NEGOTIATING A HYPHENATED IDENTITY:

THREE JEWISH-CANADIAN WRITERS

by

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Abstract and Keywords

This thesis is an exploration of the responses to the problems created by a "hyphenated identity." Hyphenated identity is a phrase conceived for the purpose of this thesis in order to express the relationship between an individual's nationality and their religious and cultural inheritances. It is the goal of this thesis to investigate and set out how three authors, working against a similar set of circumstances, negotiate their hyphenated identities in their writing. The responses are not uniform. This thesis argues that not only do responses vary widely, but also, that they are part of a dynamic process that is influenced by previous responses and historical events. This theme will be examined in the context of A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, Irving Layton's *Fortunate Exile*, and Mordecai Richler's *This Year in Jerusalem*.

Keywords: Klein, Layton, Richler, Canadian, Jewish, Identity, Israel.

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Introduction

In the lives and works of A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Mordecai Richler, Montreal is home to both Jews and gentiles. Growing up in a Jewish neighbourhood, in a predominantly non-Jewish city, forced them to create a space in which to live on the margins of society. On the one hand, they were the generation born to immigrants who moved to Canada to escape persecution and pogroms in Eastern Europe. They were raised in an environment where stories of Jewish victimization, punctuated by tales of the Holocaust,

"coalesced with everyday experiences of anti-Semitism."[1] On the other hand, they grew up in and began to explore a world unknown to their parents' generation. The non-Jewish world that existed outside the walls of their sheltered upbringing offered social and economic opportunities previously unknown to the Jewish community. They faced a choice: assimilation or segregation. This dilemma resulted in the "inability to resolve the conflict between the wish to assimilate and the desire to assert their Jewish identity."[2] Unable to make a definitive choice, these Jewish-Canadian writers engaged in a negotiation between, at one end of the spectrum, integration and assimilation into gentile society, and at the other, a complete withdrawal from the gentile world. The reality is that most Diasporic Jews try to locate themselves in a position somewhere in between the two poles.[3]

Fueled by the anxiety and strain felt by those living a "hyphenated identity," Klein, Layton, and Richler are three Jewish-Canadians who use their writing to engage in and explore the conflict between their Jewish heritage and their Canadian homeland.[4] This results in a tension that drives the need to reconcile their hyphenated identities; a complex

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[1] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Assimilation and Assertion: The Response to the Holocaust in Mordecai Richler's Writing* (New York: Peter Lang P, 1989) 168.

[2] Brenner *Assimilation* i.

[3] A Diasporic Jew is a Jew living in the Diaspora. The Diaspora refers to all Jews not living in Israel. Historically, it refers to the dispersion of the Jews from Israel. The first dispersion took place in 700 BCE when ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were destroyed and the remainder dispersed by the Assyrians.

[4] Hyphenated identity is a phrase conceived for the purpose of this thesis in order to express the relationship between an individual's nationality and their religious and cultural inheritances.

negotiation that requires social and religious compromises. These authors aim to avoid alienation from either half of their cultural realms. Through this process, they strive to resolve the tension created by a dual identity by attempting to situate and understand their place within both a Jewish and a Canadian context.

It is the goal of this thesis to explore the responses to the problems created by a hyphenated identity and to investigate and set out how three authors, working against a similar set of circumstances, negotiate their hyphenated identities in their writing. The responses are not uniform. This thesis argues that not only do responses vary widely, but also, that they are part of a dynamic process that reacts to previous responses and historical events. This theme will be examined in the context of A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, Irving Layton's *Fortunate Exile*, and Mordecai Richler's *This Year in Jerusalem.*[5]

A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* is the first major Jewish-Canadian novel to explore Jewish life in the Diaspora. In his novel, the narrator's journey leads him to Israel where he finds redemption and consolation in the wake of the Holocaust: the birth of a Jewish state. In other words, Klein explains the existence of Israel as a miraculous response to the Holocaust. This view represents a paradigm in Jewish-Canadian Literature. The Holocaust

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[5] A.M. Klein, *The Second Scroll* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961); Irving Layton, *Fortunate Exile* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987); Mordecai Richler, *This Year in Jerusalem* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1995).

and the birth of the state of Israel had a profound impact on Klein's relationship with both the Jewish and gentile communities in Canada. Klein sought to unify and to achieve a sense of harmony that existed within the multiple divisions of his life: the practice of Judaism and a liberal education which challenged traditional beliefs; Diasporic Jews in contrast with Israeli Jews; the cultural divisions between anglophone and francophone Québecois. In *The Second Scroll*, Klein attempts to understand his place in the world. Through his narrator, he struggles to uncover a unifying voice in the communities of the Diaspora and to develop a meaningful relationship with Israel. His quest forces him to construct a new form of Jewish expression that recognizes and participates in gentile society while maintaining his commitment to his Jewish heritage.

Following Klein, other Jewish-Canadian writers have struggled to understand the Holocaust, their relationship to Israel, and their own place in Canadian society. In his collection of poems titled *Fortunate Exile*, Irving Layton grapples with a variety of Jewish issues. He rejects Klein's position that announces Israel as a miraculous response to the Holocaust. Instead, Layton views Israel as an opportunity for an empowered response, through military strength and political independence, to the Jewish history of victimization. As such, it would appear that Layton's position is the polar opposite to Klein's. Layton's combative and didactic approach strives to shock and awaken his readers. His work

transcends the dichotomous life that threatened to suffocate Klein by taking an aggressive stance on Jewish issues. In his poem "For My Two Sons, Max and David," Layton explores his relationship to Judaism and Israel. Through the course of the poem, he discovers the symbolic value of the newly-established state of Israel. For Layton, Israel functions as a model for how all Jews should live: Bibles are exchanged for Uzis. He is acutely aware and a strong defender of his Jewish heritage and he embraces Israel as a symbol of Jewish heroism; yet at the same time, he rejects the orthodoxy of Jewish ritual. Like Klein, he seems to refashion old traditions in order to suit the needs of life in the modern world.

Similar to Klein and Layton, Mordecai Richler reconceptualizes what it means to be Jewish. His response to life as a Jewish-Canadian appears to occupy a space somewhere in between Klein's and Layton's. His reaction to the dilemma that his life as a Jewish-Canadian presents is difficult to locate as his satiric mode of writing implicitly resists labels. Klein was anchored, for the most part, by his Jewish heritage, and Layton, by his need to react to the Jewish history of victimization. In contrast, Richler's work is stimulated by existing in a constant state of negotiation and challenging all forms of ideology. Unlike Klein, Richler's goal is not to uncover one unifying explanation. Despite having been exposed to the same anti-Semitism that fueled Layton's writing, Richler is

unwilling to use the Jewish history of victimization as an excuse for the oppressed to become the oppressor. *This Year in Jerusalem* is an autobiographical account of his trip to Israel in 1992 in which he explores his Jewish heritage and his relationship to Canada and Israel. His work embraces his Canadian homeland and demonstrates a desire to gain acceptance into society while maintaining strong ties to his Jewish upbringing. At the same time, he is critical of the Canadian public, the Diaspora, and Israel for their indifference towards and inability to resolve social issues. Richler's memoir undermines all forms of dogmatism and opposes categorization. His commentary vacillates between the detached social criticism of a liberal moralist and an emotionally charged response that advocates Jewish assertiveness and self-sufficiency.[6]

While the works chosen for this thesis represent different genres of writing - Klein's a novel, Layton's a collection of poetry, and Richler's an autobiography - all focus on Jewish themes and explore the notion of identity. This thesis aims to understand and account for the literary and poetic choices they make by examining the influence of major historic events such as the Holocaust, the birth of the state of Israel, and the Six Day War. These events are independent watersheds in Jewish history that serve as fertile materials that demand literary engagement and response.

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[6] Brenner *Assimilation* 145.

Chapter I - A.M. Klein

In the summer of 1949, The Canadian Jewish Congress sent A.M. Klein to the newly-established state of Israel, as well as to Europe and to North Africa on a fact-finding mission. He was asked to survey the condition of Jewish refugees and upon his return, to deliver a series of speeches relating his findings. In addition to his speeches, Klein published a succession of articles describing his travels in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* under the title "Notebook of a Journey." His speeches and articles provided the stock material for what was quickly evolving into his only published novel, *The Second Scroll*. In

it, Klein combines personal experiences with fiction to fashion a poetic and allusive story about a quest. In a letter written to friend and fellow writer Leon Edel, Klein explains how his novel serves as "a memento of my pilgrimage, scripture to witness to the fact that I had beheld the glory of the Jewish State's beginning, the consolation of our people's rescue."[7]

Klein's comments to Edel allude to the central theme in *The Second Scroll*: understanding the birth of Israel as a miraculous event which relates to the search for Jewish identity. In it, the narrator is sent on a mission to Israel. Klein uses the narrator's journey as a vehicle to explore several underlying themes in recent Jewish history. The most significant of these themes is an account of the narrator's cultural and religious inheritance, a survey of modern philosophies and ideologies, and an attempt by the narrator to reconcile his Jewish heritage with the modern world in order to understand his identity as a Jewish-Canadian.

Klein uses the narrator's trip to Israel as a way of exploring these themes. Each chapter of the novel represents a facet of his exploration. As is the case with Klein's trip abroad, the narrator of *The Second Scroll* is sent on a mission. He is sent by his publisher to seek out the new poets of Israel in order to produce a volume of translations. The search for modern Hebrew poetry acts as a pretence for the narrator's true goal, the pursuit of his uncle, Melech Davidson. Melech's name translates into King, son of David, which places

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[7] Seymour Mayne, ed. *The A.M. Klein Symposium* (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1975) 25.

him in the Messianic tradition as a descendent of King David, a figure who represents Jewish salvation and embodies all Jewry. During the narrator's travels, Melech's life is traced, and with it, modern and ancient Jewish history. Melech's life mirrors the stages of the modern Jew: he begins his life as a renowned Talmudic scholar only to abandon religion for Marxism in order to become a Bolshevik revolutionary. Next, he is nearly engulfed by the Holocaust and seduced by Christianity. Miraculously, his journey ends in Israel. When the narrator finally catches up to his uncle and is about to meet him, Melech is murdered by a band of Arabs in a terrorist attack. The novel ends with his funeral. Melech's life functions as a model to his nephew. By learning from his uncle's experiences, the narrator is better able to understand his own life as a Jewish-Canadian. Melech's death is presented as both a symbol of Jewish victimization, punctuated by the Holocaust, and one of rebirth.

With the above outline in mind, the first part of this chapter will review the contents of *The Second Scroll* and highlight significant events as they relate to Klein's exploration of Jewish-Canadian identity. The second part of this chapter will provide a more detailed study of the themes raised in the first part and examine how Klein attempts to reconcile the past with the present and the future.

