother Chanoch Langer were denied the right to marry their partners, as they were declared *mamzerim* due to their mother's nonreligious divorce previous to her marriage to their father.[74] The Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of the 1970s, Shlomo Goren, took a liberal stance on this specific

[70] J. David Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 146.
[71] Ibid., 150.
[72] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 609.
[73] Bleich, *Halakhic Problems*, 159.
[74] Ibid., 167-168.

case and implemented a policy that allowed agreements to be made between the Rabbinate and the secularists, resulting in the legal marriage of the Langers.[75] Despite the ultimate success of this case, the Langer affair "served to widen the rifts between the religious and nonreligious elements of the Israeli populace."[76] It is clear that if changes are not made to government policy and if the government does not institute a system of civil marriage, "archaic religious legalisms" will produce a "caste of untouchables" in Israel.[77]

Conclusions

The Status Quo Agreement and subsequent Basic Laws were created so that neither religious nor secular political camps would feel compromised.[78] The lack of consistent definition of who is a Jew has only proved to create an ambiguous and unstable relationship between religion and state in Israel. While pre-state political Zionist leaders such as Ze'ev Jabotinsky described Judaism as a secular national consciousness, religious Zionists such as Shlomo Goren describe Jewishness as a nationalism rooted in faith and Torah, "based on covenant with God."[79] The ideological rifts among religious and secular Zionists have contributed to the problem of defining Jewish identity and have resulted in tension between civil nationalism and religious nationalism. The delicate nature of Israeli politics has meant that governments have needed to adapt their policies

[75] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 610.
[76] Bleich, *Halakhic Problems*, 167.
[77] Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 610.
[78] Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "The 'Status Quo,'" 34.
[79] Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 88.

to gain the support of religious parties. This has meant that religious parties have had a great deal of influence over government policies and laws.

Though religion is a crucial aspect of the "internalization of social virtues and civic responsibility" in Israel, it has the capacity to impose on individual freedoms.[80] It is clear that religion, when unmitigated by civil politics, poses a challenge to state democracy and to personal rights and freedoms. However, separating religion from politics completely in Israel would jeopardize the Jewish nature of the state as well as the religious rights of *Mizrachi* and ultra-Orthodox party members.

The widespread problem of defining Jewishness and the consequent challenges that have faced many Israelis has resulted in the need for civil marriage in Israel. The civil rights movement in Israel has seen a decline in in-state marriages sanctioned by the Chief Rabbinate and has "caused the Orthodox monopoly in *kashrut* and burial to be broken."[81] There are those that are hopeful that Israeli policy will reflect the changes in society toward democracy and liberalism. However, others worry that the "decrease in the state's Jewishness" will be "so severe as to call into question its definition as a Jewish state."[82] In searching for compromise, Israel must find a way to remain Jewish *and* democratic.

[80] Liebman, *Religion*, 91.
[81] Cohen, "Changes in the Orthodox Camp," 89-90.
[82] Ibid., 90.

The coalition government in Israel is "meant to enable a society to maintain stability and unity in spite of and in the presence of deep dissension."[83] Despite this aspect of the political system, Israel must settle this religious-secular schism before internal divisions threaten the ability to maintain a democratic government. Creative attempts must be made to "bridge the gaps" between the secular and religious divide "without forcing either side to surrender cherished principles."[84] These attempts will begin only once Israel can implement a civic system of defining Jewishness that does not compromise the religious parties or the Jewish character of the state.

[83] Ibid., 91.
[84] Arian, Politics in Israel, 358.

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Antisemite Sketches

Joan Meyer

Jean Paul Sartre's *Portrait of the Antisemite* (1945) offers an astute analysis of anti-Semitism in society. Sartre discusses the hatred of Jews, the mainstream attitude of acceptance surrounding this hatred, and the indifference by the average person toward Jewish oppression. Although Sartre himself was not Jewish and therefore did not experience anti-Semitism firsthand, his experiences as a witness to the rise of Fascism in Europe and as a political prisoner of the Vichy regime gave him unusual insight into the psychology of anti-Semitism itself. His observations were quite apparently aimed at his fellow non-Jews with the goal of correcting their misconceptions about the nature of anti-Semitism. However, many modern Jews also hold misconceptions about the nature of anti-Semitism and so are also in desperate need of Sartre's work. *Portrait of the Antisemite* is therefore a useful text for combatting such misconceptions effectively and so ultimately weakening the larger system of oppression to which anti-Semitism belongs. As I have witnessed in my own life as a Jewish woman, many anti-Semites no longer recognize themselves as such. This ignorance enables their participation in the continued social objectification and scapegoating of Jews, which further enables their participation in a larger system of oppression. Thus, there is great danger when people fail to recognize themselves as anti-Semites and when people are passive in the face of anti-Semitism. The truths of Sartre's writing are enduring because the essence of anti-

Semitism remains the same seventy years after he wrote *Portrait of the Antisemite*, but without knowledge of this similarity anyone can become one of the passive individuals examined in his work.

My first major encounter with anti-Semitism perfectly corresponds with the opening page of *Portrait of the Antisemite*. I made the naïve assumption that anti-Semites were essentially good. Similarly, Sartre portrays the average man as "a good father and good husband, a zealous citizen, cultured, philanthropic *and an antisemite at the same time*."[85] During my childhood I lived in both diverse and near-exclusively Jewish urban neighborhoods. However, after I became a residential student at a college preparatory school, I was exposed to the anti-Semitism that comes with a fairly sizable Jewish minority living amongst mostly white Christians.[86] Due to my inexperience with this dynamic (a Jewish minority living amongst a white Christian majority) and with anti-Semitism more generally, I gave my anti-Semitic peers the benefit of the doubt. While they were merely adolescents, the same principle applied as in Sartre's writing — they could be good children, siblings, students, volunteers, even friends, and still hold problematic, anti-Semitic opinions. I believed, just as many of my fellow Jewish students still do, that my peers were merely in need of education.

My fellow Jewish students and I attributed our peers' prejudice to their severely limited exposure to Jewish people. For example, I was one of only three Jewish residential students at my school. The rest of the school's Jewish student

[85] Jean Paul Sartre, "Portrait of the Antisemite," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann et al. (New York: Plume, 2004), 329.
[86] The school was both a boarding and day school. I lived in the dormitory.

population commuted from the surrounding affluent, mostly Jewish area outside of Detroit, Michigan. Since their parents were mostly doctors, attorneys, and businesspeople, these Jewish commuter students seemingly confirmed the misconception that "Jewish" is synonymous with a rich, white American. My fellow Jewish students and I made the same cognitive error Sartre outlines: "If he does not like them people [Jews] say it is because his experience has taught him that they [Jews] are bad […] Thus his opinion seems to be the result of external causes […] the percentage of Jews who are bankers, industrialists, doctors, lawyers."[87] We admitted that there was a certain albeit limited truth to the belief that Jews control everything — not in society as a whole, of course, but in this case it was true that Jewish parents controlled our school board. Yes, the food at lunch was better than at breakfast or dinner and yes, buses ran only during the hours commuter students stayed on campus. Granted, this was the result of these parents, many of whom were Jewish, advocating for the resources they paid for to be rightly allocated to their children. Our parents would have done the same had they been aware of our needs as residential students, but they simply lived too far away to know the logistics of our daily lives. Residential students, including myself, resented commuter students for the preferential treatment they seemingly received. Many gentile students conflated this preferential treatment with the commuter students' Jewishness. That this mass misconception lead to a culture of anti-Semitism in the dormitories and, unchecked by teachers or the

[87] Sarte, "Portrait of the Antisemite," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 329.

administration, eventually forced its way into our classrooms reveals the continuing need for writing like that of Sartre to be widely read.

One event rid me of my illusions about anti-Semites. Our class had a substitute teacher and she allowed us to play a game called "celebrity" after we had finished our lesson. The rules, similar to charades, state that each player writes down a celebrity's name. In the following rounds, pairs draw a slip of paper from a hat and work together to guess the person based first on a word and an action. This game was intended to be innocent fun. However, three separate individuals placed the name "Hitler" into the hat, one of whom I had considered my friend. I vehemently protested, stating that Hitler was an infamous historical figure, by no means a celebrity like everyone else's choice of actors, musicians, writers, and artists. Furthermore, it was offensive and incredibly insensitive to Jewish students to include the name "Hitler" in the game. I reminded everyone of a student in one of our other classes whose grandfather was a Holocaust survivor. The class objected en masse, loudly insisting I was being overly sensitive. The substitute teacher ignored me and proceeded with the game's first round. The word association for Hitler was "heil." It became a horrific kind of call and response: one student prompting the other "heil" and the other laughingly responding with "Hitler." The substitute teacher and my class again overruled any objections. They moved on to the next round in which the action for guessing Hitler was, of course, a Nazi salute. I

pleaded with the teacher to put a stop to this and, once again, she refused to do so.

My experience with this game of charades was a textbook demonstration of Sartre's assertion that "[i]f he has become an anitsemite, it is because one cannot be antisemetic alone. This sentence: 'I hate the Jews', is a sentence which is said in a chorus; by saying it one connects oneself with a tradition and a community; that of the mediocre man."[88] A fellow student who I had considered my friend was responsible for this demonstration of hatred against my people and me. Although I had tried to teach him about Jewish culture, religion, and history (as had another Jewish friend of the student), he had betrayed us. Instead of "unlearning" his bigotry, he had chosen to become a part of the long and tragic history of anti-Semitism. More specifically, he joined the large community of anti-Semites at my school. He displayed his hatred willingly and multiple students as well as our substitute teacher joined him. They provided him with the safety of anonymity and group sentiment so he could espouse his prejudice entirely without consequence.

Before my next class began, I spent ten minutes crying in a corridor. I was shocked and sickened. Moreover, I feared the implications of this incident and what it meant for students more visibly Jewish than myself. I do not look "stereotypically" Jewish: I do not have a large nose, brown eyes or black curly hair. I had the privilege of passing for non-Jewish with my blue eyes, medium brown wavy hair, and straight nose. My friends with Hebrew first names and

[88] Ibid., 335.

those who did look more "traditionally" Jewish would be more easily identifiably targets for anti-Semites.

