

Across the Border: Canadian Jewish Writing

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Canadian Jewish literature has often been compared to its U.S. counterpart, for both geographic and cultural reasons. The two countries share a vast border, are former English colonies with a continual use of that language, and have significant immigrant populations. The two countries absorbed significant numbers of Jewish immigrants, including a mass Eastern European immigration that was Yiddish speaking and working class. The comparison between the two countries should be natural, at least from a Canadian perspective. However, rather than being a mini-United States, Canada has produced a literature that has evolved its own very distinctive set of defining characteristics. Further, the dominating presence of the United States and its overshadowing influence on Canada in terms of literature, theater, film, and music are indisputable, and Canadian culture is oft subsumed into the larger category of "American." Canada's Jewish writers are conflated with U.S. writers or neglected altogether. Michael Greenstein's study *Third Solitudes* suggests marginality as a key feature of Jewish Canadian literature.¹

Intertwining historical realities have informed Canada's cultural identity and the literature that its Jewish writers have produced. The ideological foundation of the country is a French-English bilingualism that dates to its roots as a European colony, and the dynamics of that uneasy duality have permeated the country's cultural development. Unlike the United States, Canada was not born out of revolution and rejection of the British Empire that dominated it. Rather, British culture continued to exert a significant influence on the country. As a former Commonwealth country, Canada arguably has far more in common with Great Britain or Australia culturally than it does with the United States: Like Canada, these countries have Jewish populations with high degrees of institutionalization and maintenance of Jewish traditions and limited influence of liberal Jewish movements.

The mass immigration of Canada's Jews, which took place after 1905, was composed of Eastern European Jews who spoke Yiddish and were, on the

whole, traditional as well as Zionist, socialist, or a combination. This stands in sharp contrast to the U.S. mass immigration of the 1880s and its earlier German immigration, which promoted acculturation and cosmopolitan values until the turn of the nineteenth century. Further, Canada did not develop its identity as a nation of immigrants until the third quarter of the twentieth century, with the advent of policies of multiculturalism. Rather, the mass Jewish immigration to Canada was dictated by government policies set in place to serve the economic needs of the country. The Jewish immigrants were met with ambivalence, in particular in comparison with the experience of new arrivals in the United States. As Greenstein writes, whereas newcomers to Ellis Island were welcomed into the melting pot, "later arrivals to the Port of Montreal, however, received no such welcome, having to wait for recognition in a conservative Canadian mosaic that did not force quick abandoning of Yiddish roots."² In an atmosphere of exclusion from a Christian mainstream, the new arrivals created a vast infrastructure to promote and maintain their Jewish culture in both Yiddish and Hebrew, notably a system of all-day schools. Without a recognizable Canadian literary tradition, Yiddish writers who emerged out of this community in the first half of the twentieth century looked to European and U.S. models for their writing. The first generation of English-language Jewish writers emerged from this immigrant community. In the 1980s, the country's new official government policies of multiculturalism created a place for Canada's Jews to promote their distinctive culture, in particular in the realm of the arts. Ethnic culture was promoted and supported by government programs that encouraged Jewish voices. Meanwhile, in the 1970s, in Quebec, separatist politics that aggressively valorized the French language excluded a majority of the province's Jewish population, which comprised immigrants from Eastern Europe who had acculturated from Yiddish into the historically dominant English-speaking minority. Meanwhile, a significant French-speaking immigrant population primarily from northern Africa forged its own distinct culture.

In addition to evolving under very different circumstances and influences than writing in the United States, Canadian Jewish literature has been strongly influenced by the relatively later development of a distinct national identity. Confederation in 1867 rendered Canada a dominion in the British Commonwealth rather than an independent country, and English Canada remained strongly identified with British culture. The country continued to fly the British Union Jack until its own national flag, the maple leaf, was adopted in 1965. Until well into the twentieth century, writers in Canada oriented themselves toward England rather than forging a distinct Canadian

literary tradition. Likewise, French Canada, which remained largely agrarian and dominated by the Catholic Church until the “Quiet Revolution” of the 1960s, had looked to France in the development of its modern culture in the late nineteenth century. The mass immigration of Jews to the country in the early twentieth century, which swelled the population from several thousand in the 1880s to more than 100,000 by the 1920s, rapidly acculturated into the economically and culturally dominant English milieu. This immigrant community produced a number of major writers who participated in the founding of their country’s literary tradition in English before it had an entrenched literary establishment. Likewise, the later Sephardi/Mizrahi Jewish immigration of the post-1950s era has participated in the development of a distinct French literary culture in Canada. The evolution of Canada’s national identity in the second half of the twentieth century – and its influence on the country’s literary tradition – has thus had a significant impact on the development of Jewish Canadian writing. The lack of a long-standing literary tradition in Canada’s official languages has historically allowed the country’s Jews the freedom to make significant contributions to Canadian literature and form an integral part of the country’s literary tradition, even as they write on Jewish themes. At the same time, the lack of a strong Canadian ethos encouraged the maintenance of a coherent Yiddish culture that produced its own lasting literary life.