The Writer's Journey - Canada to Israel and Back

A.M. Klein's novel opens with a nameless narrator talking about his lost uncle Melech. The first person narrator is identified only as the son to his mother and father, and nephew to his uncle Melech. Uncle Melech's character is slowly revealed through a series of stories, letters, and second-hand accounts. The first of these tales describes the influence his achievements as a legendary Talmudic scholar have on the narrator. When the narrator is first introduced to the Hebrew alphabet, his uncle's accomplishments serve as both an inspiration and a burden:

> and I recall how it was his custom, as I struggled with the vowel signs - those beneath the letters, like prompters prompting, and those beside the letters, like nudgers nudging, and those on top, like whispers whispering - how it was custom to encourage me forward from each mystic block to the next with repeated promise of pennies from Heaven...my mother would sigh, and exclaim: 'Oh, that he might be like his Uncle Melech, a scholar in Israel!'[8]

This episode marks the generational passing of a cultural inheritance that the narrator struggles to come to terms with through the course of the novel. The narrator adopts a tradition that communicates through his body: he senses and is aware of the prompts, nudges, and whispers of his ancestry, but remains unsure about how to deal with them. He is caught between two worlds: the ancient, unchanging world of Eastern Europe that his

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[8] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 12.

parents struggle to maintain, and the modern, changing world of his Canadian home. The theme of fighting to preserve the past, while striving to move forward, also runs throughout Klein's poetry. In his 1944 poem "A Psalm Touching Genealogy," Klein announces his role in his lineage: "Not sole was I born, but entire genesis."[9] In it, he explores how his relationship to the ancestors that dwell in his veins and eavesdrop in his ear and the insular, protective environment into which he is born, close in on him. While the poet is grounded in Jewish tradition, he struggles to acknowledge the future under the weight of the past. The poet's burden is increased as he is haunted by the judgment of the generations of ancestors looking "through my eyes."[10] Klein is aware of the history of his people and the social and cultural responsibility he inherits: "The poet's sense of mission is overwhelming: he is both the product and transmitter of heritage.... A spokesman of ancestral heritage, Klein sees himself in a role comparable to that of the prophet."[11] Prophet turns poet in an effort to understand his place in society. As is the case with the episode in *The Second Scroll*, where the narrator is first introduced to the Hebrew alphabet and feels the physical presence of his ancestry, the poem's use of the metaphor of a body "communicates the poet's

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[9] A.M. Klein, *The Complete Poems - Part 2*, ed. Zailig Pollock (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990) 624.

[10] Klein, *Complete Poems* 624.

[11] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *A.M. Klein, The Father of Canadian Jewish Literature* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 1990) 11.

complete and unconditional subservience to tradition."[12] The physical manifestation of his heritage demonstrates how an external, abstract notion becomes an internally negotiated reality. The poet seeks a way to fashion his culture so that it is relevant in the present and in the future. While resisting assimilation, he tries to create a space that allows for both his Canadian homeland and Jewish heritage. It is at this point that Klein introduces another theme that repeats itself throughout the body of his work: the attempt to forge an identity that reconciles his Jewish ancestry with the modern world.

The narrator of *The Second Scroll*, like Klein, struggles with his dual inheritance. Early in the novel, he is confronted with the complexity of living in a predominantly non-Jewish society. He strives for the purity of his uncle's Eastern European life: "He represented a consoling contrast to the crass loutish life about us where piety was scorned as superstition, and learning reviled as hapless, and where Jews were not ashamed to wax rich selling pork."[13] The outside world reduces and equates his Jewish identity to a crude form of primitive tribalism. The Montreal ghetto cannot protect him from the judgmental gaze of gentile society. While stories of Melech's life begin to form a cloudy picture, the narrator has yet to meet him and his family does not have a photo of him. This forces the

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[12] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* 11.

[13] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 13.

narrator to create an image of his uncle. This marks the beginning of the narrator's search for his uncle.

The first communication from Uncle Melech comes in the form of a letter during *Simchas Torah*, a Jewish holiday that celebrates the annual completion of the reading of the Torah.[14] The letter describes two events: a pogrom in Ratno that drives Uncle Melech from his home town and an explanation of the events which led him to join the Bolshevik Revolution. In his search for answers, Uncle Melech rejects Judaism and embraces Marxist ideology. He progresses through the Communist ranks forcing the narrator to revise his image of him: "It was a strange metamorphosis, this from Talmudic scholar, syllogizing the past, into Moscow student, conspiring a world's future."[15] This is the first in a series of transformations in Melech's life. The narrator follows them closely and parallels them to his own evolving sense of identity. Melech's rejection of Judaism and adoption of Bolshevism results in his excommunication from his family. The lack of tolerance and understanding defines the attitude of the environment that the narrator grows up in: "...it was clear that other people, too, had witnessed the pogrom and yet had not turned from their faith...while Uncle Melech had been saved; and even of the perished - what was man, to

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[14] *Simchas Torah* celebrates the annual completion of the reading of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible. The final reading does not end with Deutoronomy, the last of the five books of Moses, but with Genesis, the first book. This symbolizes the continuing cycle of the Torah and life.

[15] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 20.

question the will of God?"[16] The narrator is a generation removed from the *shtetls* (Jewish villages) of Ratno. He is intrigued by the philosophical implications of Marxism. In contrast, despite Canada providing a refuge from the violence of his European birthplace, his father's relationship to Canada remains "essentially pragmatic."[17] The narrator struggles with his father's "*Haigel-baigal*," anti-intellectual attitude.[18] He confesses that his uncle's progress in the Communist Party fills him with pride. This leads to conflict and opens the door for a relationship, albeit largely symbolic, between the narrator and his uncle: "Klein's critical representation of the paternal world elucidates the function of Melech, his nephew's mentor. The nephew's filial loyalty, respect, and love for his uncle indicate the inadequacy of the parental role model."[19] What emerges is the generational conflict between father and son: one who has been transplanted into a society versus one who was born into it. It is this point of divergence that the narrator attempts to reconcile. He strives to find a way to unify the tradition of the past with the modernity of the present. As the narrator's identification with his uncle grows, the first chapter titled 'Genesis' - a symbol of birth - ends with the assumption that Uncle Melech is killed in the Holocaust.

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[16] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 19.

[17] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 18.

[18] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 18. "*Haigel-baigal*" refers to the 19th century German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and to a bagel. It is a simple rhyme used by the narrator's father in order to denigrate the significance of Hegel's work and secular interpretations of the world in general.

[19] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* 19.

'Exodus,' the title of the second chapter, describes the narrator's preparations for his journey. It begins with the narrator comparing his Canadian homeland to Palestine, his spiritual centre. Canada, like Israel, was chosen for him. But the connections to Israel run deeper. They fill him with pride and are "as intimately known as the lines of [his] hands."[20] After an invitation by his publisher to travel to Israel in order to produce a volume of translations of its new poets, the narrator begins his preparations: "One has to suffer to earn Jerusalem. Sacrificed I was, accordingly, against small pox, punctured against typhus, pierced for tetanus, injected for typhoid, and needled with cholera."[21] Before his travels begin, the narrator receives a package that has been lost in the mail for almost twenty years. It includes a letter from Uncle Melech. The narrator's reaction suggests a connection between his uncle and the Messiah: "It was like a voice from beyond."[22] In it, Melech describes his abandonment of Marxism and his brush with death. After having been rounded up by the German SS and lined up to face a firing squad, Melech was accidentally knocked into a mass grave before he was shot. 'Exodus' ends with Melech, later that night, rising from a pile of bodies that had only been loosely covered with earth.

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[20] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 22.

[21] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 22-23.

[22] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 23.

The third chapter titled 'Leviticus' describes the first leg of the narrator's journey that takes him to a Jewish refugee camp in Bari, Italy, the return address of his uncle's letter. During his flight over the Atlantic the narrator looks forward to "the new bright shining microcosm of Israel" but his sense of duty pulls him back and draws him to Bari: "I, now of a diminished tribe, felt that I could not forgo even an uncle never seen or known."[23] The narrator's search leads him from the refugee camp to a Monsignor at the Vatican. Here he learns of Melech's flirtation with Christianity through a second letter addressed from Melech to the Monsignor. At this point, the Marxist dialectic that had previously invaded Melech's dialogue is no longer present. His letter engages questions raised by the Christian view of art, specifically Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. In the end, Melech's brush with Christianity drives him back to his Jewish roots. Despite his renewed connection to Judaism and a desire to migrate to Israel, he continues to explore different facets of the Diaspora. His need to understand and reconcile his sense of exile in the Diaspora leads him to Casablanca:

> He had a change of heart. He would leave Rome, but not for Haifa. And here it was that he showed that he was not yet fully rid of the Diaspora infection. He desired to go to Casablanca.... He wanted to feel in his own person and upon his own neck the full weight of the yoke of exile. He wanted, he said, to be with his

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[23] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 33.

> Sephardic brothers, the lost half of Jewry. So there it was again, that passion for belonging to the minority.[24]

In 'Numbers,' the title of the fourth chapter, the narrator receives a photograph of his uncle. It turns out to be a multiple exposure. The photograph's lack of focus represents the narrator's own lack of clarity and understanding concerning his identity. The narrator continues the pursuit of his uncle in the mellah of Casablanca.[25] The mellah presents the Diaspora in its most dire condition: "We entered, we slid into the mellah; literally: for the narrow lane which gaped through the gateway at the clean world was thick with offal and slime and the oozing of manifold sun-stirred putrescences."[26] The mellah represents a level of physical decay and spiritual degradation unmatched during the course of the narrator's journey:

> "It is a world in which there is no sense of a process unfolding towards some final resolution.... The inhabitants of the mellah have no concept of progressive change but accept their situation as part of a static pattern, which they have not created and cannot change."[27]

The mellah represents the antithesis of the narrator's attempt to find a unifying voice in the Diaspora. It has neither the tradition of the past nor a vision for the future. It simply exists.

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[24] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 49. Sephardic Jews are of Spanish, Portuguese, or North African descent.

[25] The mellah is an impoverished section of Casablanca that is part market, part slum.

[26] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 56.

[27] Zailig Pollock, *A.M. Klein: The Story of the Poet* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994) 246.

The mellah is the narrator's worst fears realized: a population of Jews living without feelings of hope or redemption. The sense of extreme exile that lured Melech to Casablanca, is the one that drives the narrator from it: "I was eager to leave the city where the word Jew was a term of pornography, eager to leave it and its false music, its hollow art, eager to shake from my feet the dust of this city of the teated domes and the phalloi of minarets."[28]

In the final chapter of *The Second Scroll*, 'Deuteronomy,' the narrator's search for his uncle leads him to Israel. Israel is the final leg of his travels through countries that represent the three major Western religions. During the narrator's flight, he describes the feeling that draws him to Israel: "It was as if I was part of an ascension, a going forward in which I was drawn on and on by the multiple-imaged appearing and disappearing figure of Uncle Melech."[29] The narrator emphasizes the motivation for his search. He longs to focus and unify the blurred multiple exposure of his uncle, a symbol of his Jewish heritage, with his own life in the Diaspora. He alludes to a physical and spiritual ascension that somehow miraculously draws him to Israel. On the airplane, he encounters a fellow passenger who offers some perspective on the narrator's journey. He links the history of the Diaspora to the birth of Israel and contrasts the illusion of the Diaspora with the essence of Israel:

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[28] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 63.

[29] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 65.

> Jewry, leading in the lands of the Diaspora but a vestigial part-existence, moved of necessity between banality and suffering.... Jewry ceased to consider life as a reality to be experienced, but as a gauntlet to be run.... Jewry turned inward. In its flight from suffering...Jewry still further ghettoized itself. It lost contemplation of the One.... And then, suddenly, this extra-temporal nonexistence leaped back into time and reality.... Jewry could not wholly die. This knowledge...turned into a path of life.[30]

Klein's biographer Zailig Pollock explains the passenger's comments: "The Idea which the Jewish people represent was once embodied in the life of a nation, but, in the Diaspora, it finds expression only in a disembodied, spectre-people, an Essence without Existence."[31] The fellow airplane passenger claims that what made Israel's existence possible was the Holocaust. It showed Jews were able to resist and survive the most threatening assault endured in their lengthy history. While their "Essence" survived, their "Existence" remained tenuous. Israel represents the Jewish version of reincarnation; it is the symbol that has allowed Jews to progress from a state of disincarnation to a state of incarnation.

Once in Israel, the narrator begins his twofold mission to find his uncle and uncover the country's new literary and poetic voice. In expressing the difficulties and unlikelihood of finding his uncle, the narrator begins to realize that to find Melech, "was to suspect him

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[30] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 66-67.