Once class started, my history teacher took note of my distress. However, rather than attempt to comfort me or assert his authority on the behalf of the Jewish population at our school, he chose to engage me in a debate about the appropriateness of the swastika. To my horror, he drew one on the whiteboard. He then drew a hammer and sickle, arguing that it too should be banned as millions of people had also died under Russian communism. I was incredulous. True, the Soviet Union did commit mass murder on multiple occasions but racist ideologies did not play a role in Stalin's atrocious acts. In fact, the hammer and sickle represents the theoretically antiracist ideals of Communism. Therefore, the Soviet Union's symbol does not carry the same weight of hatred as does the swastika. Yet my history teacher, supposedly an expert in his field, felt that the two symbols were comparable. To him, Communism was somehow worse than Nazism, an ideology predicated upon the destruction of other ethnic groups and nationalities.

A boy sitting next to me defended the history teacher's behavior by asking: "Well, do you have Jewish family members?" I immediately realized that he was unaware of my background and believed that it was my place to protest anti-Semitism only if it directly affected me or my loved ones. This mindset justified his own inaction to himself. He was one of the passive "no ones" to whom Sartre refers, who is not actively anti-Semitic yet passively accepts hatred

toward Jews. As Sartre explains, "[i]t is because they do not detest the Jews but they do not love them either. They would not do them the slightest harm but they would not raise their little fingers to protect them from violence. They are not anti-Semites, they are nothing, they are *no one*."[89] This boy thought that I was a "no one" like him.

After this experience, anti-Semitism seemed to follow me everywhere, including out of the country. My understanding of anti-Semitism became more layered as I became aware of its intersection with misogyny and how it impacted me as a Jewish woman. Sartre is aware of this intersection, despite being a non-Jewish male. He comments on the fetishizing of Jewish women as exotic and how this is inherently intertwined with violence against them: "In the words 'a beautiful Jewess' there is a specific sexual connotation, very different from that which is understood in the words […] 'a beautiful American.' The phrase 'a beautiful Jewess' has a kind of flavor of rape and massacre. The beautiful Jewess is the woman whom the Czars's Cossacks drag by the hair through the streets of a flaming village."[90]

My visit to Russia enlightened me to the eroticization of Jewish women as a form of anti-Semitism, still present seventy years after Sartre wrote *Portrait of the Antisemite*. Throughout my time in Russia, strangers, often men, would approach me and initiate a conversation that almost always began with a compliment about my appearance. I thought nothing of it other than that

[89] Ibid., 343.
[90] Ibid., 342.

perhaps I met the Russian standards of beauty particularly well, until I engaged in a revealing conversation with my host, who was the mother of my roommate at boarding school. Unprovoked, she commented on my hair, stating "You have curly hair." I agreed, as this was a statement of fact, and I attributed her abruptness to Russian speech patterns until she went on to remark that "white people do not have curly hair." I knew immediately she was implying that the only people with fair skin and curly hair are European Jews — she was saying to me: you are Jewish. My well-intentioned roommate later tried to explain: "She is confused by you because you look Aryan and Jewish at the same time. You have fair skin and light eyes but your forehead is high and wide, your nose is well defined and there's a certain curve to the corners of your mouth. She is trying to categorize." Suddenly, all the comments I had heard during my visit came back to me with a stark clarity, contextualized in all the racism I had witnessed in Russia.

The comments that I heard throughout my time in Russia often came from my host family. They insisted that Russian Jews had betrayed their motherland by immigrating to the United States, asserting that such a supposedly treasonous action is only justifiable if one's life is endangered. They repeatedly claimed that this was never the case for Russian Jews. Apparently, they had incorrectly assumed I was of Russian extraction and these comments were targeted specifically at me. With the knowledge that these interactions were motivated by a specifically malicious and anti-Semitic intent, I felt targeted by my hosts and

sexually preyed upon by men whom I met in the street. My appearance confused my host, but it was fascinating to these men. I was simultaneously foreign and familiar to them. "You look like how Russia used to be," they told me, apparently assuming I was a relative of Jewish émigré women. They seemed to think my "return" to Russia was only for their enjoyment. I was lucky to avoid physical harassment, but I returned to the United States with a new relationship to the historical persecution of Russian Jews and Jewish women, especially as aligned with the discussion of the eroticization of the Jewess Sartre provides in *Portrait of the Antisemite*.

While written before the invention and widespread use of the Internet, Sartre's writing also applies to harassment that I have received online. This is unsurprising, as Sartre composed *Portrait of the Antisemite* under the specter of Nazism and my abusers were British and Irish skinheads. After posting a single innocent comment on a YouTube video, these skinheads flocked to me thanks to GooglePlus's policy of displaying their users' full names. They recognized "Meyer" as a Hebrew surname and bombarded me with messages under fake usernames. Usernames such as "Ziedick Bagelstien" combined stereotypes about Jews with common Jewish suffixes; accompanying profile pictures displayed obviously photographically manipulated, prominent hooked noses. The skinheads first attacked my name, and then attacked Jewish people in general. Common statements expressed sentiments such as, "people should know who is responsible for the destruction of Europe and the ruin of the white race." Behind

the computer screen, these threats might not seem significant but, as Sartre warns, they are not isolated incidents. These words do have incredibly dangerous political implications for their home countries and the Jews who live there. As Sartre states,"[o]f course he does not have occasion to use them [insults like these] everyday, but make no mistake: these sudden outbreaks of anger, these thunderous reproaches which he hurls against "kikes", are so many death sentences."[91] To this day, I am still afraid to open my notifications.

Far from being an all-encompassing account of the anti-Semitism present in contemporary society, this essay intends to be a testament to the continued relevance of Jean Paul Sartre's *Portrait of the Antisemite* and its necessary application to the lives of modern Jews. Many people are privileged enough to be ignorant about anti-Semitism due to the understated manner in which it can present itself, but anti-Semitism persists, maintaining the patterns Sartre specifies. Anti-Semitism is perhaps less overt in our contemporary North American society than in Sartre's mid-twentieth century France, but it remains recognizable and unchanged as I have demonstrated by recalling my own experiences. We must be ready and willing to acknowledge anti-Semitism's continued existence before we enact further change to oppose it.

[91] Ibid., 343.

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"You Are Our Savior, Caroline": Messianism in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

Sophie Panzer

As a child, I tended to resist reading books that adults recommended to me. Fiercely stubborn in my attempts to be independent, I loved reading, but only books I was allowed to pick out for myself. For example, I started reading the *Harry Potter* series in middle school, long after most of my friends had started, because it was only at the point when all the adults in my life finally stopped trying to nudge me towards them (I have since worn out my paperback versions of the books). I underwent a similar experience with Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Gaiman commented in an "about the book" feature for HarperCollins that *Coraline* "was a story, I learned when people began to read it, that children experienced as an adventure but which gave adults nightmares. It's the strangest book I've written, it took the longest time to write, and it's the book I'm proudest of."[92] After I graduated elementary school, escaped the English teachers trying to convince me to read the slim volume, and when trailers for the movie started to appear in 2009, I finally sat down with it, finishing it in one sitting.

I fell in love. I re-read *Coraline* several times a year. I watched the movie version of *Coraline* countless times. I started reading every Neil Gaiman novel I could get my hands on. I loved them all, but none of them resonated with me quite like *Coraline*. I wondered what exactly Gaiman had tapped into in this little

[92] Neil Gaiman, *Coraline* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 198.

story, "one of the most frightening books ever written" according to *The New York Times Book Review,* which delighted children and terrified adults.[93]

The answer might lie in the connection between religion and the genres of horror and fantasy within which Gaiman works. While Gaiman is a secular author and does not promote any particular religion in his works, he is also a writer of modern fairy tales, stories that draw from several religious and mythological traditions. Many readers, myself included, are likely drawn to *Coraline* by its eponymous strong female protagonist, who serves not just as a source of inspiration but also as a savior figure. In this paper, I will first examine Gaiman's Biblical and Grimm fairy tale influences and explore the connections between the two storytelling traditions. Second, I will discuss how *Coraline* specifically incorporates religious material. Finally, I will argue that the religious and fairy tale elements of *Coraline* have the effect of casting the main character as a messiah figure. While Gaiman does not promote any specific attitude towards religion in *Coraline*, he does utilize religious motifs and ideas that are characteristic of the Grimm fairy tale tradition within which he works. Specifically, he uses Mosaic and Christian messianic rhetoric to create an empowered modern heroine distinguished by her vulnerability, selflessness, and bravery.

[93] Ibid., ii.

Neil Gaiman, Religion, and Fairy Tales

Born and raised in England, Gaiman developed a unique perspective on religion as a Jew educated in Christian schools. According to Cyril Camus, "His Jewish identity certainly made him an 'outsider' in his Anglican educational environment, but being half immersed in another belief-system than his family's from an early age actually allowed him to put both systems in perspective. As he puts it, 'in a sense, it made [him] view everything as myth.'"[94] An interest in stories, rather than spirituality, led Gaiman to persuade his Hebrew instructor to teach him Bible stories — the Behemoth, the Leviathan — and the secret teachings about Lilith and the Lilim, which he used in "The Sandman," instead of studying for his bar mitzvah.[95] As a result of his eclectic religious upbringing, Gaiman's attitude towards the Bible is admiration for its literary qualities, not necessarily subscription to its religious doctrine.

It is quite possible that Gaiman's horror writing draws directly from his early exposure to the Old Testament. In a graphic novel entitled *Outrageous Tales From the Old Testament,* Gaiman focuses on the action and horror aspects of biblical stories, including violent battles and dismembered concubines. It is no coincidence that similarly gruesome narratives can be found in fantasy and fairy tales, additional genres that Gaiman has mastered. Grimms' fairy tales especially are steeped in religious rhetoric and ideas borrowed from Christianity as well as

[94] Cyril Camus, "The Outsider: Neil Gaiman and the Old Testament," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 29.2 (2011): 77-99, 78.
[95] Dana Goodyear "Kid Goth," *The New Yorker* 25 Jan. 2010.

Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology.[96] These tales have been criticized for being too violent and horrific for children or any other audience, for that matter. "Some feel that they [Grimms' fairy tales] are […] much too violent to be of spiritual value — notwithstanding the bible's own faithful accounts of cannibalism in besieged cities, royal adultery, and murder, not to mention mockery and crucifixion."[97]

Coraline, like the Grimms' fairy tales, has faced criticism and has been deemed inappropriate for children, not just because of its horror elements but also because of its perceived attacks on spirituality and "traditional" family structures. In summary, Coraline is a bright, bored child whose parents are always too busy to play with her. When the family moves into a new flat, she discovers a door that leads to another world, where everything is a distorted mirror image of her own life and all the inhabitants have buttons for eyes. There she encounters her Other Mother, a perfectly attentive and domestic figure who feeds Coraline delicious food and provides her with constant entertainment. There is, however, an ulterior motive — the Other Mother wants to replace Coraline's eyes with buttons and keep her in the Other World forever, to consume her as she has consumed three previous young victims, who have all been reduced to empty husks behind a mirror. When Coraline attempts to leave, the Other Mother imprisons Coraline's parents to lure her back. Coraline embarks on a quest to save the souls of the three ghost children and rescue her

[96] Ronald G. Murphy, *The Owl, the Raven, and the Dove: The Religious Meaning of the Grimm's Magic Fairy Tales* (New York: Oxford University, 2000) 5.
[97] Ibid.

parents, armed only with her wits, the guidance of a black cat, and a stone with a hole in it. In a profoundly anti-feminist review of the movie from christiananswers.net, which Gaiman deemed to be the "funniest Coraline review ever" on Twitter, Michael Karounos accuses both the book and the movie of "spiritual emptiness" for demonizing female domesticity and promoting "abusive" behavior of women towards men.[98] It remains unclear whether Karounos would criticize other fairy tales that share these motifs of evil maternal figures and forbidden fruit, like *Hansel and Gretel*, in a similar manner.

Coraline and the Grimm Fairy Tale Canon

As a gothic horror story and dark fairy tale, *Coraline* contains many of the tropes present in the Grimms' fairy tales. These tales tend to follow a pattern reminiscent of the Genesis story in the Old Testament: temptation, fall, and salvation through love. Snow White eats a poison apple, falls into a death-like sleep, and is revived by the love of a prince. Sleeping Beauty touches a forbidden spindle, falls into a death-like sleep, and is revived by the love of a prince. Similarly, Coraline is tempted by the sensory delights of the Other Mother's world but ultimately saves herself and everyone she cares for through her love for her parents and her compassion for lost souls.

Perhaps the story that most closely resembles *Coraline* is that of Hansel and Gretel, who are driven into the clutches of a child-eating witch by neglectful parents and tempted by forbidden fruit. "The test is old: the food is forbidden […] The punishments […] mortality and hard work, are immediately visited

[98] Michael Karounos, "Movie Review: Coraline," *Christian Answers.*

upon the children by the serpent/witch: Hansel will be fattened for killing, Gretel will be forced to do hard labor and then she too will be killed."[99] Similar to the witch in Hansel and Gretel, the Other Mother constantly feeds Coraline delicious food in order to prime the girl for her own consumption. Coraline and the siblings are both redeemed by their wits — Coraline tricks the Other Mother into opening the door that leads her back home and Gretel fools the witch into opening the oven so she can push her in. Both stories also emphasize the importance of familial love. Coraline is motivated to defeat the Other Mother by her love for her parents. In Hansel and Gretel, "The children's love for one another and their mutual fidelity as an escape from their situation echoes medieval Christian tradition."[100] These stories, along with most stories composed by the Grimm brothers, emphasize the importance of salvation through love, an important element of Christianity.

Another common motif in these stories is that of the evil maternal figure who intends to eat, mutilate, or otherwise harm children. In David Luke's translation of the Grimm's Snow White story, the evil stepmother queen is so jealous of Snow White's beauty that she orders a huntsman to kill Snow White and bring her the girl's organs so that she may ingest her beauty and vitality. The huntsman spares Snow White's life and brings back the lungs and liver of a pig, which the queen devours.[101] In *Little Red Riding Hood*, the wolf disguises himself as the heroine's grandmother in order to eat her, thus creating the evil maternal

[99] Murphy, *The Owl,* 62.
[100] Ibid., 54.
[101] Ibid., 125.

figure with his disguise. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the witch lures the children into her home in order to trap and eat them. Similarly, the Other Mother lures Coraline into the Other World with delicious food, beautiful clothes, and interesting, attentive neighbors, doing all she can to tempt Coraline into forsaking her life in the real world. Her motive? According to the black cat, "She wants something to love, I think. Something that isn't her. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that."[102] He delivers these words of warning to Coraline as she explores the other world. Later, Coraline realizes, "It was true: the Other Mother loved her. But she loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold. In the Other Mother's button eyes, Coraline knew that she was a possession, nothing more. A tolerated pet, whose behavior was no longer amusing."[103]

While the finer details of how the Other Mother intends to consume her potential victim are left unclear, it is connected to the black buttons she wants to sew into Coraline's eyes. According to the ghost children Coraline encounters behind the mirror who allowed the buttons to be sewn in, "[The Other Mother] stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, and she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark."[104] These evil maternal figures (in many of these stories the main villain is rarely the protagonist's true mother) play the satanic role of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, tempting or distracting the protagonists until they fall like Eve and Adam. Their use of food to lure their

[102] Neil Gaiman, *Coraline* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 68.
[103] Ibid., 106.
[104] Ibid., 84.

prey reflects the warning embedded in the Genesis story: when one falls to temptation by rejecting spiritual or filial authority, that which initially seems to nourish and please will ultimately lead to hardship. Thus, this theme, expressed in Coraline, is reflective of the Grimm fairy tale canon and is rooted in the Genesis story.

Coraline as a Messiah Figure

Gaiman endows Coraline with generic messianic characteristics by giving her a sense of alienation from the people around her, a desire to stand out, and an overall extraordinary or anointed status.[105] The first example of these qualities is her name, which all of the adults with whom she interacts (except her parents) pronounce wrong, replacing it with the more ordinary-sounding Caroline. This mispronunciation is seen in Coraline's encounters with her neighbors, the elderly former actresses Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, and Mr. Bobo, her upstairs neighbor. Their refusal to pay attention to Coraline's attempts to correct them underscore her sense of alienation from her neighbors and from adults in general. In one conversation, Coraline is forced to correct Miss Spink:

> "You see, Caroline," Miss Spink said, getting Coraline's name wrong, "both myself and Miss Forcible were famous actresses, in our time. We trod the boards, luvvy. Oh, don't let Hamish eat the fruitcake or he'll be up all night with his tummy."
> "It's Coraline. Not Caroline. Coraline," said Coraline.[106]

The denizens of the Other World attempt to prey on Coraline's sense of alienation from people in the real world as they try to convince her to abandon

[105] Emily Kopley, JWST 353, January 19, 2016.
[106] Gaiman, *Coraline,* 3-4.

her parents and stay with the Other Mother. The Other Mr. Bobo asks Coraline, "And what if you do everything you swore you would? What then? Nothing's changed. You'll go home. You'll be bored. You'll be ignored. No one will listen to you, not really listen to you. You're too clever and too quiet for them to understand. They don't even get your name right."[107] Coraline's parents also contribute to this sense of alienation by being too busy with work to play with her. They do not really care what she does as long as she does not bother them or "make a mess."[108] Her mother's refusal to buy her a pair of bright green gloves emphasizes her crushing Coraline's desire to stand out, indicative of Coraline's special status in the book:

> Coraline saw some Day-Glo green gloves she liked a lot.
> Her mother refused to buy them for her, preferring instead to buy white socks, navy blue school underpants, four gray blouses, and a dark gray skirt.
> "But Mum, *everybody* at school's got gray blouses and everything. *Nobody's* got green gloves. I could be the only one."[109]

At the end of the book, Miss Spink marvels privately at Coraline, "What an extraordinary child," not once, but twice.[110] This reinforces the fact that Coraline has a special quality or status. The fact that this extraordinariness is a kind of messianism is referenced by Mr. Bobo after Coraline sends the Other Mother's hand plunging into a well along with the black key to the other world.

[107] Ibid., 119.
[108] Ibid., 6.
[109] Ibid,, 23.
[110] Ibid., 156, 161.

"'The mice tell me all is good,' he said. 'They say that you are our savior, Caroline."[111] This notion of being a savior is reminiscent of messianism.

Another general messianic quality Gaiman bestows on Coraline is the nature of her quest — she literally saves the souls of three other children, in addition to her parents, from an evil figure. When Coraline demands her parents back, the Other Mother traps Coraline in a room behind a mirror as punishment for her supposed insolence. In this room, Coraline meets three ghost children who have been forgotten there. When she explains to them that she is looking for her real parents, one of the children pleads, "Peradventure […] if you could win your mamma and your papa back from the beldam, you could also win free our souls."[112] The concept of a messianic figure being responsible for saving people's souls is evident in Judaism, Christianity, and several other religious traditions.[113]

Gaiman also incorporates several connections to the story of Moses, a messianic figure of the Old Testament.[114] In *Coraline,* Gaiman emphasizes the importance of a savior figure "challenging" authority. Similar to Moses' famous demand of the Pharaoh to "Let my people go," Coraline makes demands of freedom to the Other Mother: "I want to go home and be with my real parents. I want you to let them go. To let us all go."[115] Both Coraline and Moses state their demands without wheedling or equivocating. When the Other Mother refuses, Coraline heeds the black cat's advice: "Challenge her. There's no guarantee she'll

[111] Ibid., 160.
[112] Ibid., 85.
[113] Kopley, January 19, 2016.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Gaiman, *Coraline,* 87.

play fair, but her kind of thing loves games and challenges."[116] Coraline baits the Other Mother into an agreement: if Coraline can use her skills as an explorer to find the souls of the ghost children and her parents, then the Other Mother has to let them all go. This is a challenge of wits rather than a challenge of brute force. Moses' challenging the Pharaoh with plagues was more a show of God's strength, but both characters use whatever assets they have. In Coraline's case she uses her knack for exploring and her courage, while in Moses' case he uses the power of God. Both challenge a tyrannical figure in order to save the souls of the oppressed.