Jewish Canadian literature emerged out of three distinct generations: Yiddish in the 1910s, English in the 1940s, and French in the 1960s. Each of these literary strands has had its own characteristics that stem from the interplay between its authors and the Canadian context in which they wrote. This essay will examine two pioneering authors in each language who achieved critical success in Canada: J. I. Segal and Chava Rosenfarb in Yiddish, A. M. Klein and Adele Wiseman in English, and Naim Kattan and Régine Robin in French. Each of these writers experienced isolation as the first Jewish or Jewish/female author in his or her respective languages in Canada, or, in the case of Chava Rosenfarb, the last. The study will discuss the ways in which these writers were formed by their Canadian landscape and the impact they have had on wider Canadian culture.

Yiddish

Within a relatively small and new Jewish immigrant center, Canadian Yiddish literature emerged in the shadow of larger and more established literary centers in Europe and the United States (notably New York) and produced largely minor writers until the Second World War. Concentrated in the immigrant

center of Montreal, these writers formed a cohesive literary community that was involved with literary organizations such as the Jewish Public Library (Yidishe folksbibliotek) and published widely in the daily newspaper, the *Keneder adler* (founded in 1907), as well as a series of local short-lived literary journals. At the same time, they understood themselves as an integral part of a transnational literary venture that spanned Yiddish hubs across the world. They published abroad and hosted visiting Yiddish writers from across the world. Because of these contacts, Canada's Yiddish writers introduced new, modernist literary trends to the country as early as the 1920s, some two decades before these would appear in English. However, because they were writing in Yiddish, the impact did not extend beyond a Jewish readership.

J. I. Segal was the most renowned Canadian Jewish writer of the early immigrant period. Born in the Ukraine and raised in the Hasidic town of Koretz, Segal settled in Montreal at the age of fifteen and found work in a garment factory. With the encouragement of local Yiddish literati, he published his first poem in the *Keneder adler* in 1915. A poet who briefly resided in New York City and associated with Mani Leib and other members of the modernist Yiddish literary collective *Di yunge*, Segal forged new paths in his verse and in the publication of avowedly modernist literary journals that were, in turn, influenced by avant-garde American and European cultural movements. Among his subjects was the Montreal cityscape; one of the most well known of these poems, "Late Autumn in Montreal," captures the Jewish neighborhood along "the Main" (St. Laurent Boulevard) where Segal, along with the city's Yiddish immigrant population, resided:

Our churchy city becomes even more pious
on Sundays, the golden crosses shine and gleam
while the big bells ring with loud
hallelujahs and the little bells answer
their low amens; the tidy peaceful streets
lie dreaming in broad daylight murmuring
endearments to me who am such a Yiddish Jew
that even in my footsteps they must hear
how the music of my Yiddish song sounds
through the rhythm of my Hebrew prayer.³

During a time when English and French poetic traditions favored pastoral landscapes, Segal was one of the very first poets in any language to depict the cityscapes of Montreal. However, while these poems capture the physical landscapes of an ordinarily bustling street, they are devoid of people

to identify the landscape as recognizably Canadian. As Shari Cooperman Friedman suggests, poems such as this one harken back to Segal's home of Koretz, which, like Catholic Montreal, was a "churchy" city.⁴ This feature of Segal's verse points to a broader feature of the Canadian Jewish experience in the first half of the twentieth century: The Jewish population formed a distinct minority within a Christian country that maintained its strongly Catholic and Protestant characters and lacked mechanisms to integrate its immigrant population. In Montreal in particular – the largest Jewish immigrant center at the time – the city's Jews maintained a separate infrastructure to parallel the French Catholic and English Protestant ones already in place, including libraries, schools, philanthropic organizations, and others. As a special volume dedicated to Canada in the *Musterverk* series of Yiddish literature indicates, there is a corpus of Yiddish poetry that describes the physical environment of Canada: in it but separate from wider Canadian society and its inhabitants.⁵ Segal himself was acutely aware of the absence of a distinctive Canadian literary voice, a situation he attempted to address by publishing Canadian Yiddish literary journals such as *Nyuansn* (1921), whose introduction reads:

Our motivation is not to strive for pioneering literary activity here in Canada, which is cold, vast, and of limited Jewishness. We cannot hope for any kind of distinct Yiddish cultural center here. . . . Our literary center is New York, whether we have expectations from it or not, and whether we seek inspiration there or not. The fact that we are *here* in Canada makes us a distinct element that is seeking expression and cannot remain silent.⁶

This lack of engagement with the Canadian cultural mainstream and the absence of a distinct Canadian literary tradition allowed the country's Yiddish literati to forge their own literary voice rather than be influenced by contemporary Canadian writing. Their writing thus integrates avant-garde literary trends that would not enter mainstream Canadian writing for another generation. The lack of a specific Canadian Yiddish literary tradition likewise imbued that literature with fluidity. In his study of the Yiddish poet Ida Maze, a contemporary of Segal, the scholar Irving Massey characterizes the Montreal Yiddish milieu of the Depression era as deeply communitarian, with art a product of the community and "no clear standards, and none to impose them if there had been."⁷ Although this was a period of ideological extremes and Yiddish literati, like their counterparts abroad, had their rivalries along political lines, in particular with the advent of extreme left-wing movements, virtually all of the country's writers published in a wide array of journals and other collective publications that spanned the ideological spectrum. This can

be attributed to the country's relatively small population of writers and readers and corresponding lack of resources, as well as to the lack of a Canadian literary establishment in any language. This fluidity has remained a lasting characteristic of Canadian Yiddish writing.

Canada transitioned from a minor into a major center of Yiddish literature after the Holocaust, which sent world-renowned Yiddish writers to Canada. Chava Rosenfarb joined a vibrant cultural community in Montreal in 1950. A survivor of the Lodz Ghetto and several concentration camps, Rosenfarb authored a series of novels set in her native Lodz. She continued to write in the Yiddish language even as its readership dwindled out of fidelity to a community destroyed in the Holocaust.⁸

Rosenfarb formed part of a tight-knit Yiddish literary community that comprised dozens of writers in Montreal as well as internationally. She maintained correspondence with many Yiddish writers, notably those who wrote for the prestigious Israel-based publication *Di goldene keyt* (1949–1995). By the 1980s, when many of these writers and their audiences were no longer living and Yiddish audiences were not replenishing themselves, Yiddish writing was buoyed by Canadian policies of multiculturalism that supported literary projects in minority languages. Rosenfarb applied for several writing grants, albeit unsuccessfully, while writers such as Sholem Shtern received funding for projects to translate and promote Yiddish.⁹ Further, the language was taught in secular Jewish day schools that were heavily subsidized by the provincial government. With this state support, it remained viable to publish in Yiddish even as the number of fluent native speakers in the secular world dwindled.

Rosenfarb received international acclaim for her novels, including the prestigious Manger Prize, and became one of the world's last remaining secular Yiddish writers. Like many other Yiddish writers in Canada, she was closely involved in the translation of her own works into English in order to reach a wider readership. These efforts date to 1971, when she prepared a selection of her own English translations of her poetry for publication, which, for reasons unknown, never appeared during her lifetime.¹⁰ In her introduction to this volume, published posthumously, Rosenfarb identifies the rationale behind her project of self-translation: "It is an attempt to reach out, to remove the linguistic chains I was born in, chains that are uncomfortable to any writer; because, basically, language is an inadequate and limited instrument."¹¹ She sought to transcend ethnic barriers and communicate with a broad audience. Rosenfarb continued these efforts: Translations of all of her novels and a selection of short stories, which she was closely involved with, did appear during

her lifetime. At the same time, she remained committed to the language until the end of her life.

Rosenfarb had a complex relationship with Canada, which allowed her freedom to write but also filled her with a profound sense of isolation rooted in her identity as a displaced post-Holocaust Diaspora Jew. She expressed these conflicting feelings in an essay she wrote two decades after settling in Montreal:

For twenty-one years I have lived in Canada, the country of promise. There is a magnificent air of freedom about this country, a freedom which the winds of all seasons, sweeping through the breadth of the continent seem to carry on their wings – an ideal place of escape for those who have been oppressed and enslaved elsewhere, for those who wish to turn over a new leaf, who hope for change, for betterment, who want to live their lives as they please.