[31] Pollock 247.

everywhere and to find him nowhere."[32] His search for Israel's poetry takes him to a variety of poets, none of whose voices satisfy the narrator's desire to uncover an adequate representative of the new Jewish state. As his search progresses, he begins to discover that the real voice of Israel does not exist in the work of artists, but in everyday language and speech:

> I had looked, but not seen. It was there all the time - the fashioning folk, anonymous and unobserved, creating word by word, phrase by phrase, the total work that when completed would stand as epic revealed! They were not members of literary societies, the men who were giving new life to the antique speech, but merchants, tradesmen, day labourers. In their daily activity, and without pose or flourish, they showed it to be alive again, the shaping Hebrew imagination.[33]

Hebrew was in a state of birth and renewal. Words were created to respond to the modern experiences that were a part of everyday life. Other words were dusted off and rejuvenated from their Biblical roots. Jewish-Canadian poet Miriam Waddington explains the narrator's discovery of the miracle that is the creative process: "Thus, language is at one and the same time both poetry and the source of poetic renewal; it is creation and creator together. The key image is miracle; but the miracle is language, and language, to the narrator, is poetry,

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[32] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 69.

[33] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 78.

and poetry is creation. Creation...is life."[34] The narrator discovers that poetry, and the symbol of creation that it represents, do not emanate from one source, but instead, from an entire nation. His discovery renews his hopes of finding his uncle.

The focus of the narrator's search shifts from poetry to family. He goes from Kibbutz, to Moshav, to Yeshiva in the hope of a sign that might lead him to his uncle.[35] His search leads him to a list of thirty-six names that "seemed endless, tantalizingly familiar, yet forever elusive."[36] This discovery suggests Uncle Melech is a *Lamed Vavniks*. A *Lamed Vavnik* is a member of a group of thirty-six anonymous pious saints that are believed by Jewish Cabalists to exist in each generation to protect humankind from God.[37] The list of names suggests Uncle Melech, like the poetics of the new Jewish state, does not exist in one individual, but in all Jews.

Eventually, the narrator tracks Uncle Melech to Safed. Before he can make contact with him, the narrator hears over the radio that Melech has been killed and burnt in an attack by a band of Arabs. At the moment when the narrator is about to meet his uncle, he is killed.

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[34] Miriam Waddington, *A.M. Klein* (Vancouver: Copp Clark, 1970) 123.

[35] A Kibbutz is a communal farm. A Moshav is a co-operative of small farmers. A Yeshiva is a religious college. All three reflect different social, religious, and political systems that comprise a part of the narrator's search for his identity.

[36] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 70.

[37] *Lamed* and *Vav* are the names of the Hebrew letters that stand for the number 36, hence the name *Lamed Vavnik* for the 36 anonymous pious saints.

The speeches at Melech's funeral portray him as a figure of mythical and Messianic proportions. The narrator's presence at his uncle's funeral "effectively restores Melech's human dimensions and reaffirms his identity of a long-lost dear family member, an uncle."[38] In reciting the mourner's prayer, the narrator connects with his uncle through the religious ritual that signals the cyclical nature of life. Death is transformed into a symbol of hope, as the narrator makes a final statement: "I turned for the last time from the city of Safed, holy city on whose hills once were kindled, as now again, the beacons announcing new moons, festivals, and set times."[39] With Melech's death and the realization by the narrator that he, like his uncle, is part of a cycle, a cycle that is inclusive, his quest is satisfied. The narrator represents the new world, a modern artist on a secular search to discover a language of rebirth. Uncle Melech represents the old world of traditional Jewish learning. The old world dies and becomes part of the new world: "The new world, as experienced by the narrator as Israel, contains the death of the old, and something else besides. The miracle of art, like the miracle of survival, turns out to be life itself."[40] While Klein's story ends with death, allusions to the story of creation in 'Deuteronomy' point to the references to life's cycle that begin Klein's story: "A year of the reading of the Law

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[38] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* 119.

[39] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 87.

[40] Waddington 124.

had been concluded, a year was beginning anew, the last verses of Deuteronomy joined the first of Genesis, the eternal circle continued."[41]

The Search for Jewish Identity

The narrator's search for his Uncle leads to an exploration of his own identity. By uncovering his uncle's experiences as a Jew in search of identity, he begins to understand his own life as a Jewish-Canadian. The novel's uncertain resolution leaves the reader unsure whether or not the narrator's journey was successful. Klein explains the novel's ambiguous ending in a letter to Edel:

> the Messiah is, or is of, or is in the ubiquitous anonymity of universal Jewry's all-inclusive generation, he is the resurgent creativity of the incognitos of the folk. That is why the narrator imagines that he sees Melech everywhere; he does indeed see him everywhere, but everywhere gets lost in the mass.... That Uncle Melech should never be seen physically...follows logically.... That he should be killed was equally inevitable; it is the messianic fate; but his resurrection has already taken place [42]

Klein's explanation illuminates the novel's conclusion. The narrator's lack of fulfillment is a result of Melech's role as the embodiment of an anonymous Messiah. The narrator cannot face a Messiah that is faceless. While in Casablanca, he receives a photo, which turns

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[41] Klein, *The Second Scroll* 14.

[42] *The A.M. Klein Symposium* 25-26.

out to be a double exposure. Melech's image eludes him. Later in the novel, when his uncle is killed by Arabs, he is burnt beyond recognition. The narrator is forced to forge a mental image of his uncle. Although the narrator never faces his uncle, Klein's letter suggests that the narrator's journey was successful. The narrator's travels lead him to understand the universal nature of the Messiah. The point was for the narrator *not* to face his uncle. The narrator's search and Klein's explanation suggest that once the narrator reformulated his conception of the Messiah, not as an individual, but as existing in the anonymity of all Jewry, his journey became successful.

Klein uses his story as a vehicle to explore both Jewish history and the condition of the modern Jew. Having grown up in an Orthodox home surrounded by a gentile world, Klein was keenly interested in the conflict between tradition and modernity. Rachel Brenner, scholar of Jewish-Canadian literature, comments on the narrator's function as a symbol of Klein's own spiritual journey: "Like his Canadian-born Jewish narrator...who leaves Canada to set on a quest for the Messiah...Klein, the Canadian-Jewish poet, transcends the ethno-nationalistic confines to set out on a poetic quest for a vision of global redemption."[43] It is at this point that Klein's work blurs the distinction between author and narrator as the novel is based on Klein's own physical and spiritual journey. The narrator's

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[43] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* iv.

identity is elusive: he refers to himself only as Uncle Melech's nephew. The blending of Klein's life into his novel, combined with the uncertain definition of the narrator, suggests a personal investigation by the author through the course of the narrative. What ensues is the multiple search for Klein's, the narrator's, Uncle Melech's, the reader's, and all Jewry's identity. During the course of this pursuit, allusions are made to all of the significant events in Jewish history as the narrator's travels lead the reader through the major Diasporic communities. The narrator, like Klein, is unable to find a sense of unity in the Diaspora. Author Michael Greenstein compares the unattainable nature of the narrator's journey to the impossibility of finding a unified explanation to life in the Diaspora: "...the quest at the heart of *The Second Scroll* is never fulfilled: another kind of negative, Uncle Melech's photograph is both a double and a multiple exposure, since overexposure to vicissitudes of the Diaspora denies fixed meanings."[44] The narrator functions as a vehicle for Klein's personal search for self-definition. Klein's attempt to find a unifying voice to explain the multiplicity and essence of the Jewish tradition he inherited goes unfulfilled. The narrator's search is complicated by his immersion in multiple commentaries. These commentaries take the form of a constant dialectic among numerous interpreters within the story, the various texts cited, and the five glosses that correspond to the novel's five chapters. These complex

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[44] Michael Greenstein, *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature* (Kingston: Queen's U P, 1989) 9.

commentaries contrast with the work's simple narrative.[45] The multiple commentaries are ironic: they illustrate the hopelessness of Klein's attempt to achieve a unified understanding of his place in the world. While the quest for Uncle Melech or the Messiah as he was thought to exist is never achieved, the narrator does come to understand that "the Messiah is in fact the entire Jewish people."[46] Once the narrator understands that the Messiah was not one individual and is able to see him in all Jews, as a collective, anonymous people, his quest is fulfilled.

Klein biographer Usher Caplan explains Melech's life as representing a cycle: "Melech's life is at once a recapitulation of modern Jewish history and a summation of the lives of many individual Jews, such as Klein himself."[47] It is this repetitive, cyclical pattern that Klein picks up on and engages with in his novel. He was acutely aware of the cyclical patterns of history that connect the past to the present and the present to the future. In these cycles, Klein found a sense of unity that brought the world, and more specifically, Jews together. In his letter to friend and fellow poet A.J.M. Smith, shortly after the book was published, Klein describes how he was "struck by the similarity between contemporary Jewish history and my people's ancient saga - I thought I saw in events of today, in large

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[45] Pollock 240-244.

[46] Caplan 175.

[47] Usher Caplan, *Like One That Dreamed: A Portrait of A.M. Klein* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1982) 175.

outline, a recurrence of the events of the Pentateuch."[48] Hence the title of the novel, *The Second Scroll*, a retelling of the Pentateuch or the first five books of Moses, known in Hebrew as the Torah.

The title of Klein's novel - *The Second Scroll* - identifies it as the sequel to the first scroll of the Torah. The Torah is a story about creation and the relationship between humankind and God. The title of Klein's novel suggests a need for a modern understanding of the Torah. Brenner comments that the novel's title and the titles of the five chapters taken from the book of the Torah "signify both indebtness to and departure from the Biblical pattern." The Biblical framework of the novel links Jews to their religious origins and at the same time, mirrors the connections made by the narrator's travels between the Diasporic Jewish communities in North America, Europe, North Africa, and Israel. The event that acts as the main catalyst for his need to reevaluate and question the validity of the first scroll is the Holocaust. He cannot understand the profound manifestation of human evil that the Holocaust represents in terms of the original scriptures. Klein's novel seeks to understand the Holocaust in relation to modern events. His second scroll serves as a literary version of the first one and functions as an opportunity to understand his Jewish heritage and to "reestablish the principle of meaningfulness in human history."[49]

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[48] *The A.M. Klein Symposium* 12.

[49] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* 115.

The first paragraph of A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* introduces the reader to his uniquely poetic and allusive style. His novel is a modern work: lyrical and subjective and flowing with the freedom of stream of consciousness writing while vacillating between symbol and fact, simile and metaphor. It is poetic prose that combines with autobiographical detail: "It is not a question of the prose poem, but of fiction which crossed the border into a land of verbal beauty, removing itself from concretion into the fluid life of senses and mind."[50] In her study of Klein's work, Waddington raises the question of the genre of *The Second Scroll*: "Is it prose or poetry, fiction or autobiography, a religious tract or a literary jokebook?"[51] Her question signals the difficulty in categorizing Klein's novel. Is the novel a fictional account of a first person narrator or Klein's personal journey? Are the five glosses that follow the body of the text meant as commentary to facilitate the reader's understanding or an indulgence by the author in order to explore issues that he was unable to incorporate into the main story? What is clear is that Klein's use of elusive, structural ambiguity mirrors the unresolved issues raised in the text.

Klein's struggle for self-definition results in an a sense of humanism that transcends religion and conflicts with his traditional orthodox upbringing. While many aspects of Melech's and the narrator's journey are Jewish, they are not limited to a religious

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[50] *The A.M. Klein Symposium* 20.

[51] Waddington 117.

exploration. His quest transcends pedagogical dogma. Waddington comments that the theme of *The Second Scroll* "turns out to be secular and humanist, and not, as first appears, doctrinal in the religious sense."[52] This analysis explains Israel's birth as a secular revelation. In Klein's attempt to negotiate his own reality, he must understand Israel as both a secular reality and a miraculous Messianic response to the Holocaust: "Klein's humanism assumes universal and messianic dimension. The rebirth of Israel becomes the symbol of the rebirth of the world."[53] His secular understanding answers to his sense of social humanism, and his religious understanding, to his need for a divine response to the Holocaust. The moral foundation laid by Klein's Jewish upbringing, combined with his experiences of growing up in a secular society, created a sense of responsibility that extended his vision beyond Judaism: "Klein's Jewishness...emerges as a starting point rather than the end-all of his work: it is the window to the world of art in service of humanism rather than a locked room of ethnic idiosyncrasies; it grants him a sense of identity which focuses his outlook."[54] What remains is Klein's and the narrator's struggle to position themselves within the boundaries of everyday life while maintaining their Jewish identity. It is at this point that the tension created by the negotiation to reconcile his

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[52] Waddington 124.