Coraline's final escape from the Other World, accompanied by the cat, her parents (who are trapped in a snow globe), and the souls of the three ghost children, also bears a strong resemblance to the story of Moses' battle with the Amalekites:

> So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set […] [117]

The Israelites' battle against the Amalekites was essentially a battle for the souls of Israel, since its outcome would determine whether they would continue on to be a great nation or collapse. During the battle, Aaron and Hur lend Moses strength so that Israel may prevail. Coraline's comrades also lend her strength as

[116] Ibid., 65.
[117] Exodus 17:11-12.

she struggles to close the door between the other world and the real world and save their souls:

> It was heavier than she imagined a door could be, and pulling it closed was like trying to close a door against a high wind. And then she felt something from the other side begin to pull against her. […] Suddenly she was aware of other people in the corridor with her. She could not turn her head to look at them, but she knew them without having to look. "Help me, please," she said. "All of you." […] The other people in the corridor — three children, two adults — were somehow too insubstantial to touch the door. But their hands closed about hers, as she pulled on the big iron handle, and suddenly she felt strong. [118]

The battle against the Amalekites and the scene above illustrate the fallibility of both Moses and Coraline as savior figures and emphasize the fact that they are rarely capable of fulfilling their missions alone, regardless of their chosen status. Incorporating aspects of Moses' story into Coraline's story allows Gaiman to expose her vulnerability, stemming both from her being a child and from her being a Mosaic figure. This makes her ability to overcome the obstacles she faces all the more impressive.

Coraline also has Christ-like characteristics, reacting with kindness and mercy to the unloved, the meek, and the wretched throughout the novel.[119] This likeness is highlighted by the Other Mother's twisted use of Christian rhetoric. When the Other Mother declares, "we temper our justice with mercy here; we love the sinner and hate the sin"[120] after fetching Coraline from her temporary prison behind a mirror, she quotes Christian values ironically. By using these

[118] Gaiman, *Coraline,* 133-134.
[119] Kopley, January 19, 2016.
[120] Gaiman, *Coraline,* 90.

words to illustrate how much the Other Mother "loves" Coraline, Gaiman makes it clear to the reader that the "love" she speaks of is really hunger and possessiveness. Coraline, on the other hand, takes genuine pity on the ghost children who were led astray by the Other Mother's wiles, resolving to rescue them, even if doing so is an additional complication in her quest to find her parents and escape. She shows a more genuine love for these "sinners," perhaps because she identifies with them. This genuine love manifests when she encounters a monstrous creature that at one point was her Other Father; this creature is imprisoned in the cellar. Her reaction is not anger or fear, but compassion. "*Monstrous*, thought Coraline, *but also miserable* […] 'Poor thing,' she said. 'I bet she made you come down here as punishment for telling me too much […] I'm so sorry."[121] She even pats the creature's head right before it tries to attack her under the Other Mother's influence. The fact that she is so naturally compassionate, even towards those who have done her wrong, ties directly into Christ's teachings of love and mercy.

Coraline also believes strongly in the importance of putting herself in harm's way in order to save the people she cares about. In returning to the Other World to rescue her parents, she puts her body and soul on the line, similar to Christ's suffering on the cross in order to save humanity. As she explains to the black cat as they walk through the passageway back to the Other World:

> "[…] when you're scared but you still do it anyway, *that's* brave […]"

[121] Ibid., 111.

> "So that's why you're going back to her world then?" said the cat. "Because your father once saved you from wasps?" "Don't be silly," said Coraline. "I'm going back for them because they are my parents. And if they noticed I was gone I'm sure they would do the same for me."[122]

Coraline frequently reminds herself that she is brave throughout the book in order to sustain her morale as she battles the Other Mother. To Coraline, bravery and self-sacrifice — the idea of doing something even though you are scared because it's the right thing to do — are inextricably linked.

Conclusion

Coraline's popularity and the mixed reactions it evokes from children and adults raises questions about the kind of material that is deemed "appropriate" for children. Gruesome Biblical narratives and fairy tales were once considered perfectly acceptable for children's consumption, but contemporary attitudes tend to favor more censured versions of these classic tales. To this day, the Bible, with all its gore, violence, incest, and disasters, remains not only a source of literary interest but also a source of spiritual inspiration for many readers, young and old.[123] In some ways, so does *Coraline*. In an interview with Laurie Penny of *Newstatesman*, Neil Gaiman commented that he had started "running into beautiful, poised, adult young women [...] who tell [him] that Coraline saved their lives, got them through late childhood. This was their book that they held on to. It taught them about bravery. Sometimes they would tell me about how it got them through times of abuse. And this stuff actually is big and important. To

[122] Ibid., 59.
[123] Kopley, January 19, 2016.

give people tools. Mind tools that they can use to deal with real problems."[124] In writing a modern fairy tale/horror story with Biblical roots and an empowered female lead character, Gaiman taps into the original appeal of these kinds of stories. Summed up in the epigraph that preludes the novel: "Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."[125]

[124] Laurie Penny, "Neil Gaiman Interview: 'It Was Much, Much More Fun Being Absolutely Unknown," *NewStatesman*.
[125] Gaiman, *Coraline,* i.

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Yiddish-Language Schools in Soviet Russia

Rhiannon Turgel-Ethier

The Jewish population in Russia has been subject to a variety of regimes and governments throughout history, including during the rise of the Soviet Union. By the time of the Soviet Union's emergence, Jews in the Russian territories had already experienced centuries of tumult, beginning with the Pale of Settlement under imperial rule. This tumult continued with the new Soviet regime. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet government tasked itself with the creation of a whole new education system that pushed Soviet Jews to undergo Russification through Yiddishization. The birth of Soviet-Yiddish language schools was an important step in the history of Russian Jews. This paper will demonstrate the importance of these schools to the Jewish people and will examine the goals of this new type of educational system.

Through an analysis of the institutional goals of the Soviet-Yiddish schools, the curriculum they followed, and the Jewish experience between the October Revolution and the mid-1930s, this paper will try to determine the schools' degree of success in terms of strengthening Jews' ties to the Soviet Union. This will be achieved through the study of different sources from scholarly books, government reports, newspaper articles, and testimonies. Government reports are difficult to use because of their discrepancies and biases. Government records at the time were twisted in order to make the Soviet Union look better. Additionally, the government did not collect statistics on a regular

basis. Scholarly books are a helpful alternative to government records and reports due to their relative neutrality in describing and analyzing Soviet Yiddish-language schools. Newspaper articles are also a good alternative when read critically; it is important to keep in mind that the Soviet Union controlled the newspapers. Lastly, testimonies are a difficult source to use because of personal biases. Testimonies are often given in hindsight, which leads to an increased chance of distorted memory. Additionally, they only give the view and experience of one person and his or her family, rather than reflecting a larger population's thoughts and experiences. This being said, for the purpose of this paper, testimonies are analyzed as part of an attempt to meaningfully understand how Jews viewed the Soviet school system.

Context: A Brief History of Making Jews Russian

Tsar Nicholas I was the emperor of Russia from 1824 to 1855. Nicholas I viewed nationality as the coming together of three elements: autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality.[126] In 1840, the Russian government consciously embarked upon a policy aimed at bringing the Enlightenment to Russian Jews.[127] Russians seemed to believe that Jews lacked guidance. In order to help them, the minister of national enlightenment, Sergey Semionovich Uvarov, established new schools for them. At this time, the Russian government's main purpose in creating these schools was to enlighten Jews and make them more Russian: "the

[126] Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "Nicholas I," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-I-tsar-of-Russia.
[127] Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 59.

enlightenment of the Jews will indeed lead to the gradual improvement of their civic and cultural status and thus to their acceptance of the general principles of "civility."[128] By this statement, Uvarov meant that he saw Jews as being able to move up the social ladder if they attended his schools. Max Lilienthal, an adviser for the reform of Jewish schools in Russia, deeply believed that Jews would become cultured once they had graduated from these new schools. With their new education he felt that they would receive emancipation, and thus he supported Uvarov's view.[129] The government founded the first Jewish state-sponsored schools in 1847.[130] These schools had a very particular curriculum. The government promoted secular education, although it allowed these Jewish schools to teach religion through Bible studies. Talmudic studies, however, were banned from the curriculum.[131]

By the end of Tsar Nicholas I's rule, the education reform had led to the clear emergence of a coherent Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, marking the program's success.[132] After Nicholas I's death, Alexander II became emperor. Alexander II's reign (1855-1881) was characterized by his reforming policies in intellectual, economic, and political domains.[133] Alexander II's successor was his

[128] Ibid, 66.
[129] Ibid, 71.
[130] Ibid, 98.
[131] Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews,* 101.
[132] Ibid., 109.
[133] W.E. Mosse, "Alexander II," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-II-emperor-of-Russia.

son Alexander III, who ruled as the emperor of Russia from 1881 to 1894.[134] Unlike his father, Alexander III was not liberal. He believed in the Russian national identity and spent his reign trying to turn his subjects into so-called true Russians. His "political ideal was a nation containing only one nationality, one language, one religion, and one form of administration; and he did his utmost to prepare for the realization of this ideal by imposing the Russian language […] by persecuting the Jews, and by destroying the remnants of German, Polish, and Swedish institutions in the outlying provinces."[135]

Alexander III oppressed the Jews and put an end to the new class of Russian Jewish intelligentsia that had emerged three decades earlier. He persecuted them through "rural expulsions, wholesale expulsions from Moscow and St. Petersburg, exclusions from civil service positions, quota limitations in secondary and higher education and repeal of residence licenses outside the Pale."[136] With these draconian reforms, the Jewish people of the Pale of Settlement were reduced to their status as an oppressed minority. By the turn of the twentieth century, the founding of the first Yiddish secular school in 1898 in the province of Minsk signaled a shift in fate for Russian Jews.[137] The school's curriculum mirrored Russian schools and textbooks and included Russian

[134] Michael T. Florinsky, "Alexander III," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-III-emperor-of-Russia.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Eli Lederhendler, "Classless: On the Social Status of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 517.
[137] Elias Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc, 1971), 18.

language, arithmetic, and geography.[138] However, this school only operated for nine months before it was closed down.[139]

The Soviet Yiddish-school system was established by the Soviet government in 1918 and officially lasted until 1948.[140] These schools were not meant to be religious schools for the Soviet Jews; rather, they were secular schools that used Yiddish to teach such disciplines as arithmetic, geography, history, and biology.[141] Only Jews whose mother tongue was Yiddish could attend the Soviet Yiddish-language schools; Jews who were raised speaking Russian, German, Polish or Ukrainian could not attend.[142] This decision was widely accepted and celebrated within the Jewish section of the Communist Party.[143] These schools taught Yiddish literature until 1921, when the Jewish section of the Communist Party stated that the teaching of this subject slowed the students' "Russification."[144] This conclusion was reached based on the fact that Jewish children and teenagers who attended other, more secular schools tended to become further estranged from Jewish life than those who attended the Soviet Yiddish-language schools.[145] Many Jewish families chose to not send their children to Soviet Yiddish-language schools, opting instead to send them to Russian schools for a variety of reasons. First, being Russian was considered

[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 19.
[140] Ibid., 1.
[141] Ibid., 28.
[142] Ibid., 69.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union,* 78.
[145] Ibid.

trendy.[146] Second, many parents wanted to increase their children's chances of getting good jobs, and in order to do so mastery of the Russian language was important.[147] Third, higher education did not exist in Yiddish, hence, going to a Russian-language or German-language school was in many ways a prerequisite to getting a university degree. [148] Essentially, Jewish parents often saw a better practical purpose in sending their children to a Russian school.