However I do not feel at home in this country. Here, in Montreal, in the Province of Quebec, I have lived for two decades between the two solitudes – in my own solitude.¹²

As a Yiddish writer, Rosenfarb's primary point of engagement was with a transnational Yiddish literary community rather than the Canadian context in which she wrote most of her works. Her main influence was European literature, and she only became familiar with Canadian literature late in life. Canada, however, features prominently in her short stories, originally published in *Di goldene keyt* in the 1980s. According to Goldie Morgentaler, "She has done this by effecting a synthesis between her primary theme of the holocaust and the Canadian milieu in which she finds herself, so that Canada becomes in these stories the land of the postscript, the country in which the survivors of the holocaust play out the tragedy's last act."¹³

English

Canada's Anglo-Jewish authors and poets of the twentieth century played a formative role in the creation of a tradition of Canadian literature and are some of the country's leading writers. They have received critical recognition locally and internationally, including Canada's top literary prize, the Governor General's Award. They integrated the Jewish immigrant experience into an evolving Canadian literary mainstream, which includes a significant component of immigrant literature. As such, they were able to find their place within an evolving literary tradition that lacked an entrenched establishment.

The poet A. M. Klein bridged two worlds: Eastern European Jewish tradition and the Canadian modernist literature that he played a role in forging

in the 1940s. Born in Ratno, Poland, Klein arrived in Montreal as a child and grew up in the Jewish immigrant neighborhood, where he received both a traditional Jewish and secular education. As a community activist, Klein was devoted to Jewish and leftist causes: He served as president of Canada's Zionist Young Judaea movement in the 1930s and unsuccessfully ran for federal office for the leftist CCF Party in 1949. He served as long-term editor of the Anglo-Jewish newspaper the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (1938–1955). Klein was at the forefront of a distinctively Canadian modern literary tradition and was involved with various literary schools that sought to forge a new voice in Canadian literature: the "Montreal Group" of poets at McGill University, which included A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, and Leon Edel; the Preview Group of poets, which included F. R. Scott, P. K. Page, and Patrick Anderson; as well as the rival First Statement poets, which included John Sutherland, Louis Dudek, and Irving Layton. His poetry integrates diverse literary traditions and forms: biblical verse, medieval and modern Hebrew literature, Yiddish literature, Shakespeare, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce. The themes of his highly complex writing constitute a wide array, Jewish and non-Jewish. For example, he published *The Rocking Chair* (1945), a series of poems that depicts French Canadian life, and a novel titled *The Second Scroll* (1951) that deals with the search for meaning in a post-Holocaust world. His position as one of the country's first modern Canadian poets allowed him great freedom to experiment with forms and content. For example, his ode to his city, "Montreal," originally published in *Preview* in 1944 and reprinted in *The Rocking Chair*, integrates linguistic elements of Canada's two official languages:

O city metropole, isle riverain!
Your ancient pavages and routs
Traverse my spirit's conjured avenues!
Splendor erabic of your promenades
Foliates there, and there your maisonry
Of pendent balcon and escalier'd march
Unique midst English habitat
Is vivid Normandy!¹⁴

The effect, as one scholar posits, is that the poem upon which it draws, Ezra Pound's "New York," is "reassembled into a new, distinctively Canadian dish."¹⁵

Klein remains one of the most critically acclaimed of Canada's poets, and as the country's first prominent Anglo-Jewish writer, he offered a model for

Jewish Canadian writers to follow. Despite his withdrawal from public life in the mid-1950s, his influence has been long-standing in Canadian literature, in particular among his fellow Jewish writers. The poet and prose writer Miriam Waddington published a biography of Klein in 1970, a study titled *Folklore in the Poetry of A. M. Klein* (1981), and an edited collection of his poetry. A biographical study, *A. M. Klein: La réconciliation des races et des religions* (1994), authored by Naïm Kattan (discussed later), lauds Klein for melding his literary career with civic duty and commitment to his community, and for being open to the world while safeguarding his own traditions. Further, an anthology of poetry dedicated to and written about Klein was published under the title *A Rich Garland: Poems for A. M. Klein* (1998). The collection featured some fifty poets, including the Jewish poets Eli Mandel and Miriam Waddington.¹⁶ Klein has also been the subject of academic books and symposia. With Klein, one can begin to speak of a community of Canadian Jewish writers who influenced each other: Klein encouraged the poet Irving Layton and strongly influenced the prose writer Henry Kreisel, who authored what was to become his best-known short story, “The Almost Meeting” (1981), about a missed encounter between a young writer and his literary hero, based on A. M. Klein, whom Kreisel had tried to meet after Klein had lapsed into silence.¹⁷ Most famously, the novelist Mordecai Richler modeled a highly unsympathetic character on Klein in his novel *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989).