[53] Brenner, *Assimilation* 172.

[54] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* vi.

Canadian homeland with his Jewish heritage is most tangible. Brenner posits that Klein's solution is "firmly rooted in the sphere of integration into the enlightened general society" but at the same time, he remains "fully cognizant of his Jewish origins" and "never advocates assimilation."[55] Textually, this is expressed by Uncle Melech's flirtation with Marxism and Christianity. While the narrator is in Rome, the search for his uncle brings him to Krongold, an official at the American Joint Distribution Committee. Krongold knows Melech and explains that he is a "philanderer of ideas, but to the basic one he remains faithful: loyalty.... In fact, the idea most appealing to him is - to join the minority."[56] While he only embraces ideas for brief periods of time, this episode illustrates his curiosity about and interest in them. Melech's exploration to find his place in the world of ideas is mirrored by the narrator's. Ultimately, Melech returns to his Jewish origins. While he is seduced by a variety of ideologies throughout the novel, Melech's romances are short-lived. He never fully severs his Jewish ties. While the narrator's search for Melech can be understood as driven by and exhibiting a strong sense of humanism, contrary to Waddington's comments, it is made with the intention to place it within a Jewish context.

Klein, like his narrator, is bound and committed to Canada as his home, but remains acutely aware of his emotional and spiritual connection to Israel: "My life was, and is,

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[55] Brenner, *Assimilation* 172.

[56] Klein 48.

bound to the country of my father's choice, to Canada; but this intelligence...from that quarter of the globe which had ever been to me the holiest...filled me with pride, with exaltation...."[57] Living in Canada forced Klein to turn towards the spiritual realm in order to explain and understand his relationship with Israel. His struggle to comprehend his relationship with Israel extended beyond *The Second Scroll* and into his poetry. Common to his prose and poetry is a yearning for Israel and the struggle to deal with living in a state of "exile." His poem "These Northern Stars Are Scarabs in My Eyes," written before *The Second Scroll* in 1940, offers an idealistic, romanticized vision of Jerusalem, the spiritual and physical capital of Israel. In it, he fuses religious references to the Sabbath with secular visions of pioneering Kibbutzes: "At last, my bride, in our estate you'll wear / Sweet orange-blossoms in an orange grove."[58] Klein's poem is the expression of a pre-Zion ideal. His depictions of Jerusalem are a "distant, transcendent expression" of a city that exists on a "heavenly plane, existing as a manifestation of spiritual yearning."[59] His poem illustrates his attempt to deal with living in a state of liminality. His marginal social position as poet, Jew, and Canadian forced him to "communicate both the consciousness of ethical

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[57] Klein 22.

[58] Seymour Mayne and B. Glen Rotchin, eds., *Jerusalem - An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Poetry* (Montreal: Véhicule P, 1996) 19.

[59] Mayne and Rotchin 12.

disorientation and the search for moral restitution."[60] As is the case in *The Second Scroll*, Klein is searching for a sense of unity between Israel and the Diaspora. Pollock describes "These Northern Stars" as "express[ing] as unambiguously as possible Klein's dissatisfaction with the Diaspora existence under the 'northern stars' of Canada and his desire for the pastoral Zion."[61] Pollock's explanation does not suggest that Klein was in physical need of Israel. In fact, Klein's poem was written before the official rebirth of the state of Israel, which meant that he was forced to develop a relationship that transcended a physical reality.

In Klein's poem, there is the suggestion that Jews are born into a state of exile. For Jews born in the Diaspora, this can be understood in physical terms. More significant though, is the psychological effect. Klein's "These Northern Stars" is an expression of the Diasporic Jew's psychological state of exile: "I will to Palestine. We will arise / And seek the towers of Jerusalem."[62] Klein's poem suggests that part of the Diasporic condition is a yearning to return to Israel. At the same time, while there exists a longing to return to Israel, there is no suggestion of the desire for this to actually take place. It is sufficient that he recognizes the pull of his ancestry and that it exists as a Biblical ideal and not a practical

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[60] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* iv-v.

[61] Pollock 44.

[62] Mayne and Rotchin 19.

goal. His poem is marked by the tension created by his northern home and the eastern centre of his spirit, and as in *The Second Scroll*, concludes without a clear resolution.

Klein's work struggles to create a Jewish space in a secular society. Writer B. Glen Rotchin describes Klein's vision of Israel as existing "only in Heaven (he never had to contend with the political adversity and moral dilemmas inherent in taking civic responsibility)...for Klein, 'home' was by necessity a spiritual concept and not physical, so Israel was his true home."[63] Rotchin's explanation illuminates why Klein never made *aliyah*: he did not have to as his heart and soul were already there and the physical presence remained secondary.[64] Klein's need to reconcile his spiritual and physical home was complicated by a sincere connection and responsibility to Canada and a desire not to be limited by his commitment to Judaism. In an article written in May, 1948, Klein clearly announces his feelings: "Canadian Jewry in its loyalty cedes to no one.... Canadian Jewry considers itself to be, and is - Canadian. It is 100% Canadian, and that Canadianism nothing can divide or diminish."[65] Implicit in his declaration is the duality created by being a

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[63] B. Glen Rotchin, e-mail to author, December 13, 1996.

[64] *Aliyah* is a Hebrew word which means to go up. It is used to describe Jews living in the Diaspora who move to Israel. It alludes to both a physical and a spiritual ascent. It also is the name for a religious practice which involves a member of a synagogue congregation being 'called up' to the *bima* or alter, to read from the Torah.

[65] A.M. Klein, "The Dangers of Divided Loyalty," *Beyond Sambation: Selected Essays and Editorials 1928-1955*, eds. M.W. Steinberg and Usher Caplan (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982) 322-3.

Jewish-Canadian. How does one negotiate the uncertainties that such a hyphenated identity creates? Brenner explains the tension created by Klein's desire to unify his commitment to liberal ideals with his Jewish upbringing as:

> the reality of a constant "tug of war" between the external, liberal, nonbinding world and the sense of Jewish communal commitment. It is this realization that makes...[Jewish-Canadian writers] go on imaginary journeys back to the European Yiddish shtetl, to the national memory of suffering and victimization.[66]

Despite Klein's strong Zionist sympathies, his relationship to Israel was based on a mythical ideal that transcended time and space and did not materialize physically. He was never able to escape the realities of the Diaspora, and over time, became deeply embedded in Canadian life. Klein had found his niche as a member of a minority, a facet of the Canadian mosaic, that encouraged and helped to preserve diversity. He did not yearn for integration in the mainstream and strove to interact with other cultures on equal terms. Part of Klein's decision not to make *aliyah* can be explained, ironically, by the birth of the state of Israel. Israel created a conflict between old and new ideologies. Klein and those living in the Diaspora represented old ideologies. They were the Jews from Eastern Europe who represented the Jewish victim whose morality was defined by *Yiddishkayt* and its

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[66] Brenner, *Canadian Jews and Their Story: The Making of Canadian Jewish Literature.* Unpublished article from author.

commitment to the preservation of Jewish culture.[67] The new ideology, established with the birth of the state of Israel, promoted the ideal of the Jewish hero. This conception demanded that the exile of Jews for two thousand years be renounced with the creation of a Jewish homeland: "Jews of the Diaspora would be forced to choose between immigration or inevitable annihilation through assimilation or physical destruction; the creation of the new would necessarily imply the destruction of the old."[68] Klein's vision to merge *Yiddishkayt* with Zionism, to preserve Jewish values, and promote a close and rich relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, began its slow death with revelations of the Holocaust. His attempt to appeal to Israel as a spiritual centre "whose influence would emanate throughout a complex and vigorous worldwide Jewish community" and "enable him to justify his own position as a Zionist who has no intention of abandoning the world of the Diaspora for the Promised land," failed.[69] The new ideology nullified and rejected Klein's understanding of his role in the Diaspora: "He sensed that the State displaced his world view by promoting a new cultural ideology he could not partake in; moreover, the new reality seemed to invalidate his vision of the cultural revitalization of the North American Diaspora."[70] What emerged from Klein's struggle was yet another form of internal conflict. In this instance, he tried to

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[67] A Yiddish word meaning Jewishness.

[68] Pollock 32.

[69] Pollock 31.

[70] Brenner, *A.M. Klein* 19.

unify and validate the values of the old Jew with the new one. Once again he failed. In his final essay, "In Praise of the Diaspora," Klein eulogizes the death of the Diaspora and its cultural achievements. In order for Israel to move forward it must reject the *galut* and its people's history as a minority and a victim.[71] Klein could not foresee cultural or social cooperation between Israel and the Diaspora. The two were built on different foundations and the new, in order to create its own sense of identity, rejected the old.

In many ways, Klein's fears were well founded. Currently, the relationship between the Diaspora and Israel remains strained. Israel encourages immigration and believes that Jews should live in Israel in order to build a socially and economically powerful, unified nation. It sees Diasporic communities as vulnerable and weak. Meanwhile, the Diaspora craves acknowledgement from Israel for its service to Judaism and Israel socially, culturally, religiously, and economically. It yearns for Israel's stamp of approval and for an endorsement of its contribution to Jewish life. The cultural dialogue and cooperation that Klein envisioned has yet to develop. He understood his voice as no longer being current. While his work was fueled by the tension created by an unceasing multiple dialectic, ultimately, he surrendered to its stress. With the birth of Israel came his literary death.

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[71] "galut" is the Hebrew word for "exile." It is used by Israelis to refer to Jews who live in the Diaspora. It has a negative connotation. Jews in the Diaspora refer to themselves as Diasporic Jews, meaning dispersed, which has more of a positive connotation. This explains in part the struggle that Diasporic Jews have with their identity.

Shortly after the publication of *The Second Scroll*, Klein's pen fell silent, he withdrew from public and professional activities, and succumbed to psychological disorder. Only conjecture can hope to understand Klein's silence. Was it the bitter disappointment of the Diaspora's rejection? Was it an overwhelming sense of euphoria with the realization of an impossible dream? Was it the uncertainty between understanding the birth of Israel as the manifestation of the Messiah or seeing it as a mirage? Was it the frustration that developed as a result of his inability to communicate his message of a united Jewish world to the masses? Leonard Cohen's poem, "A Song for Abraham Klein," notes Klein's role as an artist and laments his inability to effect change: "The weary psalmist paused / His instrument beside. // He thought he knew no music / To make the morning right. // Abandoned was the Law, / Abandoned the King. // He sang and nothing changed / Though many heard the song."[72] Like the final words of Klein's novel, Cohen's poem signals an end and a beginning, a return to the cycles of the Jewish calendar, and a sense of renewal and hope.

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[72] Leonard Cohen, *The Spice Box of Earth* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961) 74.

Chapter II - Irving Layton

After A.M. Klein, Irving Layton was the next major writer to emerge in Jewish-Canadian literature. Layton continued the tradition begun by Klein of exploring what it means to be a Jew living in Canada. Having grown up in the Jewish ghetto of Montreal, Klein's and Layton's immigrant and cultural status placed them on the margins of Canadian society. Despite working against a similar set of social circumstances, Layton takes his work in an opposite direction from Klein. This departure from Klein is evident in Layton's collection of poems, *Fortunate Exile*, which focuses on a wide spectrum of Jewish themes.