Another aspect that helped determine whether families sent their children to a Yiddish-language school was where the family lived. Jews who lived outside the Pale of Settlement in imperial Russia tended to be more Russified. Those more Russified families were more likely to send their offspring to Russian schools than to Yiddish schools. It is also important to consider the more traditional and religious Jews in Soviet lands at the time. Most of them were said to have despised the Soviet Yiddish-language schools because they saw them as anti-religious propaganda.[149]

Institutional Goals of the Soviet Yiddish-Language Schools

Over the course of Soviet history, the Soviet government attempted to use the education system to address two constant concerns. The first was a practical concern regarding the production of workers for the Soviet Union's developing economy. The second was an ideological concern regarding the ways in which

[146] Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 88.
[147] Ibid., 89.
[148] Ibid., 90.
[149] Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl,* 91.

education could shape a new generation of society.[150] Before the October Revolution, Lenin wrote that "Jewish national culture is a slogan of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie, a slogan of our enemies […] Whoever, directly or indirectly, puts forward the slogan of a Jewish 'national culture' is an enemy of the proletariat, a supporter of the old and of the caste position of the Jews, an accomplice of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie."[151] His view did not change after the revolution. Once in power, he believed that the only answer to the Jewish question was Jews' total assimilation into the majority population of each territory of the Soviet Union.[152] This view helped prompt the creation of the Soviet Yiddish-language schools.

Later, Stalin found that the best way for the Russification process to succeed was through the Yiddishization of the Jews. The government believed that it was important for the Soviet Jewish population to avoid speaking Hebrew because it was a religious and sacred language; the government preferred that Soviet Jews speak Yiddish. Yiddishization was to be largely achieved through the Soviet school system.[153] These schools were primarily aimed at turning Jewish children into strong Russian communists. All secular courses were taught in the children's mother tongue (Yiddish) and the curriculum was based on

[150] Nigel Grant, "Fifty Years of Soviet Education," *The Irish Journal of Education* 1, no. 2 (1967): 89, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30077141.
[151] Zvi Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1976), 152.
[152] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union,* 47.
[153] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*, 183.

Soviet atheist values.[154] Around 1931, the Soviet Yiddish-language schools underwent a reform. After the reform, the schools' main goal was still to produce communist children, but also to teach students to become industry workers.[155] The importance of the creation of workers was one of the main reasons why the schools placed a strong emphasis on science and technology. The Soviet Yiddish-language schools made use of the polytechnical principle of education. This type of learning environment called for the combination of education with industrial production.[156] The government believed that students should learn about the fundamentals of agricultural and industrial production through the study of theory and its application. Through this type of education, the Soviet Union hoped that children would easily reach an informed decision on what they planned to achieve in terms of their careers.[157]

An additional change by the government was to divide the school year into three sections. The first section ran from September 1 to June 1 and was characterized as regular school time. The second section ran from June 1 to July 1, during which the school curriculum operated outside of the classroom, in open air. The last section of the school year ran from July 1 to September 1 and was simply full vacation.[158] This breakdown of the school year meant that children were subject to Soviet propaganda for at least ten months of the year. In addition,

[154] Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, 86.
[155] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union,* 103.
[156] Jon Lauglo, "Soviet Education Policy 1917-1935: From Ideology to Bureaucratic Control," *Oxford Review of Education* 14, no. 3 (1988): 291.
[157] Grant, "Fifty Years of Soviet Education," 95.
[158] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, 70.

during the two months of full vacation, depending on where they lived, students had the option of joining youth groups such as "pioneer clubs," which will be explained later on in the Jewish Experience section of this paper.

Every aspect of these schools involved some sort of propaganda aimed at making Jewish children feel and become more Russian. Literary courses, for example, were extremely propagandistic. Students were supposed to become "ideal readers," representing the new Soviet's triumph over illiteracy.[159] Indeed, all courses given in the Soviet Yiddish-language schools had a symbolic aspect to them. Children were not just learning how to read for their own pleasure, development, and education; they were also learning how to read in order to symbolize the power of the Soviet government. Soviet-Yiddish-language schools had clear institutional goals: Jewish students needed to become Russian communists who would eventually become industrial workers contributing to the Soviet Union's economy.

The Curriculum

During the existence of the Soviet Yiddish-language schools, the curriculum only underwent one major reform, which occurred in 1931 under the rule of Joseph Stalin. In order to contextualize the importance of the Soviet Yiddish-language schools to Soviet Jews and their class mobility, it is necessary to analyze the schools' curriculum before and after 1931. It is also important to examine the factors that led to the reform. This will be done through the analysis

[159] Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 54.

of the curriculum's approach to the study of languages, the way that it portrayed Jews and Jewish history, and the textbooks the schools used.

Language constituted a core element of the Soviet Yiddish-language schools. One might wonder why the Soviet government would take on this type of project when it saw the Soviet Union's Jewry as a threat. One possible reason for the founding and expansion of these schools was the importance of "Yiddishization" to the government. In the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet policy called for compulsory attendance in Yiddish schools for Yiddish-speaking children in many Soviet territories. This compulsory "Yiddishization" was a product of Stalin's anxiety over winning the support and allegiance of nationalist intellectuals. The policy was a means of expressing disapproval of the Zionist movement, which was gaining popularity at the time.[160] Local governments also embraced "Yiddishization," although for reasons other than disapproval of Zionism. In Ukraine, for example, there was a strong Ukrainization movement in the 1920s and 1930s; this movement did not want local Jews to be carriers of Russification, so it supported Yiddish schools.[161]

Although the government wanted to promote "Yiddishization," many Jews who were literate in Yiddish did not necessarily wish to read and write in this language.[162] In response, the Soviet Union ensured that all courses at Soviet Yiddish schools were taught in Yiddish — even gymnastic classes trained their

[160] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*, 183.
[161] Ibid., 184.
[162] Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher,* 69.

students in Yiddish.[163] The instruction of other languages was under strict regulation. In the first years after the founding of Soviet Yiddish-language schools, institutions that sought government subsidies were expected to satisfy certain requirements. These schools had to prove that their students would not learn any Hebrew in grade one, that second grade Hebrew would only be taught a maximum of six hours per week and that there would be no religious studies whatsoever. All Hebrew classes needed to be composed of secular materials. All schools that opened after the government implemented these rules could only start teaching their pupils Hebrew in grade four.[164] Even with these regulations, the Education Bureau of the Jewish Section of the Communist Party took issue with the Jewish content found in Yiddish literature courses. In 1921, the Education Bureau released a statement arguing that students learned too much Jewish content in Yiddish literature classes, which slowed down the Russification process.[165]

The Soviet Union favored Yiddish over Hebrew because Hebrew was a sacred and religious language. This is reflected by encyclopedias from the era. The general encyclopedia devoted one hundred and ten columns to the description of modern Yiddish literature, while it devoted only twenty-four columns to modern Hebrew literature.[166] In 1929, the seventh grade literature curriculum identified seven subjects that would encompass all of the semester's

[163] Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 91.
[164] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, 57.
[165] Ibid., 78.
[166] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and* Communism, 227.

work. These subjects only dealt with Yiddish folkways to the Haskalah movement and the Jewish workers movement, as well as Jewish people in the first and second Russian Revolutions. Nowhere was there mention of Jewish nationalism or of the conflict between traditional Judaism and the modern world.[167] Although most of the greatest Yiddish writers of the early twentieth century were writing in Poland or the United Stated of America, the Soviet Yiddish-language schools refused to allow any of these writers' literature in their curriculum. Only Yiddish literature written inside of the Soviet Union was considered for the curriculum.[168] This demonstrates the ways in which the curriculum was designed so as to make Jewish students more Russian and to imbue them with a nationalist mindset through "Yiddishization."

The Soviet Yiddish-language schools' curriculum had a distinct approach to the ways in which it depicted Jews and Jewish history. Before 1931, the teaching of Jewish history in these institutions was highly regulated. Children were not taught any Jewish history that took place before the October Revolution of 1917. An American observer in 1920 explained that after conversing with the students, he realized that they saw Jews as having no history before the revolution.[169] The way that the curriculum described Jews in 1928 was propagandistic but in a certain way also surprising. It aimed to show that the Soviet regime was the best option for the Jews, but it failed to address the

[167] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*, 241.
[168] Ibid., 219.
[169] Ibid., 226.

deprivation of cultural freedom. Notably though, the curriculum still recognized the Jewish question. There was a brief yet straightforward description of the Soviet Union's Jewry and of their social position. For the era, this was a liberal way to teach Jewish history and identity.

After 1931, the school system officially abandoned progressivism.[170] The new aim of the Soviet Yiddish-language schools was to produce trained workers who would become good communists. This meant that students needed both a political and technical education.[171] There was a change in the schools' curriculum, in which focus shifted from social science to more explicit forms of political propaganda.[172] Soviet Yiddish-language schools adopted a new requirement for their students to fulfill. Students needed to participate in a work program: four hours per week for students aged eight to ten, six hours per week for students aged eleven to thirteen, and eight hours per week for students aged fourteen to sixteen.[173] The Soviet government fully rebuilt the whole curriculum in order to establish students as machine operators and as technical workers.[174] After 1931, Jewish students who attended Soviet Yiddish-language schools received an education that intended to turn them into hard-working communists.