The Winnipeg-born writer Adele Wiseman was a seminal figure in Canadian literary culture in the second half of the twentieth century, both as an author and as a promoter of literature. She grew up in Winnipeg’s North End, the city’s Jewish neighborhood, and her Ukrainian-born parents were involved in secular Yiddish cultural circles and sent her to a secular Yiddish school. Like Klein, she was educated at a Canadian university, receiving her B.A. from the University of Manitoba. As Ruth Panofsky has shown, Wiseman made an early commitment to become a professional writer and devoted herself to the vocation of perfecting her craft, despite declining success over the course of her career.¹⁸ She wrote in multiple genres; her most critically acclaimed writing centered on the Jewish immigrant experience: Her first novel, *The Sacrifice* (1956), which received universal acclaim, deals with traditional Jewish Ukrainian immigrants to Canada, Abraham and Sarah, who experience a series of tragedies in the transition from Old World to New World. Her second novel, *Crackpot* (1974), is a lighthearted glimpse at the life of a Jewish prostitute in Winnipeg’s North End. Both novels are deeply Jewish in content and language and lend themselves to a variety of Jewish interpretations. For example, scholars have applied kabbalistic concepts in their readings of *Crackpot*.¹⁹

Wiseman identified Canada as a significant factor in her literary career. In an essay about women in Canadian fiction, she attributes her mobility as a woman writer to forging her career in a country that lacked “an already strongly established male literary establishment.”²⁰ Encouraged by mentors and fellow students at the University of Manitoba, she found herself one of the first women prose writers in Canada in the immediate postwar years. Further, she enjoyed a long and fruitful friendship with the prominent Canadian writer Margaret Laurence.²¹ This friendship, expressed in a voluminous body of letters, helped create a sense of community among women writers in Canada, who otherwise experienced isolation.²² Despite declining critical acclaim, she remained devoted to the literary path she had chosen, delaying the publication of a second novel for eighteen years. Finally, particularly in her last years, she exerted wide influence on Canadian literature as a mentor to other writers.

French

Canada’s French-language Jewish writers arrived in Canada after the Second World War, both as part of a sizable Sephardi immigration and as French-speaking survivors of the Holocaust. As Francophones, they naturally settled in Montreal, which was home to a French-speaking majority that had historically lived uneasily with a politically and economically dominant English-speaking minority. Until the “Quiet Revolution” of the 1960s, the province of Quebec outside Montreal was largely agrarian, staunchly Catholic, and French-speaking; the 1960s marked massive changes as the province secularized rapidly and nationalist movements situated the French language as a core component within a newly emerging Quebec identity.

While not the first French-language Jewish writer to achieve wide acclaim – in this respect he was preceded by the poet Monique Bosco – Naïm Kattan is the first to write predominantly on Jewish themes. Born in Baghdad, he was educated in Arabic, Hebrew, French, and English and pursued his advanced education in literature at the Sorbonne. He settled in Montreal in 1954, a time when Canada’s Jewish population was predominantly Ashkenazi and anglicizing rapidly. With facility in both English and French, he was able to move fluidly between cultures and became involved in cultural rapprochement between the Jewish community and the wider French Canadian population, who had historically been estranged from each other, through his liaison work with the Canadian Jewish Congress organization, the Cercle Juif de Langue Française. He also worked as a journalist with the French-language press and head of the literary section of the Canada Council, a federal funding agency

for the arts in Canada. His first novel, *Adieu Babylone* (1975), is a semiautobiographical coming of age novel that follows a young Iraqi Jew as he encounters the world of Western culture in the 1940s. One of the core themes of this work is how the protagonist negotiates his own minority Jewish heritage within a multiethnic Baghdad and his encounter with the West.²³

Kattan's multilingualism and transcultural identity have placed him in a unique position within Canadian literature. Critics point to the fluidity with which Kattan has moved among English and French cultures in Quebec combined with his experience as an outsider to the majority Muslim Iraqi culture in which he grew up. This is indicated in the title of a review of *Adieu, Babylon*: "Bridge of Tongues: Why an Arabic-speaking, Baghdad-born Jew Is a Perfect Guide to the Modern Canadian Experience."²⁴ According to one scholar, "it is because of the facility with which he moves in and out of the confines of cultures that Naïm Kattan has been able to fit so easily into the Canadian Mosaic." As Kattan himself stated in 1982, "I'm not Canadian just because I prefer Canada to the United States. . . . I have become part of the ethos of what is Canada."²⁵ Kattan's unique position at the crossroads of cultures has resulted in his being portrayed as the quintessential Canadian.