In it, Layton's migration away from Klein is manifested in two ways: the style of his writing and his response to Jewish issues. First, where Klein is allusive and allegorical, Layton is direct and literal. Layton strives to shock his readers. He seeks to arouse emotion. For Layton, humankind is bound by a Baudelairian sense of *ennui*.[73] He endeavors to awaken humanity from its slumber. He seeks out dormant, raw, emotions in an attempt to stimulate his readers. Where Klein is intellectually challenging, Layton is emotionally confrontational. Layton challenges traditional sensibilities. He does not believe poetry is the unifying force Klein imagined, but rather "the most subversive force in the world.... Good poetry shakes people up, bloodies their apathetic noses for them, disturbs their complacencies."[74]

The second, and more significant way Layton departs from Klein, is in his response to Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel. In *The Second Scroll*, Klein's exploration of his identity is closely connected to and expressed through his vast knowledge and interest in Jewish themes. In *Fortunate Exile*, Layton is more concerned with secular themes. Layton rejects the ritual and the passivity that Judaism promotes. He believes religion is deceptive, dangerous, and offers false hope in its ability to protect Jews from their enemies. In *The Second Scroll*, Klein understands the Holocaust in terms of the events that occurred after it

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[73] Charles Baudelaire was a 19th century French poet who wrote about *ennui* or boredom, a social pathological condition that he believed immobilized society.

[74] Irving Layton, *Engagements: The Prose of Irving Layton*, ed. Seymour Mayne (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971) 95.

had ended: the birth of the state of Israel. He sees the birth of Israel as a miraculous answer to the suffering endured by Jews during the Holocaust. Layton's reaction to the Holocaust is entirely different. He does not understand the creation of Israel as God's response to the Holocaust. For Layton, the only meaning in suffering is suffering. He focuses on the pain endured by Jews and uses the Holocaust to illustrate the potential of human evil. In the words of literary critic Cynthia Messenger: "He conveys as directly as he can the physical and mental anguish of the victims of the Holocaust because he feels that this is the only way to lay bare the evil at the root of the world's torment of the Jews."[75] The Holocaust demonstrates to Layton that religion is deceptive and proves that history's lessons are easily forgotten. He questions: how did Judaism protect Jews from Hitler? Layton wants the Holocaust to function as a catalyst for change in the way Jews act. He wants Jews to forge a "new" identity, one that is assertive rather than passive. He sees Israel as a living opportunity to exemplify this change. For Klein, Israel is an idyllic, Biblically promised homeland for the Jews, whereas Layton sees Israel as a symbol of Jewish strength. It is not the spiritual centre Klein describes, but rather, a state born out of military force. Layton believes Israel, a country that physically defends itself and protects its people, should function as a normative model for Jewish life.

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[75] Cynthia Messenger, rev. of *Fortunate Exile*, by Irving Layton, *Queen's Quarterly* Winter 1998: 942.

The title of Layton's collection of poems, *Fortunate Exile*, reflects its major themes. It is a statement of Layton's commitment to the progression of the tradition begun by Klein in *The Second Scroll* which explores the Jewish and Canadian inheritance and expresses a deep concern for Jews and Israel. "Exile" refers to the Hebrew word *galut*, which has a negative connotation, as it is used by Israelis to describe Jews not living in Israel. Conversely, Diaspora, meaning dispersed, has a positive connotation and is the term used by Jews not living in Israel to describe themselves. By using "exile" in the title, Layton signals to the reader his awareness of his dual identity as a Jew living in Canada. "Exile" also refers to the long history of Jews living as a dispersed people. Traditional life in the Diaspora forced Jews to create for themselves a marginal position on the outskirts of mainstream society. Often Diasporic Jews' liminal social position was threatened by anti-Semitism and violence. The result of their need to negotiate a safe position in society led to a unique cultural identity. This unique cultural identity constitutes the "Fortunate" part of "Exile." As a cultural figure, Layton is appreciative of the stimulus of his Canadian life on the margins of society. "Fortunate," an adjective describing "Exile," also refers to Layton's Canadian home. The writer understands that by growing up in Canada, he did not have to endure the Holocaust. Living as a Jew in a country where individual freedoms are protected has allowed him the opportunity to explore his dual heritage publicly.

This chapter will examine how Layton develops his sense of identity in *Fortunate Exile*. In doing so, the focus will centre on Layton's responses to Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel. Attention will also be paid to how Layton's formulation of his identity and how it has evolved from Klein's negotiation of his dual heritage in *The Second Scroll*. Finally, in investigating the way in which Layton shapes his identity, this chapter will also examine Friedrich Nietzsche's influence, as there are repeated references to his thought throughout Layton's collection of poems.

"God's Promised Peace"

A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* presents a romanticized vision of the newly born state of Israel. The declaration of Israel as an official state by the United Nations represents the first watershed in Jewish-Canadian writing. It offered Jews an explanation for the Holocaust. The birth of Israel could be understood as a miraculous response to the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps. The second watershed was the 1967 Six Day War. It confronted Jews with a new physical reality: a unified Jerusalem controlled by Jews. Jerusalem was reclaimed through military strategy, not Biblical promises. Layton's poems reflect this change. He dismisses the myth assigned to Jerusalem by his predecessors. Jerusalem is brought down to earth as Layton rejects Jerusalem's sacred status. His

perspective represents a polar shift from Klein's poetic vision that longs for a Biblical Jerusalem. Layton engages the "real" or practical as opposed to the "ideal" or impractical.

Layton's poetry does more than revel in its ability to confront reality. In order to understand his poetry it is necessary to recognize the tensions that fuel his work. What drives Layton is a fascination with "the layers of human meaning, the dialectic of reality."[76] His interest in dissecting what it means to be human and reevaluating reality as it is traditionally understood translates into a personal negotiation of his identity throughout the body of his work. While Layton rejects the role of Jews as passive victims, he embraces his Jewish heritage. He does not allow his Jewish inheritance to function as a roadblock, but instead, it informs and shapes his perception of the world.

This is demonstrated in a series of poems in *Fortunate Exile* in which Layton responds to Judaism and the false sense of hope and protection that it offers. In "The Sabbath," Layton describes the build-up to the weekly holy day. The Sabbath, despite its frequency, is one of the most significant occasions of Jewish religious observance. It is a day of rest and reflection. Preparations for the Sabbath are extensive: cleaning, cooking, and dressing in finery. Layton details these events as part of his childhood memories: "Spotless were parlour and kitchen and bedroom; / My mother's hands had left no speck or crumb. /

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[76] Irving Layton, *Taking Sides: The Collected Social and Political Writings*, ed. Howard Aster (Oakville: Mosaic P, 1977) 6.

The plates in the immaculate cupboard glistened."[77] These are positive family memories. Layton continues by describing how during the week, his family and its unwelcome inhabitants are at war: "Each day in our semi-slum house / We fought a battle with cockroaches and rats. / It was a draw, i.e., they ate, so did we."[78] The battle temporarily ceased each week for the Sabbath. Each of the first three stanzas ends with a reference to the variety of insects that inhabited his house and describes their unexplainable respect for the Sabbath: "On Saturday they respected our Sabbath. // Whatever the reason, no rat or roach stirred. // Perhaps the vermin had been struck dumb."[79] The last lines of the first three stanzas are written in a way that encourages the reader not only to read them as part of the poem as a whole, but also, as part of a separate sequence. Layton's intention becomes apparent with the last two lines of the fourth stanza: "Nothing moved on the walls or floors. I went outside / And heard militant shrieks, '*Maudit Juif!*'"[80] The poem's last two lines function in clear contrast to the communal relationship Layton develops between the Sabbath and the vermin inhabiting his home. Once he leaves the insular, protective world of his home, the reality of the outside world emerges.

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[77] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 74.

[78] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 74.

[79] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 74.

[80] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 74.

In "The Sabbath," Layton describes the cockroaches and rats living in his home and his family as co-inhabitants. While they don't love one another, they tolerate each other's presence and respect each other's space. The poet contrasts the relationship between his family and the vermin living in his home with the relationship between his family and the outside world. In illustrating how the insects living in his home show more respect to Jews and their religious observance than the outside world, Layton makes a clear statement with regard to the lack of mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding in society. He implies that although "God's promised peace was in every corner," instead of protecting Jews, God insulates Jews and makes them vulnerable to the anti-Semitism of the outside world.[81] Once Layton leaves the protected, internal environment of his home and confronts the external environment of the outside world, religion is no longer able to protect him. Judaism, like the outside world, promotes an intolerant and unnegotiable position. By venting his frustration towards Judaism and stating the reality of the outside world, Layton is trying to create a space that makes it possible for Judaism and the outside world to co-exist. While there is no evidence in the poem that Layton supports assimilation, it is clear he feels that Jews could do more to face the cruel realities of humankind, rather than hiding and insulating themselves within their own communities. "The Sabbath" illustrates Layton's

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[81] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 74.

belief that religion offers a false sense of protection and the unnegotiable fact of humanity's inherent cruelty.

Layton's poem "Cabalist" repeats his frustration with the insular, naive environment that religion breeds and details the consequences of this when no attempts to confront reality are made. A Cabalist is a believer in the Cabalah, a book of Jewish mysticism. Cabalists are generally considered deeply religious and introspective individuals. To be a Cabalist, it is necessary to have an exhaustive understanding of Judaism. They examine all its mysterious facets. They spend most of their time studying text and performing religious ritual. "Cabalist" is a short and direct poem. Layton's careful description of the individual who dedicates his life to the Cabalah, mirrors the Cabalist's delicate existence: "Always his eyes radiated light: / His gentle voice stirred love and hope / God was a Presence that he could touch, / The mental source of an inner might."[82] Layton depicts the Cabalist as a holy, almost unearthly, figure. The last two lines of the poem function in sharp contrast to the first three. Layton abruptly moves from a lyrical, poetic description to a static, prosaic statement: "For all that, witless humans seized him / And changed him into a bar of soap."[83] In many ways this short poem exemplifies Layton's Jewish poetry. It is direct and to the point. Its harsh exterior does not encourage the reader

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[82] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 80.

[83] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 74.

to probe into its serious and rich interior. Unlike Klein, Layton does not weave allusive references from a variety of sources into his poetry. The message is simple: despite the beauty of God's glory which these Cabalists represent, they remain a group that humanity is capable of destroying them without a second thought. Layton's poem strives to illustrate in clear and concise words the potential of human evil. The crematoria of the Holocaust do not discriminate. The Cabalist makes no better a bar of soap than any other Jew, homosexual, Pole, or Gypsy that was killed during Hitler's siege. "Cabalist," like "The Sabbath," attempts to demonstrate that religion is no match for the innate cruelty of humankind and points to the Holocaust as the most recent example, in a long history of examples, of humanity's tendency toward self-destruction.

"To the Victims of the Holocaust" picks up on the theme of using the Holocaust to demonstrate the impotence of religion and laments that humanity will not learn from its lessons. In it, Layton decides he will provide a voice for the victims of the Holocaust who can no longer speak for themselves: "My murdered kin / let me be your parched and swollen tongue / uttering the maledictions / bullets and gas silenced on your lips."[84] He sees it as his mission not to allow humanity to forget its past: "Fill, my ears with your direct curses. / I tongue them, unpleasable shades, / till the sun turns black in the sky."[85] Layton

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[84] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 108.

[85] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 108.

is determined not to let time erase the memory of those lost in the Holocaust. He repeats the sentiment described in his other poems that humanity is forgetful and does not learn from its most obvious lessons: "Your terrible deaths are forgotten, / no one speaks of them anymore. // I live among the blind, the deaf, and the dumb. / I live among amnesiacs."[86] Layton confronts those who deny the existence of the Holocaust. He sees these people contributing to the destruction of the memory of his murdered kin: "people now say / your deaths are pure invention, a spoof. // That's how the wind blows. Tomorrow / some *goy* will observe you never existed."[87]

Layton's poem contrasts the impact the Holocaust had on both Jews and non-Jews. In the minds of many non-Jews, according to Layton, the Holocaust did not take place, or what did happen, was soon forgotten. His poem introduces a theme that is developed in other poems: the use of the Holocaust as a catalyst to forge a "new" Jew. The Holocaust is the prime example that demonstrates to Jews their own weakness in the face of destruction. For Layton, the Holocaust proves to Jews, once and for all, that the old ways do not work. The creation of Israel gives Jews the opportunity to change from a passive to an assertive

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[86] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 108.