An analysis of the textbooks and workbooks that the Soviet Yiddish-language schools used before and after 1931 provides a fuller understanding of

[170] Ibid, 220.
[171] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, 99.
[172] Lauglo, "Soviet Education Policy," 295.
[173] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union,* 105.
[174] Ibid, 103.

the curriculum goals. In the first Yiddish-language schools during World War One, there were no Yiddish textbooks available for subjects such as general history, geography, and biology. Due to this lack of Yiddish textbooks, teachers had two options. The first option was for teachers to use their own translations of Russian textbooks. The second option was for teachers to simply lecture instead.[175] In the mid-1920s, there was a sudden spike in the Yiddish printing press. By 1928, the main textbook used in these schools was Y. Bakst and Y. Grinberg's *Arbets Kinder*. In total, there were approximately ten to twelve thousand printed copies of this textbook.[176] *Arbets Kinder* was organized according to the primary schools' curriculum. Every year was divided into three themes: nature and man, work, and society. In the students' first year, they learned about the seasons of the year, the daily work of the family in the city and in the country, and the family and the school. In their second year, students learned about the administrative institutions of the city and the village, they learned about air, water, sun, plants and domestic animals, and they gained a better understanding of the work of the village and the city in which the students lived. In their third year, students, now eleven years old, learned about the elementary notions of physics and chemistry, local nature, and the life of the human organism. They also learned about their region's economy and administrative institutions. In the last year of primary school, the pre-adolescent students took classes on the geography of the Soviet Union and other countries.

[175] Ibid, 29.
[176] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*, 217.

They also learned about the national economy of the Soviet Union as well as the country's organizations.[177]

Y. Bakst and Y. Grinber's textbook approached all of these topics while giving each of them a slight propagandistic twist. The textbook aimed to instill communist ideology in the students' minds. Notably, the textbook did its job without the use of blatant propaganda; the propaganda was very subtle.[178] This contrasts with the textbooks that were used after the schools' reforms in 1931. In 1933, the new curriculum used a new textbook, *Literature Lernbuch farn 4th Shulyor*. This new textbook was considered to be "aggressively propagandistic" as it favored the Soviet regime and was explicitly opposed to Jewish nationalism.[179] This is not necessarily surprising considering the Soviet Union's new goals for the Soviet Yiddish-language schools. *Literature Lernbuch farn 4th Shulyor* was even more widely used than the earlier textbook; about thirty thousand copies were published and used in the Yiddish-language schools.[180] The new textbook and curriculum separated all literature material into three general themes: Pre-October Literature, Soviet Literature, and Proletarian Literature of Capitalist Countries.[181] Another example of post-1931 schoolbooks comes from a fourth-grade textbook assigned in Minsk in 1933. In this textbook, almost all stories that students read and studied included leading questions.

[177] Ibid,216.
[178] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism,* 217.
[179] Ibid., 222.
[180] Ibid, 221.
[181] Ibid.

These leading questions meant for students to read the stories with a pro-communist point of view.[182]

There was a clear change in the Soviet Union's view on education before and after 1931. However, it is unknown exactly why this change happened. One can assume that if there were changes made, it was because the government must have been unsatisfied with the results that they were getting before. Around the same time as the curriculum reform there was a change in the government's goal for the Soviet Union as a whole. The first five-year plan and the government's desire to industrialize quickly led to this large-scale change in goal, which required trained manpower. This explains the aforementioned 1931 proclamation in which the new main goal of Soviet Yiddish-language schools was to teach students to operate machinery.[183] In addition to primary and secondary schools for native Yiddish speakers, Ukraine had an extensive system of Yiddish-language industrial technical and professional schools in the early 1930s. By 1932 there were twelve types of these institutions, with a total of about 12,997 students.[184] The expansion of this type of school demonstrates the importance the Soviet Union placed on the creation of a stronger and larger number of industrial workers.

[182] Ibid, 245.
[183] Schulman, *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union,* 103.
[184] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*, 170.

The Jewish Experience

How did the Soviet Yiddish-language schools actually impact Jewish students as well as the larger Jewish community? Did the schools successfully make the Soviet Union's Jewry more Russian and more communist? These questions can be difficult to answer because most reports and literature on the subject are not entirely reliable. Especially after 1933, the government kept no systematic statistics on the Yiddish schools.[185] This being said, the only sources available on this subject after 1933 come from the Soviet Yiddish Press, which was under Soviet government control and was therefore biased. Between 1934 and 1937, all information about the collapse of the school system came from articles in *Ermes*, the central Yiddish daily newspaper published in Moscow. In 1938, however, the government suppressed the journal.[186] Reliability in Yiddish newspapers continued to be an issue in the 1920s and 1930s. In Anna Shternshis' book *Soviet and Kosher* she interviews a man named Philip G., who expresses the ways in which some Jews were suspicious about what they read in the Soviet Yiddish newspapers. He recalls that his father always used to say that "if a paper says that the living conditions are prosperous in Ukraine, it means that people are starving there."[187] Due to these issues regarding the amount and the reliability of information available to scholars today, it is important to devise new ways of analyzing this aspect of Soviet history.

[185] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism,* 185.
[186] Ibid., 186.
[187] Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher,* 66.

The Soviet Yiddish-language schools were not the only means through which the government attempted to Russify Soviet Jewry. In the mid-1920s, many Yiddish magazines that were controlled by both the government and communist Jews published clear instructions for children as well as for adults on how to read "properly." In a 1925 guideline to reading, one such publication instructed every person to read between three and five o'clock in the afternoon with four easy steps. The first step was to choose books with big clear letters, the second was to write notes about the book on white paper, the third was to not read while eating or lying down, and the last was to sit still while reading.[188] This demonstrates that even what Jews read both in school and at home, and furthermore the way that they read, was part of their "Yiddishization." Another important strategy during the Jews' Russification was the "Communist Child Movement." On November 5, 1924, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), based in New York City, reported that there were about nine thousand organized Jewish children's groups in the Ukraine and White Russia together. The report also noted that these youth groups, called "Pioneer clubs," were attached to workshops and schools and that all of the work done by Jewish pioneers was carried out exclusively in Yiddish.[189]

An analysis of the Soviet Yiddish Press provides additional information on how the Yiddish-language schools and the expansion of the Yiddish language impacted the Soviet Union's Jewry. By 1924, there were twenty-one newspapers

[188] Ibid., 54.
[189] "Communism Among Jewish Children in Russia," *JTA* (New York, NY), Nov. 5, 1924.

established in the Soviet Union. Journals in Yiddish were booming; the government recorded that there were eighty-three new books in the Yiddish language, with a total of 320,650 general printings.[190] These achievements inspired multiple propaganda speeches. The 1924 Conference, which was the thirteenth congress of the Russian Communist Party, declared that "the great achievements in all spheres of Jewish cultural work speak clearly that only under the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet lands which are free from nationalist oppression can culture of the Jewish masses further develop."[191] This declaration demonstrates what the government wanted the Jews to believe, but was it accurate? According to a man named Yakov T. who was interviewed by the author Anna Shternshis, his mother always believed the Soviet government's declarations. Yakov recounts that his mother used to tell him to "read papers and you will be able to advance in society."[192] This view reflects that some Jews believed the Soviet Yiddish-language schools and believed that the process of "Yiddishization" would lead to upward mobility.

According to I. Dardak, a White Russian Jew who wrote an article on the comparison between the Soviet Yiddish-language schools and the Polish Jewish schools, the Soviet government was allowing Jewish culture to develop. His article describes the way in which Polish Jewish schools led to a crisis and collapse of Jewish culture, while Soviet Yiddish schools allowed for a growth in

[190] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism,* 167.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher,* 66.

culture.[193] In his analysis, Dardak claims that the Soviet education system promoted the quality of languages by instructing children in their mother tongue. He also criticizes the Jewish schools of Poland for making their pupils study in Polish, which he sees as compulsory "Polonization."[194] Ironically, he sees the Soviet Yiddish schools as inclusive and does not seem to make a link between the school system and its goal of Russification. Articles like that of Dardak can be used to demonstrate that whether or not the Soviet Union's policy towards their Jewry was in fact good or bad, at the time many people bought into the government propaganda that infiltrated virtually all aspects of life.

It is possible to find many positive testimonies about the Soviet Yiddish-language schools. Overall, students seemed to have had a good experience in these schools. Fira T., an interviewee of Anna Shternshish, recalls her time studying in the Soviet schools: "The teachers were wonderful there. Sometimes they were young and we called them comrade teacher […] I liked to study a lot. I wanted the teacher to tell me I was good."[195] In his book *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, Jerry Veidlinger states that most of his interviewees who had attended these schools were extremely proud to have studied in Yiddish. He also recounts that he interviewed a man who explained that the schools were a positive experience for students because in addition to an education, the schools provided

[193] Halevy, *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism,* 180.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, 15.

food and hot soup for children under the fourth grade, even during times of famine.[196]

These positive experiences and memories of the Soviet Yiddish schools do not mean that the institutions were successful in their Russification mission. According to a 1924 report, a Yiddish Communist writer had conducted a campaign to find out if Jewish pioneers were truly communists in their homes. The writer was upset to discover they were not truly communist; he "finds among the children an appalling ignorance of Communism and an absolute indifference to what it stands for."[197] Although this could be one single case that is unrepresentative of the larger community of Soviet Jews who attended the Soviet Yiddish-language schools, it may also be part of the reason for the educational reforms that occurred in 1931. These 1931 reforms might have actually been successful short-term because in 1933, S. Diamenstein, chairman of the Ozet and member of the Executive of the Comzet (a governmental department for settling Jews on the land and in industry) reported that the number of Jewish workers in the Soviet Union had increased from two percent before the revolution, to twenty percent afterward.[198]

Conclusion

The founding of the first Soviet Yiddish-language school in 1918 was not a first in the history of Jewish education. The aim to make Jews more Russian

[196] Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl,* 87.
[197] "Jewish Children in Russia Ignorant of Communism, Yiddish Organ Complains," *JTA* (New York, NY), Nov. 14, 1924.
[198] "Jewish Workers in Russia Now Constitute 20% As Compared with Previous 2%," *JTA* (New York, NY), Feb. 6, 1933.

began in the mid-nineteenth century during the rule of Nicholas I. His first somewhat successful attempt at bringing the enlightenment to the Jews in 1847 involved the creation of secular Russian schools for Jews. However, as years went by and imperial Russia collapsed, new forms of government still sought to make Jews more Russian. After the October Revolution in 1917 and the rise of the Soviet Union, the Soviet government attempted to turn Jews into perfect communists who would contribute to the growth of the Soviet economy through industrial work. This attempt was carried out through Soviet Yiddish-language schools. These schools' curriculum was extremely propagandistic — everything from literature to geography courses became symbolic of the Soviet Union's power. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, there was an expansion of these types of schools throughout Russia, Ukraine, and White Russia. Whether the schools were truly successful in achieving their goal and in making Jews move upwards in the class system is still debatable. Upon reviewing testimonies and journal reports, I suggest that even if they were not successful, at the time many Jewish students and parents believed that the Russification through Yiddishization program was a true means to social mobility.