Régine Robin was born to Polish-Jewish parents in Paris, where she grew up speaking Yiddish and French and was sent to a leftist Yiddish Sunday school. She obtained a doctorate from the Université de Paris, settled in Montreal in 1977, and became a professor of sociology at the Université de Montréal. Her arrival coincided with the height of the Quebecois separatist movement and marked a time when the province was fundamentally redefining its sense of national identity. Her first novel, *La Québécoise* (1983), is considered a classic work of a genre called *écriture migrante* that emerged in the 1980s in Quebec. Like Kattan, she was multilingual – speaking French, Yiddish, German, Russian, and English – and was able to move freely among cultures. At the same time, her displacement as a post-Holocaust Jew resonates throughout her work.

La Québécoise offers a fragmented, nonlinear stream of consciousness account of a protagonist who is unable to integrate into her adopted home. The work follows a Paris-born Ashkenazi Jew, like Robin, who settles in Montreal and is "the wandering Jew" who is comfortable only in Hebrew; like Robin, she has attempted to salvage works in the Yiddish language via translation. The work is punctuated by outbursts such as this one:

ON NE DEVIENRAIT JAMAIS VRAIMENT
QUÉBÉCOIS.

De l'autre côté de la barrière linguistique?
Allons bon. Elle serait venue de Paris
pire encore
maudite Française.
Un imaginaire yiddishophone? Quel drôle de
mot!²⁶

WE WOULD NEVER BECOME TRULY
QUÉBÉCOIS.
On the other side of the linguistic barrier?
Okay then. She would have come from Paris
even worse
a damn Frenchwoman.
A Yiddishophone imagination? What a funny
word!²⁷

One of the themes of the work is the displacement of Jewish history, notably in the Holocaust, as well as the loss of Yiddish, which constitutes the subject of her book *L'Amour du Yiddish: écriture juive et sentiment de la langue, 1830–1930* (*The Love of Yiddish: Jewish Writing and the Feeling of the Language*, 1984). In a paper titled “Rêver la langue disparue” that she contributed to a 2004 conference called “Traduire le Montreal Yiddish/New Readings of Yiddish Montreal,” Robin addresses the imagined ways that Yiddish can inhabit a culture where no one understands it: “La langue perdue, la langue absente comme tremplin à l’imaginaire et à la création, si l’on veut, et quelques modalités de ces inscriptions.”²⁸ [The lost language, the absent language as a springboard to the imagination and to creation, if one desires it, and some modes of these inscriptions]. Rooted in Montreal and profoundly informed by her identity of displacement as an atheist Holocaust survivor, Régine Robin is, perhaps, the quintessential Quebec immigrant voice.

Concluding Remarks

These founding figures in Canadian Jewish literature were joined by a growing group of writers in all three languages. Yiddish letters in Canada expanded rapidly from 1950 to 1980, with a core group of some two dozen writers actively publishing in the language, including Yehuda Elberg, Peretz Miransky, Simkha Simkhovitch, Sholem Shtern, and Yaakov Zipper. Canada’s Yiddish writers were at the forefront of international Yiddish activity into the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the last decade, this Canadian Yiddish literary tradition has essentially come to an end with the death of the last major writer in that language, Rosenfarb herself. In contrast, the English and French Jewish literary

traditions have expanded. The list of writers in English who have achieved international renown includes Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, and Mordecai Richler, and, most recently, David Bezmozgis. It also includes a long list of writers who have rooted their careers in Canada and published a wide variety of works with Jewish themes: Matt Cohen, Howard Kreisel, Norman Levine, Robert Majzels, Eli Mandel, Seymour Mayne, Lillian Nattel, Norman Ravvin, Nancy Richler, Miriam Waddington, and others. Geographically these writers span Canada's largest hubs of Eastern European mass immigration of the nineteenth century: Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg. The Holocaust and themes of uprooting and exile feature prominently in this body of literature. The list is shorter in French, with a handful of writers in Montreal including Monique Bosco and Victor Téboul. The most recent Jewish Canadian writing can be found in the Canadian literary journal *Parchment: Contemporary Canadian Jewish Writing*, of which the latest edition (volume 16) was published in the spring of 2014.