[87] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 108. *Goy* is a Yiddish word meaning nation, but is also used by Jews to refer to gentiles.

people. Layton's poem "O Jerusalem" repeats this sentiment and asserts how the "new" Jew should live.

For Layton, Israel is born out of human courage, not Biblical promises. His poem "O Jerusalem" expresses the "tensions resulting when the 'ideal' clashes with the 'real.'"[88] It is not "the brave young men who die for you / with military cries on their lips" nor "the scholars / who know each sunken goat-track / that winds somehow into your legend, your great name" nor the "dreamers / who looking for the beginnings / of your strange wizardry ascend from storied darkness / holding dust and warped harps in their blistered hands" that will betray Jerusalem.[89] Instead, Layton repeats the suggestion introduced in "The Sabbath," "Cabalists," and "To the Victims of the Holocaust," that what endangers Jews most, is the "promised / impossible peace, your harrowing oracles of love."[90] He claims it is not the physical or intellectual, but the spiritual, that threatens humankind. Jerusalem is a religious and spiritual symbol of piety, but it can be deceptive as it does not offer the kind of protection that Jews need: "O Jerusalem / you are too pure and break men's hearts / you are a dream of prophets, not of our clay."[91] His poem goes beyond demonstrating the potential dangers of religion; it also functions as a model for

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[88] Mayne and Rotchin 12.

[89] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 13.

[90] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 13.

[91] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 13.

modern Jews to follow. Layton struggles to reconcile the "strange wizardry" and "dream of prophets" of Jerusalem with the realities of human existence.[92] His poem affirms humanity's physical existence by rejecting its spiritual aspirations. He urges the reader not to resign his or her life to external, unknowable, transcendental realities. Layton asks the city of Jerusalem "how may we walk upon this earth / with forceful human stir / unless we adore you and betray?"[93] The implication is that to deny one's inner drive negates life and causes a loss in the ability to confront and engage in existence. Layton's poem calls into question the Utopian light in which Jerusalem is traditionally portrayed. He is dedicated to contrasting the Biblical and historical myth of Jerusalem as religious focal point with its modern reality as a centre of military conflict.

Layton's poem "Israelis" also participates in this project. Like "O Jerusalem," it represents a polar shift from the idealism in Klein's work and reflects the realities of the human condition: "Man is a fanged wolf, without compassion."[94] Layton describes Israelis as a "new" kind of Jew who survive by depending on themselves as opposed to God: "It is themselves they can trust and no one else; / Their fighter planes that screech across the sky, / Real, visible as the glorious sun; / Riflesmoke, gunshine, and the rumble of

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[92] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 13.

[93] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 13.

[94] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 136.

tanks."[95] The history of the Jews has taught him no longer to trust God for protection: "Where is the Almighty if murder thrives? / He's dead as mutton and they buried him / Decades ago, covered him with their own / Limp bodies in Belsen and Babi Yar."[96] Layton's strong reaction to the Holocaust (Bergen Belsen was a Nazi concentration camp) and to the long history of Jewish victimization (Babi Yar was a town outside of Kiev where thousands of Jews were murdered) is a call to arms. Layton has learned that "mankind's inherent cruelty has seen to it that history's true lessons are forgotten" and "history's only positive lesson is its negative example."[97] Religion no longer offers the protection necessary to defend a state and its people: "Or ruth: Assyrians, Medes, Greeks, Romans, / And devout pagans in Spain and Russia."[98] By using a pun to describe Ruth's name, Layton illustrates the Biblical matriarch's inability to protect her children; he also emphasizes this point by listing all those who have conquered the Jews. Layton sarcastically adds, "- Allah's children, most merciful of all."[99] The last stanza of the poem emphasizes his belief that the Holocaust demonstrates that neither religion nor humanity can be depended upon to protect Jews: "The pillar of fire: Their flesh made it; / It burned briefly

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[95] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 136.

[96] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 13.

[97] Michael Q. Abraham, "Neurotic Afflictions: Klein, Layton, Cohen, and the Properties of Influence," Canadian Poetry 38 (1996): 90.

[98] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 136.

[99] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 136.

and died - you all know where."[100] Layton implies that the world knew about the Holocaust, and yet despite this knowledge, only sporadic efforts were made to protect Jews. The final line of the poem, "God being dead and their enemies not," exemplifies Layton's belief that Jews have many enemies and it is going to take more than God to protect them.[101] According to Layton, God's death nullifies the Biblical contract between God and Jews in which God promises to deliver the Jews to Israel when they agree to abide by his laws. If God is dead, another explanation is required for the birth of the modern state of Israel. For Layton, Israel is the answer, but not as it was Biblically envisioned. The Holocaust, which exemplifies the death of God, frees Jews from their religious obligations. Ironically, the birth of Israel functions as a model for how Jews should live, not as imagined in the Bible, but rather, within a present reality.

"God Being Dead and Their Enemies Not" - Layton and Nietzsche

Nietzsche's influence on Layton is evident. Layton makes no attempt to hide his debt to Nietzsche: "Layton claims that he "recognized himself" in Nietzsche, that Nietzsche's work confirmed his own vision of reality."[102] Recognizing and accounting for

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[100] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 136.

[101] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 136.

[102] *Irving Layton - The Poet and His Critics*, ed. Seymour Mayne (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1978) 272.

Nietzschean themes in Layton's poetry does not reduce his work to a poetic form of Nietzschean thought, but instead allows his poetry to be read with greater depth and understanding. Nietzsche's work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, is the starting point from which to explore his influence on Layton.[103] Layton relates to many of the ideas that it presents. The point where the two most closely intersect is in Nietzsche's assertion that society is living a sick and unhealthy existence. The symptoms of this disease include a lack of spirit, an unsubstantiated and weak system of morality, and an apathetic and indifferent attitude. Nietzsche blames Christian values and Socratic rationalism for breeding this disease. Humanity's ability to overcome itself has been lost, leaving it defenceless against itself. The only way to break this cycle is for humanity to confront its tendency towards evil and to assume the burden of guilt.[104]

Layton takes Nietzsche's notion of a sick society and builds on it. The final line of "Israelis," "God being dead and their enemies not" is a clear reference to Nietzsche's famous parable in *The Gay Science* in which he announces God is dead.[105] The Holocaust is the clearest example of God's death: "For Layton, there was no greater evidence of God's death than the Holocaust, no better proof of God's former life than His tragic

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[103] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage P, 1966).

[104] *Irving Layton - The Poet and His Critics* 279-280.

[105] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974).

death."[106] Layton's reference to Nietzsche is an attempt to undermine the tradition in which truth is grounded in God. He is trying to tease out the implications and consequences of the idea, what if God is dead? Layton, like Nietzsche, tries to encourage humans to look for new answers to old questions. Christianity asserts life on earth is a stepping stone to eternal life in Heaven. Nietzsche argues in his work *On the Genealogy of Morals* that Christian beliefs represent an inversion of human morality and natural instincts.[107] Layton, like Nietzsche, emphasizes life on earth in the present. Layton's poem "Eternal Recurrence" illustrates this belief and borrows the title from Nietzsche's hypothesis which postulates that whatever happens, will happen again and again, in the same way, for eternity.[108] Nietzsche does not necessarily believe this to be the case. The point of his hypothesis is that if individuals knew they were going to have to live their lives in exactly the same way for all eternity, they might be more assertive and discerning in the decisions they make. Layton's poem reflects this thesis.

Layton begins his poem by stating, "The sleepwalkers are advancing on Armageddon / where the lines form for the final conflict."[109] These first two lines of the

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[106] Abraham 100.

[107] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage P, 1968).

[108] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 341.

[109] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 93.

poem introduce two themes adopted from Nietzsche's work. "Sleepwalkers" announces the first theme and refers to the existence of humanity in a constant state of slumber. Humankind is content to suppress and deny its true instincts and live a passive existence that turns to religion and Socratic rationalism in the pursuit of answers.[110] The second theme, Armageddon or the end of the world, is introduced in the second line. Layton's pronouncement begins the cycle of eternal recurrence that is repeated in the following stanza: "Another Megiddo rises, another Troy. Again / satyrs link tails and dance in the moonlight; / another Abram hears injunctions the wind utters / or a tapestry fluttering against a wall."[111] Layton, like Nietzsche, does not necessarily believe the hypothesis of the eternal recurrence to be true. He does, however, believe it to be a valuable mental exercise. Layton is unsatisfied with humanity's inability to learn from history, in particular, Jews' inability to learn from their long history of victimization. He uses the notion of the eternal recurrence to demonstrate that humanity's spectacular ability to destroy itself will be repeated if it does not recognize and accept its true destructive nature. The first stanza ends with the notion of humanity rising from its ashes only to repeat its cycle of destruction: "the smoke clears over another Stone Age. / over cave dwellers and humans with painted

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[110] *Irving Layton - The poet and His Critics* 279.

[111] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 93.

skins: / cannibals devour each other's kidneys and brains."[112] The second stanza continues the poet's travels through history, highlighting empires that have been built and destroyed. Layton ends the poem with humanity's destruction and places the blame for it on human beings: "always his heirs will climb towards the same ruin / until this creation becomes one vast inertness / with not a single mind to know its doom."[113] One reason that Nietzsche's hypothesis of the eternal recurrence resonates with Layton is its ability to demonstrate the passivity religion promotes. Layton warns of the dangers of Jewish faith: Judaism cannot protect humanity from itself nor Jews from its enemies. In this light, Layton's poems "The Sabbath," "Cabalist," and "To the Victims of the Holocaust" can be read in Nietzschean terms. "Eternal Recurrence" is both a wake up call and a call to arms. Layton's poems, which reject religion and announce Israel as a military state, respond to this wake up call.

By illustrating humanity's self-destructive nature, "Eternal Recurrence" introduces the notion that humanity is unwilling to confront its instinct for self-destruction. He uses the Holocaust, as well as other major events of destruction, to illustrate how all of humankind is responsible for its own downfall. Layton is inclusive in his blame for the Holocaust. He believes that the social and political environment made it safe for Hitler:

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[112] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 145.

[113] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 93.

> Let us admit it openly: we were accomplices before the crime... Directly or indirectly we connived at, encouraged and supported every one of Hitler's aggressions. With a wink and a nod and a final handclasp under the table, we assured Hitler that it was quite safe for him to rob and plunder his neighbours.[114]

Canadian literary scholar Michael Abraham suggests that Layton's passage echoes Nietzsche's assertion in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which it is not the absence of God that is most significant, but rather, the potential for human savagery: "Layton, like Nietzsche, exhorts humans to realize that they are capable of anything."[115] Layton's passage also echoes Zarathustra's description of the "Superman," who will overcome his animal instincts only by admitting and confronting his predisposition towards violence. Layton borrows from Nietzsche's notion of the "Superman" and his ability to confront and overcome himself in developing his vision of the "new" Jew. In an article comparing Layton to Nietzsche, literary critic Wynne Francis comments that Layton's Jewish poems are "quite consistent with the duty of the 'ubermensch' to seek his true self" and represent

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[114] Layton, *Engagements* 17-18.