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Reduced to Symbol: The Role of Women in Twentieth Century Yiddish Literature

Lauren Kranc

Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Shalom Asch's *Uncle Moses* feature female protagonists Rechele and Masha who both symbolize unfulfilled promises in Jewish history. Rechele's village Goray is susceptible to the promises of redemption by means of false messianism after its destruction in the Chmielnicki Massacres. Similarly, Kuzmin's impoverished Jewish community to which Masha belongs is susceptible to the promises of the American dream, which for them is represented and controlled by wealth at the hands of Uncle Moses.

Despite different historical settings, messianism and the American dream both represent unfulfilled promises in Jewish history. Rechele and Masha symbolize these failures in the texts, each sacrificing their body to powerful men in exchange for what they believe will bring prosperity to their communities in difficult times. Although their levels of agency and ultimate fates differ, both young women ultimately sacrifice their lives for their communities. The twentieth century American setting of *Uncle Moses* gives Masha a sense of agency and confidence as a woman that Rechele, who lives in seventeenth century Poland, lacks. Due to the evolution of women's rights over time and the Western setting, Masha experiences a slightly less tragic ending than Rechele. Yet, despite the disparity in socioeconomic contexts, societies, and periods of Jewish life, Rechele and Masha both portray the role of a sacrificial figure and both

symbolize unfulfilled promise. Drawing on *Satan in Goray*'s Rechele as a parallel, this paper will illustrate how Asch's *Uncle Moses* allows Masha to embody the twentieth century Yiddish literary traditional view of women as weak and powerless.

Rechele is a product of horror, brought up in superstition and fear during the seventeenth century messianic era following the Chmielnicki Massacres, thus lacking agency and moral grounding. Lacking a formal education or proper home and paranoid because of her cruel upbringing, Rechele "never learns how to distinguish between right and wrong," and she is therefore "susceptible to [...] the promise of redemption that begins to penetrate the town of Goray" in the form of false messianism.[199] She is completely powerless to object to Reb Gedaliya's physical domination of her body in the same way that the town of Goray is left powerless in the face of messianic promise. Rechele is hence "the vehicle through which the spirit of evil takes possession of the town."[200] She ultimately dies, an empty vessel either dominated by the powerful males of the community or literally infested with the devil, "lay[ing] with inert limbs: her eyes glazed, her arms and legs distended and wooden like those of a corpse."[201] Her body serves as a form of sacrifice for the community, as only after her death is it able to regain moral control and distinguish between good and evil.

Singer's choice of a disabled young female as a textual site of powerlessness and male possession reflects a broader view of women in Yiddish

[199] Ruth R. Wise, "Introduction," *Satan in Goray* (New York: Noonday, 1996), xxi.
[200] Ibid., xxii.
[201] Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* (New York: Noonday, 1996), 154.

literature. Rechele, as a woman, is dehumanized and objectified by men and the Jewish community at large, playing more of a symbolic role in the text than a human one, an empty vessel that male and demonic figures literally and figuratively invade to further their own wills. As the artist figure, Singer identifies with Rechele, correlating his own experiences in damaged, interwar Europe with hers in the chaos of false messianism. However, his choice as a male author to represent himself and his struggles in his work with Rechele's disabled, male-dominated, and feeble womanhood speaks to a Yiddish literary tradition that associates Jewish womanhood with objectification, destruction, and unfulfilled promise.

In the twentieth century American world of *Uncle Moses*, the Jewish community is impoverished, and Masha sacrifices herself to Uncle Moses in order to provide wealth and happiness for her family. Masha, in many ways, is a complete reversal of Rechele's character. She is a strong-willed, fierce, loving girl who even as a child "[feels] sure [...] she [can] get the money her father need[s]" from Uncle Moses, Kuzmin's "Pharaoh," i.e. the head of the community and controller of wealth.[202] At the beginning of the text, Masha demonstrates female agency and self-awareness when confidently standing up to Uncle Moses in order to defend her father. Moses is initially drawn to Masha because her childish name-calling is the "first time someone [...] dare[s] to upbraid him," and even as a child, she possesses an "independent spirit" that can "address him as

[202] Sholem Asch, *Uncle Moses: A Novel* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920), 13, 50.

an equal."[203] Masha, a "young, ripened girl, who [looks] at [Moses] fearlessly and proudly in the eye [...] awaken[s] in him a feeling of respect for another personality," and because she has won him over, it seems that "Masha [will] mean the fortune of them all."[204]

Masha becomes the intermediary between Uncle Moses and the community and a promise of good fortune, as "she [wins] whatever she ask[s]."[205] Just as Rechele's prophesies promise redemption for Goray, and as "the Jews resorted to Esther to influence Ahasuerus in their favor, so [do] the Kuzmin folk look to Masha as their intercessor before Uncle Moses."[206] Masha, as "the magic ring that unlock[s] the heart of Uncle Moses," yields status and wealth for her parents and family.[207] She becomes "a prodigy, a sorceress," in the eyes of her parents, and she is respected as if a portion of Uncle Moses' power has transferred to her.[208] Although Rechele lacks Masha's fierce nature, the same power and awe that come with Masha's being a "a marked favourite" of Uncle Moses also surrounds Rechele once she becomes a prophetess and comes to Reb Gedaliya's attention.[209] While Rechele is penetrated by spirits and demons because she is weak and defenseless, Masha's strong-willed nature first garners Uncle Moses' attention, followed by the attention of the community. These differences in character stem from the vastly different socio-historical contexts in

[203] Ibid., 48.
[204] Ibid., 58, 69.
[205] Ibid., 72.
[206] Ibid., 13.
[207] Ibid., 70.
[208] Ibid., 13.
[209] Ibid., 70.

which the texts are set and the additional agency afforded to the women in *Uncle Moses*. Yet despite these differences in the two women's agency and personality, their roles as women do not differ much. Despite her confidence, Masha is objectified just like Rechele when Uncle Moses "look[s] upon Masha as belonging in a way to him" as "the daughter of one of his relatives [...] whose fate depend[s] upon him."[210]

Despite possessing what may initially resemble power, Masha is objectified and used by Uncle Moses, her family, and the community as a whole. Uncle Moses "watche[s] over [Masha] as one watches an increasing property," and when "Masha reache[s] seventeen and a half, Uncle Moses [begins] to reveal his deeply-wrought, sweetly-desirous feeling."[211] Although his attraction to her is founded upon her strong female character, he treats her like an object in many respects. Masha is "brought up to comply with all of [his] requests — to obey him," following the example of her family and all the townsfolk.[212] However, even once Masha understands "what a hateful role she play[s] in the matter," she feels guilty and tries to avoid thinking about her desire to be free from what everyone else views as great fortune.[213] The whole community envies and fawns over Masha's family because of her luck. Since "[e]very former inhabitant of Kuzmin that live[s] in New York consider[s] Masha the luckiest girl under the sun," initially Masha also "consider[s] herself most fortunate in having been

[210] Ibid., 69.
[211] Ibid., 87.
[212] Ibid., 13, 88.
[213] Ibid., 13, 88.

affianced to Uncle Moses."[214] However, as she ages, she "[begins] to feel that she [will] have to pay for all this good fortune." [215] Even before Moses' marriage proposal, Masha considers "herself a sacrifice to the welfare of her parents, her sisters, her relatives and all the townsfolk," realizing that she will have to suffer through a relationship with Uncle Moses to keep her family proud and comfortable.[216]

In both seventeenth century Goray and twentieth century New York, a powerful male figure appears to be in control of an entire Jewish community's well-being and good fortune at the expense of a young girl's bodily agency and freedom. However, while Rechele is helpless and listless, Masha is cognizant of her sacrifice on her community's behalf. While this difference in awareness and agency showcases the divergent socio-historical settings and roles of women in the texts, Masha and Rechele are both ultimately subject to the will of powerful men and community influence in very similar ways. Uncle Moses is the "New Pharaoh" to whom "Kuzmin [is] a faithful slave," as the entire European village is reduced to a factory in America after it emigrates from Poland.[217] Similarly, Reb Gedaliya becomes Goray's spiritual and political leader in the chaos of false messianism, seizing the opportunity to lead a weakened and broken community. Uncle Moses' factory is unable to unionize because "the relations between Uncle Moses and his townsfolk [are] not purely industrial, but rather personal," as he is

[214] Ibid., 109.
[215] Ibid., 89.
[216] Ibid., 13.
[217] Ibid., 50.

more like "the head of a large family" than he is their boss.[218] American capitalism, like messianism, has "a magical charm [...] something fascinat[ing] [...] as the criminal is drawn to the gallows"; both fill Jewish communities with the promise of good fortune, redemption, and riches.[219] Like Reb Gedaliya as the leader of the new Messianic order, Moses, a powerful businessman, embodies the American dream, acting as the governing body of the entire community. Gedaliya and Moses, both strong, male, dominant characters, serve as the authoritarian rulers of their communities and hold the key to prosperity — for a price.

For Asch, the price of communal prosperity is female agency. Moses, as the key holder to the promises of the American dream through his wealth, controls the impoverished Kuzmin and in turn controls Masha. He tells Masha that she must love and respect him simply because "everybody shows the greatest respect for him" and "they have good cause."[220] Ironically, once he tells her she is to be his wife, he also demands "prompt obedience [...] in everything" and that she "must never oppose him and never argue," depriving her of the very agency and authority that initially attracted him to her.[221] She "learn[s] to obey him," and so when he declares "that she must be his bride," which according to him is the "holiest of commandments," she has no right to refuse.[222] Despite "a strange uneasiness that [makes] her feel like washing herself," Masha

[218] Ibid., 64.
[219] Ibid., 31.
[220] Ibid., 93.
[221] Ibid., 93.
[222] Ibid., 109.

does not resist Uncle Moses' fondling, allowing him to claim ownership over her both emotionally and physically.[223] Masha's impending marriage, which deprives her of her youth and happiness, is "a shroud of gloom and silence over her refined, maidenly being," which makes her feel "positive that she [is] to die [...] in a few weeks."[224] Uncle Moses' dominance and control over her is like "an ominous black veil, like the shroud of a dead bride," which deprives her of "any right to rejoice and laugh like other girls of her age."[225] By allowing Uncle Moses dominance over Masha, Asch extinguishes the very female agency that he portrays as attractive and powerful in Masha's character. Her helpless subjectivity to Moses' will serves as a metaphor for the unfulfilled promises of the American dream. Similar to *Satan in Goray*, the Jewish female protagonist is deprived of bodily agency and freedom as a literary metaphor for unfulfilled promise and false hope.