The question of what constitutes Canadian Jewish literature is undergoing the same challenges as in the United States and in other locations: What makes literature Jewish and Canadian? Is it enough for a writer to be of Jewish and Canadian origins or to have Jewish identity and at one point to have called Canada home? Does a writer need to be writing on Jewish themes and in a Canadian setting? For example, the award-winning writer and filmmaker David Bezmozgis emigrated to Canada from his native Latvia in 1980 and grew up in Toronto's Russian Jewish neighborhood. His collection of short works, *Natasha and Other Stories* (2004), is set largely in Toronto and deals with Jewish characters. In scholarly studies, he tends to be conflated with a generation of Russian Jewish émigré writers who settled in North America and who explore their Russian roots in their work, notably the U.S. writers Gary Shteyngart, Lara Vapnyar, Ellen Litman, Anya Ulinich, Sana Krasikov, Irina Reyn, and Maxim D. Shrayer.²⁹ While the Jewishness of his writing is discussed, its Canadianness has proved more problematic; as one author states, while Canadian Jewish writers tend to be marginalized within scholarship of Jewish writing in "America," I hope to show that Bezmozgis is too interesting to be ignored just because he ends up on the wrong side of the border.³⁰

The Jewishness and Canadianness of the literary tradition are complicated by the lack of a tradition of criticism to accompany it. Canada has not produced its own equivalent to the celebrated U.S. literary critic Alfred Kazin to help shape and promote Canadian Jewish literature. The authors who are the focus of this study – Segal, Rosenfarb, Klein, Wiseman, Kattan, and Robin – are universally considered Jewish Canadian writers in commentary on the subject. They write on Jewish themes, depict Canadian landscapes, and are

self-identified as Canadian; they also struggled to stake out their careers and many wrote with a looming sense of isolation. With increasing fluidity in Jewish and Canadian identities, the categories blur. The last fifteen years have brought heated discussion on the state of Jewish Canadian literature in journals and symposia, some of it hosted by a Montreal publisher under the title “The Jewish-Canadian Literature Debate: Has Jewish-Canadian Writing Lost Its Vigour?” Some Canadian Jewish writers have bemoaned the recent state of Canadian Jewish letters as disappointing, overly romanticized, less Jewishly informed, and constituting only minor writers; others characterize today’s Canadian Jewish writing as more diverse and dynamic, and unfortunately overlooked by contemporary critics. Many of the participating authors suggest that Canadian Jewish literature has declined as the country’s Jewish population has largely shed its immigrant roots and achieved upward mobility.³¹

Despite being overshadowed by the Jewish literary scene in the neighboring United States, young Jewish writers are producing innovative works in Canada. The newest voices include Ayelet Tsabari, whose volume *The Best Place on Earth: Stories* (2013) draws on her own experiences as an Israeli immigrant of Yemeni descent, and Gabriella Golliger, whose novel *Girl Unwrapped* (2011) portrays a child of Holocaust survivors coming to terms with her lesbian and Jewish identities. Perhaps the future of Canadian Jewish literature lies precisely in this new diversity of voices and the struggle for new identities.

Notes

- 1 Michael Greenstein, *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008).
- 2 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 3 J. I. Segal, “*Shpet harbst in Montreol*” in *Letste lider* (Montreal: Aroysgegebn fun der Y. Y. Sigal-Fundatsye, 1955), 106; translated by Miriam Waddington as “Late Autumn in Montreal,” in *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry*, edited by Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), 153.
- 4 Shari Cooper Friedman, “Between Two Worlds: The Works of J. I. Segal,” in *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, ed. Ira Robinson, Pierre Ancil, and Mervin Butovsky (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1990), 115–128.
- 5 See Shmuel Rozhanski, *Kanadish: Antologiyе. Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur 62* (Buenos Aires: Literatur-gezelschaft bam yivo in Argentine, 1974).
- 6 J. I. Segal, “Rezonansn,” *Nyuansn* 3 (February 1921): 65.
- 7 Irving Massey, *Identity and Community: Reflections on English, Yiddish, and French literature in Canada* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 53.
- 8 Rebecca Margolis, “Chava Rosenfarb’s Yiddish Montreal,” *Canadian Jewish Studies/ Études juives canadiennes* 18–19 (2010–2011): 159–177.