[115] Abraham 100. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking P, 1954).

the "fulfilment of [his] dream of the Jews - namely that they possess the greatest potential to become 'higher men.'"[116]

Layton's poem "For My Two Sons, Max and David" affirms Nietzsche's hypothesis which asserts a need to confront reality, assume responsibility, and live an assertive life. The poet also affirms that history and religion are deceptive and "unless we draw the proper conclusions from the facts, this frightful bloodletting will be a monstrous, unforgivable crime."[117] "For My Two Sons, Max and David" contrasts Jewish sensibilities with Christian perspectives: "The Jew whose helplessness stirs the heart and conscience / of the Christian like the beggars outside his churches // The Jew who fills the authentic Christian with loathing for himself / and his fellow Christians."[118] Layton bitterly catalogues how Jews are society's scapegoat: "The Jew who can be justifiably murdered because he is rich / The Jew who can be justifiably murdered because he is poor // The Jew everyone seeks to destroy, having instilled self-division / in the heathen."[119] However, with the birth of Israel, a new possibility arises: "Be none of these my sons / My sons, be none of these / Be gunners in the Israeli Air Force."[120] The poem's last stanza is a metaphor

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[116] *Irving Layton - The Poet and His Critics* 274. Ubermensch is the German term Nietzsche uses to name the 'Superman.'

[117] Abraham 100.

[118] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 145.

[119] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 145.

[120] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 145.

telling Layton's sons, and all Jews, to be active, not passive. It is a clear allusion to Nietzsche's notion of the "Superman." It illuminates the greater metaphor, that of Jews not being victims. Israel's existence as a modern, military state makes it easier for Jews to live in the Diaspora, for Israel functions as a positive example to all Jews. Brenner comments:

> In a sense, the establishment of the Jewish State indicates, for the Diaspora Jew a rejection of Jewish helplessness and impotence and marks the rebirth of Jewish identity and independence.... The sense of pride and self-sufficiency instilled with the creation of the State and its military victories informs the author's treatment of the Holocaust.[121]

Layton's poem entitled "The New Sensibility" picks up on this theme, expands it, and contributes to his vision of the "new" Jew. The title gestures back to Nietzsche's conception of the "Superman," by proposing a new Jewish attitude and destiny. In "The New Sensibility," Layton continues his metaphor introduced in other poems of the poet functioning as the soldier. In order for the poet to be a hero, he must confront his enemies and show no mercy: "A more efficacious / epigram / for topping the mouths / of tormentors / is a bullet in the head: / it opens a hole / and closes the matter forever."[122] This is the only viable option for Layton, all others having been rejected. Layton continues by comparing domesticated animals to defenceless Jews and idealistic poets: "Tamed bears / toothless

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[121] Brenner, *Assimilation* 172.

[122] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 137.

tigers / caged lions / defenceless ghetto Jews // and poets / who dish out the familiar idealistic crap / always make the murderous crowd / slobber / preparatory to prodding them with sticks / and pouring gasoline on their cadavers."[123] Caged animals, ghetto Jews, and idealistic poets are bound by their condition. They are unable to reach their potential. As such, the hunted make easy prey for the hunters and die unfulfilled in Layton's system of social Darwinism. Layton continues by announcing, "The up-to-date poet // should be a dead shot."[124] Layton is that poet. He recognizes the modern condition of humanity and as poet and soldier, knows how to respond. He is part of the generation of "new poetry / minted June 1967," that recognizes Israel's existence as a military aggressor.[125] As poet and social commentator, Layton states, "I thought / I should let you know."[126]

"Don't Be a Waffling Poet"

"After Auschwitz" expresses several of the themes introduced in other Layton poems. In the first stanza, Layton compares a poet's words to a soldier's gun: "My son, / don't be a waffling poet; / let each word you write / be direct and honest / like the crack of a

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[123] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 137.

[124] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 137.

[125] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 137.

[126] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 137.

gun."[127] By addressing the poem to his son, Layton demonstrates his belief that history, in this case the Holocaust, must not be forgotten, but instead, is something from which his son and society as a whole must learn. He continues by listing the names of a variety of religions in an attempt to demonstrate that they have not protected humans from themselves: "Believe an aging poet / of the twentieth century: / neither the Old Testament / nor the New / or the sayings of the Koran / or the Three Baskets of Wisdom / or the Dhammapada / will ever modify or restrain / the beastliness of men."[128] Humankind is inherently cruel and religion's effort to control humanity's animal instincts is ineffective. The example Layton uses to illustrate this point is the Nazi extermination camp Auschwitz: "Lampshades / were made from the skins / of a people / preaching the gospel of love; / the ovens of Auschwitz and Belsen / are open testimony / to their folly." Layton knows history's true lessons are soon forgotten "Despite memorial plaques / of horror and contrition / repentance, my son, / is short-lived."

"After Auschwitz" is intentionally didactic. It captures all of the major themes in Layton's Jewish poems, namely the Holocaust, Israel, and Jews. It also demonstrates his debt to Nietzsche. The poet is no longer willing to be stereotyped as a Jewish victim. He uses military metaphors to illustrate his belief that it is time for Jews to stand up and fight.

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[127] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 147.

[128] Layton, *Fortunate Exile* 147.

Judaism, or any other religion, will not protect humans from themselves. He blames both Jews and the rest of the world for the Holocaust but is not surprised by genocide. Genocide has happened before and it will happen again - history has proven it. Layton's poem endeavors to break this cycle. Spirituality is replaced by social Darwinism - only the strong will survive. Layton's references to guns and rifles point to Israel. He sees the modern state of Israel functioning as a model for how Jews should live and ends the poem as it began, by offering a solution to Jewish victimization: "An automatic rifle / endures / a lifetime." "After Auschwitz" is also demonstrative. Its style reflects its content and its message. Its lines rattle off like the bullets of a machine gun. Its words hit hard.

While Layton's poetry is at times shocking and even prosaic, the relevance of his comments persist. His responses to Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel, represent a modern evolution of Klein's understanding of what it means to be a Jewish-Canadian. Like Klein, Layton responds to his position as a Jewish-Canadian. Yet, instead of burying his thoughts in allusive and labyrinthine arguments, he confronts the issues his dual inheritance presents. He is unrelenting in his attack on anti-Semitism and humanity's proclivity towards evil. He does not limit his tirade to gentiles. Layton takes aim at Judaism and religion in general and the illusion he believes they promote. He also responds to Israel's existence as a military state. It is a Jewish country, with a Jewish army, that must defend itself. Layton shocks his

readers by idealizing a modern, militant Israel and its inhabitants and positioning them as a model for how all Jews should live. While Layton does not spend a lot of energy trying to reconcile the Jewish world with the gentile world, the suggestion that if everyone confronted reality with a bluntness similar to his poetry, society would be better as a whole, does emerge. If nothing else, Layton's loud and combative style and his Nietzschean perspective combine to create a response that is heard, if not understood and accepted.

Chapter III - Mordecai Richler

Mordecai Richler first visited Israel in 1962. He was on assignment for *Maclean's* magazine and upon his return, published his impressions in a three-part series. A revised version of his articles resurfaced in a collection of essays entitled *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* published in 1968. In 1984, Richler decided to make a return trip to Israel with the intention of tracking down friends and family who had made *aliyah*. Eight years later, in 1992, he finally made that trip.

Richler's trip to Israel in 1992, his first visit in 1962, and his experiences growing up in Montreal, provide the substance for his autobiographical work, *This Year in Jerusalem*. Like A.M. Klein and Irving Layton, Richler grew up in a religious family in the Jewish ghetto in Montreal and attended Byron Byng High School. His childhood was influenced by his paternal grandfather, Shamariyahu Richler. He was a rigidly religious Jew who punished Richler for minor infractions of Jewish law. Richler's break with his Orthodox upbringing began shortly after his bar mitzvah and coincided with a growing interest in the youth wing of the socialist Zionist political party *Habonim* (Hebrew for "builders"). What began as a platform of rebellion against formal religion, and as a way to spite his grandfather and to meet girls, evolved into a serious pursuit. At the time, Richler expected that once he and his three closest friends from *Habonim* graduated from university, they would make *aliyah* and become elite desert fighters.

During Richler's two trips to Israel, he visited with family, friends, Arabs, settlers, politicians, journalists, new immigrants, and just about any other person who had a story to tell. These meetings comprise the bulk of *This Year in Jerusalem*. Richler uses the stories from these encounters to challenge his ideologically informed vision of Zion developed as a member of *Habonim*. He takes the reader through his experiences in Israel in order to build an argument that attempts to demonstrate how the ideology that once was a part of Israel, no

longer exists. The idealism that drove Klein's and the heroism that drove Layton's visions of Israel, are rejected. Richler's work shows the development of the Zionist dream in both personal and historical terms and then systematically disassembles the same dream. Literary critic Michael Darling explains Richler's technique:

> As a writer, he is more the equivalent of a skillful film editor, someone who takes images and dialogue and puts them together in such a way that his audience cannot miss the point, without him actually having to *make* one. This is also the art of the satirist, whose moral position may always be inferred from what he castigates as *immoral*. Richler's view of Israelis, not unlike his opinion of Canadians, is that no one whose views are too self-regarding should 'scape whipping.

Despite Richler's unwillingness to accept an ideologically informed vision of Israel, what eventually emerges from the cloud of satire and cynicism is a moral sense of liberal humanism. This is evidenced by his deep concern for Jews, Israel, the Diaspora, as well as a sympathetic view towards Palestinians.

Richler's work is reflective. He looks back at his life and explores the choices he has made. As a satirist, he examines his life and the issues raised by his experiences with a critical mind and strives to expose all forms of hypocrisy. He tries to look beyond what he perceives to be *Habonim's*, Klein's, and Layton's problematic and ideologically informed visions of Israel. He explores the question of why he never made *aliyah*. He ponders his

Canadian existence. In essence, by cataloging his life, Richler's work is a study of the problems created by living with a hyphenated identity.

The first part of this chapter will review Richler's experiences growing up in Montreal and the development of his Zionist ideology. The second part will catalogue Richler's impressions of his two trips to Israel and show how they challenge his teenage vision of an idealistic Israel.

Habonim and *Hasidim* - Richler Grows Up in Montreal

Richler begins his autobiography with a description of his teenage years growing up in Montreal. Around the time of his bar mitzvah, he became aware of three Jewish youth groups committed to the notion of an independent Jewish state: *Hashomer Hatza'ir* (The Young Guard), Young Judea, and *Habonim*. He ended up joining *Habonim* during his first year at Byron Byng High School. He had been recruited by a classmate that Richler calls Jerry Greenfield. Jerry had all of the qualities that he desired:

> Jerry appeared effortlessly gifted in all those pursuits in which I longed,.... He had fought in the Golden Gloves for the YMHA.... He was a high scorer on our school basketball team. He also pitched for a baseball team that actually wore uniforms...[and] his breezy manner could entice pretty girls in grade ten, maybe three years older than he was, to jitterbug with him.

Jerry was Richler's high school role model. It did not take Jerry much effort to convince Richler to join *Habonim*. The main activity of their group was a group meeting every Friday night. Jerry would pick-up Richler after dinner, and then the two of them would collect two other *chaverim* (comrades), Hershey Bloom and Myer Plotnik, on their way to the *Habonim* meeting house. Once there, they would learn about Zionist mythology, watch inspiring movies, and invite impassioned, motivational speakers to lecture on anti-Semitism and Zion. Their Friday night ritual remained unbroken for almost four years. *Habonim*, a left wing, socialist, Zionist youth group, clashed with Richler's more traditional roots. Like most of his friends, he had attended a parochial primary school. The difference was that while his *chaverim* had "sprung from secular or only fitfully observant homes that honoured Jewish cultural traditions and cherished Yiddish," Richler belonged to a *Hasidic* (pious) family. Richler's description of the difference between himself and other kids' upbringing carefully distinguishes between Jewish culture and Jewish religion. In the sentence quoted above, Richler simultaneously embraces Jewish heritage and rejects religious practice.