Charlie, representative of youth and revolutionary spirit, reawakens Masha to her personal agency. In his company, she realizes that "[a]ll the poor, good people hate [her] since [she has become] engaged to Uncle [Moses]."[226] Charlie's socialism reveals to Masha an association between wealth and corruption. Moreover, he awakens her to her own unhappiness in her relationship with an older man. When Masha, after a day spent at Coney Island with Charlie, declares that she does not wish to marry Moses, her parents wonder why she wishes to

[223] Ibid., 110.
[224] Ibid., 89, 114.
[225] Ibid., 89.
[226] Ibid., 123.

rob them of their "little share of happiness."[227] Not only has her marriage to Uncle Moses never been doubted or questioned, it is considered a blessing. Masha's desire to have a normal childhood instead of abundant wealth is incomprehensible to them, as they act as slaves to the capitalist machine and as blind worshippers to the idol that is Uncle Moses, who represents the American dream. For Masha's family, her change of heart is "misfortune itself" as they "now [stand] again upon the brink of [the] abyss" that is poverty.[228] Her parents have "nothing in life — no self-confidence, no determination — nothing except Uncle Moses' favor [...] bought at the cost of [their] daughter's happiness."[229] Masha's happiness, youth, and body seem a worthy and completely acceptable sacrifice for the obtainment of wealth and the fulfillment of their own vision of the American dream.

Despite her unwillingness and unhappiness in marrying Moses, Masha sees herself as a sacrifice for the greater good of her community, thus diminishing her value as an individual and as a female. Uncle Moses acknowledges that Masha's "willingness, her free consent […will] be absent" from their marriage, ironically reverting to a place where her agency matters to him, after years spent believing that "she [will] idolize him [...] if he shower[s] her with favors."[230] Due to her parents' fear of "the vision of poverty that [rises] before [them]," Masha marries Moses against her desire in order to provide for

[227] Ibid., 146.
[228] Ibid., 147.
[229] Ibid., 162.
[230] Ibid., 70, 158.

her family.[231] Masha understands then that "she ha[s] been brought up with a rope around her neck — that she [was] sold when a child, for the benefit of her parents and the whole family [...] that she no longer ha[s] any right to happiness."[232] She understands her duty to sacrifice herself for the wealth and prosperity of her family, so despite her "scorn and disgust," Masha goes through with her marriage.[233]

Masha's affair with Sam, Moses' right-hand man, and her illegitimate child by him is less of a rebellion than it is a further enslavement of herself, as she is "given into [Sam's] hands as part of Uncle Moses' legacy."[234] Thus, her child is also "a result of her serfdom, of the pressure that [has] been exerted upon her [...] the product of an error, of her weakness."[235] Despite sacrificing herself through marriage to ensure her family's good fortune, she hates herself and resents her family for being "enslaved in the shop of Uncle Moses […] that ha[s] passed into Sam's power," slaves to capitalist society and the American dream.[236] Masha herself is "but an employee of Uncle Moses — likewise a slave of the firm 'Moses Melnick and Company.'"[237] Similarly, Rechele lives in fear, at first in the power of her Granny, then Reb Gedaliya, until she eventually is "in the power of demons," who take over her body until her eventual death.[238] *Satan in Goray*'s medieval setting allows for a pre-modern, superstitious version of the same

[231] Ibid., 162.
[232] Ibid., 173.
[233] Ibid., 174.
[234] Ibid., 215.
[235] Ibid., 226.
[236] Ibid., 215.
[237] Ibid., 219.
[238] Singer, *Satan in Goray,* 68.

narrative, in which the female protagonist is overtaken and used for the sake of what is thought to be the prosperity of the community. Masha's forced slavery to capitalist America embodied by Uncle Moses at the hands of her family until she is completely isolated follows the same trajectory as Rechele's slow death through submission to male authority and demonic powers. Both *Satan in Goray* and *Uncle Moses* present young female bodies as a textual site for sacrifice, and use women as metaphors for unfulfilled promises in Jewish history.

Ultimately, both Rechele and Masha suffer tragic endings. Masha seeks emancipation from Uncle Moses with the rest of the community in their strike led by Charlie, "the 'Moses' that [will] free the Jews from 'Pharaoh King of Egypt.'"[239] The community, however, refuses to accept her as one of their own any longer, as she too comes to symbolize and represent his corrupt power. She ends up isolated, resenting her family, alone with her illegitimate child and in hiding from Uncle Moses. Although taking the child and running away is an act of defiance, she does not end up with a real chance at a life, as Uncle Moses and Masha's family has deprived her of her youth and her agency. While Rechele dies at the hands of a demon that possesses her once she is weak enough to be invaded, Masha becomes a single mother in hiding, estranged from her family and community, who represent comparable "demons" who persuaded her to choose wealth over happiness. Even though Masha acknowledges her unhappiness, unlike Rechele, Masha's conscious choice to sacrifice herself for the

[239] Asch, *Uncle Moses*, 218.

wellbeing of her suffering family still lands her in a place of utter helplessness and unhappiness.

Though the differing socio-historical settings of *Satan in Goray* and *Uncle Moses* illustrate women as sacrificial figures in different ways and give protagonists differing degrees of agency, the role of the woman in Yiddish literature as a metaphor for unfulfilled promise and devastation to the Jewish community holds true in both texts. As a Jewish woman, self-sacrifice seems to be a duty, and Idelson-Shein notes that "the pens of men [weigh] heavily [...] on the feminine tongue" throughout the Yiddish canon, restricting female agency.[240] Singer and Asch are both male authors who choose young women to represent broken promises and suffering. They depict a view of females as weak and helpless, enslaved to men and to the greater political and social systems in which they exist. As Rechele and Masha serve as metaphors to demonstrate unfulfilled dreams in Jewish history, femaleness remains symbolically entwined with weakness and devastation in the Yiddish literary tradition.

[240] Iris Indelson-Shein, "The *Schandmaske*, Silence, and *mame-loshn*," *In geveb*, August 2015, 2.

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Author Profiles

Lara Rodin is in her fourth year at McGill, majoring in Jewish Studies and double minoring in Religious Studies and Sociology. This past academic year she was student president at Hillel McGill. Every Saturday morning she teaches youth tefillot (prayers) and programming at the Shaar Hashomayim Congregation in Westmount. After graduation this spring, she will return home to Alberta, which will serve as her home base while she spends next year applying to Masters programs and working for BBYO Canada, where she will be helping teens and staff develop engaging programming in order to cultivate more meaningful Jewish experiences for high school students across the country.

Joan Meyer is a U2 student at McGill university double majoring in English Literature and Art History. Her extra curricular activities include staffing at Queer McGill and Union of Gender Empowerment as well as working as the Ask Big Questions intern at Montreal Hillel. In her spare time she loves to read, write poetry, and draw.

Sophie Panzer is a U2 History major. Her poems, essays, and short stories have appeared in *The Claremont Review, Soliloquies Anthology, Blue Marble Review,* and *carte blanche*. Her plans for the future involve re-reading Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* before binge-watching the new television series on Starz.

Rhiannon Turgel-Ethier graduated last June with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in history and minoring in Jewish studies. She is currently working on her Master's in American History, focusing on the Georgia Gold Rush of the 1830s and its impact on Cherokee Removal. Rhiannon plans on completing her Master's in December 2017.

Lauren Kranc is a third year McGill student who majors in English Literature and double minors in Jewish Studies and Gender, Sexuality, Feminist, and Social Justice Studies. She is currently on exchange at Charles University in Prague but is looking forward to returning to Montreal in September for her final year of undergrad. This year she served as the Promotions Editor of Scrivener Creative Review, a literary publication at McGill. Lauren is very grateful for the opportunity to share her work with the McGill community through Dorot.

Editor Profiles

Caroline Bedard is in her final (U3) year at McGill, studying in the Honours History program and minoring in Jewish Studies. After graduating this June, she will enjoy a relaxing summer vacation before beginning the Master of Studies (MSt) program in British and European History, 1500-present at the University of Oxford. Although Caroline will very much miss her McGill friends, she is excited to see what England has in store for her!

Rayna Lew is a U3 Political Science student minoring in North American History and Jewish Studies. She has had a particular interest in exploring the intersections of her three areas of study and has strived to do so whenever she could. She has a particular fascination with Israel's political culture and system and the Vietnam War's place in American identity and memory. She is very much looking forward to graduating this spring, particularly so she can unashamedly watch the Edmonton Oilers' playoff games.

Lindsay MacInnis is graduating this year with a major in English Literature and minors in Communications and Philosophy. During her time at McGill, Lindsay volunteered with several university organizations to orient incoming first year and exchange students. Next year, she will be attending law school at Queen's University.

Patricia Neijens is graduating this year with a major in International Development Studies and minors in Hispanic Studies and World Islamic and Middle East Studies. During her time at McGill, she was involved in a variety of extracurricular activities including departmental associations and university committees. Next year, she will be attending law school at UBC after having spent the summer travelling abroad.

Alon Faitelis is graduating with a joint major in History and Jewish Studies. Currently focusing on Israeli Studies and the history of the New Yishuv, Alon has also spent significant time studying a variety of other subjects ranging from Chinese history to urban geography. He will spend the upcoming summer backpacking through Southeast Asia before decided what to do next with his life!

Danya Firestone is graduating this year from the Honours Liberal Arts program in the History, Culture, and Society stream with a minor in Jewish Studies. During her time at McGill, Danya enjoyed being president of the Liberal Arts Program Student Association, volunteering with McGill Students for Save a Child's Heart, and helping to plan and run Holocaust Education Week on campus. She looks forward to traveling and volunteering next year before ultimately applying to graduate school.