- 9 Rebecca Margolis, "Sholem Shtern: Bridging the Gaps," in *New Readings of Yiddish Montreal/ Traduire le Montréal Yiddish/ Taytshn un ibertaytshn yidish in Montreal*, ed. Pierre Ancil, Norman Ravvin, and Sherry Simon (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007), 93–102.
- 10 Chava Rosenfarb, *Exile at Last*, ed. Goldie Morgentaler (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2013), 10.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 11–12.
- 13 Goldie Morgentaler, "Land of the Postscript: Canada and the Post-Holocaust Fiction of Chava Rosenfarb," *Judaism* 49:2 (Spring 2000): 169.
- 14 A. M. Klein, *A. M. Klein – Complete Poems: Collected Poems*, Part 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 621.
- 15 Darlene Kelly, "A. M. Klein and the 'Fibbiest Fabricator of Them All,'" *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 43 (Fall–Winter 1998): 70–102.
- 16 Seymour Mayne and Glen Rotchin, *A Rich Garland: Poems for A. M. Klein* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1998).
- 17 Reprinted in Henry Kreisel, *The Almost Meeting and Other Stories* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2004).
- 18 Ruth Panofsky, *The Force of Vocation: The Literary Career of Adele Wiseman* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006).
- 19 For example, Francis Zichy, "The Lurianic Background: Myths of Fragmentation and Wholeness in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*," in *Adele Wiseman and Her Works*, ed. Ruth Panofsky (Toronto: Guernica, 2001), 31–54.
- 20 Adele Wiseman, *Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 58.
- 21 Their correspondence spanning some forty years has been published in John Lennox and Ruth Panofsky, eds. *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).
- 22 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 23 Naïm Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon*, trans. Sheila Fischman (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2005), chapter 11, esp. 71.
- 24 Nasrin Rahimieh, *Oriental Responses to the West: Comparative Essays in Select Writers from the Muslim World* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1990), 29.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Régine Robin, *La Québécoise: roman* (Montreal: Québec-Amerique, 1983), 36–37.
- 27 English translation by Phyllis Aronoff of Régine Robin's *La Québécoise: roman*, published under the title *The Wanderer* (Montreal: Alter Ego Editions, 1997), 24.
- 28 Régine Robin, "Rêver la langue disparue," in *New Readings of Yiddish Montreal*, 77.
- 29 Adrian Wanner, "Russian Jews as American Writers: A New Paradigm for Jewish Multiculturalism?" *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 37:2 (Summer 2012): 157.
- 30 Bettina Hoffman, "David Bezmozgis – Muscles, Minyan and Menorah: Judaism in *Natasha and Other Stories* (2004)," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 25, Contemporary Jewish American Writers Respond to Judaism (2006): 102.
- 31 "The Jewish-Canadian Literature Debate: Has Jewish-Canadian Writing Lost Its Vigour?" <http://www.vehiculepress.com/subjects/jewish/jewishlitdebate.html>.

Canadian-Jewish literature, Greenstein argues, is characterized by the sense of homelessness and exile which dominated the writings of the father of Jewish-Canadian literature, A.M. Klein. Greenstein finds the paradigm for this sense of loss in Henry Kreisel's short story, "The Almost Meeting." Using the theme of this story as a base, Greenstein describes how the Jewish-Canadian writer is divided between life in Canada and a rich European past - between life in the New World and the strong traditions of the Old. The Jewish-Canadian writer may look for a home in both these places, but neither i The Canadian Jewish Time Machine goes back to September 10, 1952 to clear up a mystery about when various rare and important Shearith Israel synagogue documents, identified as part of the "Martin Wolff collection", were donated to what was then known as the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives. Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives. September 2 at 5:49 AM Â. In this most recent episode of the ACJS Meet the Author series, Dr. Amir Lavie makes some thoughtful and encouraging points about the advantages of community-held Archives. See in particular minutes 28-30.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS8V> Canadian authorities were so angry at what they believed was his abuse of their nation's neutrality that they considered jailing him. Signs of failure were everywhere. "I had hoped to have accomplished more," the Mississippian mused bitterly in a letter written December 3, 1864, to Confederate Secretary of State Judah Benjamin. Thompson kicked off his Canadian mission by sending a small guerrilla team south across the Canadian border to provide leadership for a Northwest rebellion to help finance it. The scheme would become known as the Northwest Conspiracy. Leading the uprising would be the so-called Copperhead groups, antiwar Democratic party organizations that Thompson wrongly believed to have well-organized armies numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Henry Srebrnik, "Red Star Over Birobidzhan: Canadian Jewish Communists and the 'Jewish Autonomous Region' in the Soviet Union," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 129-47. 130 *labour/le travail*. Much has been written about the Birobidzhan project. See the recently published account, including a useful bibliography, by Robert Weinberg, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland. An Illustrated History, 1928-1996* (Berkeley 1998). Local [COR committees were active across Canada that year and worked hard to raise money for goods and supplies; the Canadian section of the ICOR, in its first national campaign, was collecting money for two tractors for Birobidzhan on behalf of two activists who had recently died. To get us across the border from Canada, Uncle Ben had paid the right people. The restrictive quota system, deliberately small to begin with, had been filled. It heavily favored immigration from northern and Western Europe, creating the unspoken attitude that people from Eastern Europe, people like us, were undesirable. I grew up with our story of crossing the border that came to me in fragments. I participated. It was I who held the hand of a stranger, walked quickly to keep up with the long strides of the adults surrounding me.