Richler's maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yudel Rosenburg, was a *Hasidic* scholar who wrote short stories, authored more than twenty books, and produced a multi-volume translation of the *Zohar*, or Book of Splendor, the source of Cabalistic thought. He was

strictly religious and held strong beliefs regarding any transgressions: "My grandfather also believed that desecration of the Sabbath enabled Satan to denounce the children of Israel before God." In other words, Richler's grandfather believes that if Jews are not strictly observant, then they should assume responsibility for any misfortune they may encounter; it is God's way of punishing them for transgressing Jewish law. This argument, which stresses the importance of religious ritual, is one that Richler returns to repeatedly throughout his autobiography. It turned him away from religion at a young age, and when confronted by the same argument later in life, it deepened his convictions.

While Rabbi Rosenberg had a philosophical impact on Richler, his paternal grandfather, Shamariyahu, had a more immediate effect on him. He would punish Richler for small infractions of Jewish law. After his grandfather found out that Richler had become an *apikoros* (an unbeliever), he ignored him and refused to acknowledge his presence. This form of intolerance drove Richler to seek out new forums to explore and express his Jewish heritage. The difference between Richler and his grandparents is generational. As far as Richler is concerned, they were still living in a *shtetl* (Jewish village) in Eastern Europe. Richler, while insulated by the ideologies of the Montreal ghetto, refused to be held back from exploring the modern world. *Habonim* was the first experience to offer him a window into society at large. It looked to the future as opposed to the past. One of the images that

Habonim promoted was that of the Jewish hero. This idea, unknown to Richler's grandparents' generation, resonated with him:

> Many an afternoon when my parents and elder brother were out, I would crawl on the floor all the way from the kitchen to the front door, propelling myself with my good arm, shoving my Red Ryder air rifle ahead of me, even as I dodged Arab bullets. Eventually the trail of blood from my abdominal wound would attract the attention of one of the many gorgeous nurses who revered me, but I would wave her off, saying, "It's nothing, just a flesh wound. Look after the other *chaverim* first."

The fantasy of the Jewish hero was more appealing to Richler than the rigour of daily prayer and ritual. *Habonim* gave him a sense of meaning and purpose: "Habonim converted me into a zealot for Zion. I badgered my aunts and uncles to join a boycott against British goods." It fueled Richler's desire to separate himself from his grandparents' generation. It was his liberation. His role models became David Ben-Gurion and Menachem Begin, leaders of the *Haganah* and *Irgun*, Jewish resistance groups fighting the British occupation of Palestine. Their organizations symbolized a "new" kind of Jew, one that embodied a sense of heroism. It is at this point that Richler's vision of Israel changes for the first time: the idealized state described by Klein becomes the heroic, empowered state described by Layton. Richler's new understanding of a heroic Israel

informs his Jewish identity. It gives Richler the confidence to abandon the psychological walls of the Jewish ghetto and begin to venture to the outside world.

Richler's story continues with the announcement of the United Nations' General Assembly vote in favour of the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state, with Jerusalem remaining under U.N. control. The next day, Israel was attacked by all of its neighbouring Arab countries. The following year, Israel incorporated Jerusalem into its territory and reached armistice agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. Israel's reincarnation set off triumphant celebrations by all Jews, especially by members of *Habonim*. Their sense of victory sparked a condescending attitude in Richler and his *chaverim*. They would scorn their peers for "being assimilationists, reminding them that no Jews had been more integrated into their society, or felt safer, than the Jews in Germany." Richler tempers the jubilant atmosphere with a quotation from Paul Johnson's *History of the Jews*: "to use Palestine to settle 'the Jewish problem' might, in turn, create the "Arab problem.'" Richler's timely notation marks two themes in his writing; first, his sense of liberal moralism in the form of a sympathetic view towards the considerable Arab population living in Israel; and second, his iconoclastic style. At the moment of the fruition of his teenage dream, he undercuts it by presenting a different point of view. He affirms his sensitivity towards the conflict between Jews and Arabs by quoting Albert Einstein:

> I would much rather see reasonable agreement with the Arabs on the basis of living together in peace than the creation of a Jewish state...my awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders, an army and a measure of temporal power, no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will suffer - especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks.

Although they once assumed that they would make it through life as friends, once high school ended, Richler and his *chaverim* headed in different directions. Jerry moved out west looking for quick cash, Myer got into the movie business as an usher, and Hershey went to McGill where he studied English literature. Richler headed to the less desirable Sir George Williams College, as McGill's Jewish quota made it impossible for Richler to be admitted, given his mediocre matriculation scores. Life outside the Jewish ghetto was not as easy as Richler and his *chaverim* had anticipated. Montreal was not an integrated city, but "a sequence of alienated, self-contained tribal bastions - French, WASP, Jewish.... Growing up, I was nourished and to some extent misled in a warm world that was just about entirely Jewish, and enjoined to be suspicious of those who weren't." Hershey, while stimulated by a course on nineteenth-century English, was unable to relate to its themes: "I was unable to respond to the poetry of William Wordsworth. However, I suspect it may not be that his poetry is *passé*. I fear it could be some inadequacy in me."

Richler also endured similar difficulties in his integration into mainstream society, but unlike Hershey, reveled in the unfamiliar environment: "My ride into *goyish* culture was exhilarating, but there were disconcerting bumps on the road." As Richler's interest in literature grew, he had to come to terms with the discovery of the unashamed anti-Semitism in the work of writers he respected, such as Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. When he was invited to dinner by his "*goyish*" friends, he was considered a novelty. He would tell stories that would highlight the more superstitious aspects of Judaism in order to humour his hosts. While Richler does not claim he felt isolated, repeated stories of soup with Ritz crackers as opposed to *kreplech* (a form of Jewish ravioli), combined with the need to pardon the great writers for their anti-Semitic sentiments, convey a developing sense of alienation. He was coming to terms with what it meant to live outside the protective walls of the Jewish ghetto. While breaking from the rituals of his grandparents' generation was easy, creating a place for himself in a world that remained hostile to Jews was difficult. In 1950, Richler dropped out of Sir George Williams and sailed for Paris, as he notes, "rather than Tel Aviv." Richler's decision to sail to Europe rather than Israel marks his rejection of his teenage Zionist aspiration to make *aliyah*. Visions of becoming a heroic Jewish pioneer settling and defending Zion are replaced by a desire to soak in the literary and cultural heritage of Europe. Richler's only remark

regarding his decision notes a passing sense of guilt: "I feared that any minute I might be confronted by Ezra Lifshitz or Fayge Kravitz. 'You're heading for the wrong port, *chaver*. Shame on you.'"

A couple of years later, Richler made his way to London where he lived for twenty years. In 1967, reports began to surface about a possible war in the Middle East. The Israeli Embassy in London contacted Richler and asked him if he would sign a letter addressed to the *Times* in conjunction with other Jewish writers stating that Israel "was in immediate danger of being overrun by the massed Arab legions of five nations and was in urgent need of support from other democracies." Richler was pleased to sign. The following week, Israel was at war with Egypt in The Six Day War. English journalists eagerly reported Egyptian victories. American reports of successful Israeli airstrikes were dismissed as unreliable. Within a couple of days of the beginning of the war, the English media struggled in having to announce that Israel had won and that most of the Egyptian airforce had been destroyed before it ever got off of the ground. Richler's story conveys the sense of displacement and alienation he was experiencing while living in England. His eagerness to support the Israeli cause and his bitterness toward a biased English media suggests that he had never fully come to terms with his decision to head for Europe rather than Israel. At the

same time, Richler's story demonstrates how he was trying to integrate his relationship to Israel and his Jewish heritage into his English existence.

Shortly after the start of the Six Day War, Richler flies to Montreal to attend his father's funeral. While there, he takes the opportunity to update the development of his *chaverim*. Over a drink with Hershey, Richler learns that he has become a dentist, married a Jewish woman, and has two children. Hershey tells Richler a story about Jerry, who had popped into town and spent the night, and in the morning, before anyone was awake, left with a typewriter, golf clubs, a silver tray, a necklace, and whatever else he decided to help himself to. A couple of years later, Richler received a phone call from Myer. He was in London on business and they arranged to meet for a drink. He had changed his name to Woodrow. Richler wondered why. Myer explained, "Myer's so Jewy. 'Myer, finish what's on your plate.' 'Myer, play with the cat.'... Myer this, Myer that. I always hated it." Myer went on to explain that his job as an usher eventually led to a job in the music industry as a manager of a couple of successful bands. Richler asked him if he ever regretted not making *aliyah* with his *chaverim*. Myer responded, "And live on a kibbutz? Jerry would've been stealing eggs from under the chickens and selling them on the roadside."

In 1972, Richler and his family moved from England back to Montreal. In 1984, he received a phone call. Jerry had died in Whitehorse and whoever was calling him wanted Richler to come and say a few words. He declined, saying that he hadn't seen Jerry in forty years. The episode rekindled thoughts of Israel. That night, Richler decided that he would make a second trip to Israel in order to track down his old *chaverim*. In 1992, he finally made that trip.

Two Trips to Israel - 1962 and 1992

Richler's first trip to Israel, an assignment for *Maclean's* in 1962, left him with a myriad of impressions. While staying in Tel Aviv, he was introduced to the journalism scene. One journalist wondered if Richler actually called himself Mordecai in Canada. Upon confirmation, the journalist remarked, "Really? In Canada? Isn't that nice!" This encounter marks Richler's first experience with Israelis' ignorance of the Diaspora. By including this episode, Richler suggests that Israelis' understanding of the Diaspora is limited to the point that even his own name (Mordecai) is construed as being a quaint gesture towards his Jewish roots.

While Richler was visiting Hebrew University, a professor explained to him how he admired Jewish-American writers such as Bellow, Malmud, and Roth, but noted that, "they

are not read much here.... The young think of them as ghetto writers." In other words, they are instantly associated with Jews living in the ghettos in old Eastern Europe, despite being a generation or two removed. This episode introduces Richler to Israel's need to reject the "old" Jew of the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe, in order to make room for the "new" heroic, Israeli Jew.

Richler's first trip also addresses the disunity between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. His cousin's wife, whom he meets in Hadera, is quick to point out the lines that divide Israel, "wherever you have black and white there's a problem," referring to the dark skin of North African Jews. She also feels it necessary to establish a sense of superiority in relation to other Jews, "Don't forget, we didn't have to come here. Not like the European Jews." Her husband, Richler's cousin, on the other hand, believes in Israel and its people, "As long as you're not a pig, everybody helps out."

Richler's stories from his first visit to Israel begin the process of examining Israel. Richler observes the multiple lines that divide Israel. He no longer sees Israel through the ideological lenses of his youth. He travels to Israel as a critic and a satirist and his observations reflect his perspective. His agenda is to expose Israel for the country that it is in reality as opposed to the country that Diasporic Jews imagine it to be. By doing so,

Richler builds an argument against *aliyah*, and at the same time, justifies to himself his decision to live in the Diaspora.

In preparing to tell the story of his second trip to Israel, Richler comments on two points that he finds particularly interesting: Israelis' attitude towards the Diaspora and the religious and political lines that divide its people. The first point arises from a Gallup Poll published in 1990 which stated that the number of Israelis desiring to leave Israel exceeded the number of Jews wanting to leave their European homes. Further, approximately twenty thousand *yordim* ("those who go down" - the opposite of *aliyah*), emigrate from Israel every year. Yitzhak Rabin, on a visit to the United States during his first term as Israel's prime minister, claimed *yordim* were "the dregs of Israeli society." Richler is unimpressed by the prime minister's comments. Two of Richler's oldest and most cultured friends are *yordim*.

The second point that Richler comments on is Israeli politics and the *haredim*, or ultra-Orthodox, God-fearing Jews. In 1992, there were two political parties representing the *haredim*: Agudat (Union) Israel, representing the Ashkenazim, and Shas, the voice of Sephardic Jews. It was their practice, as Richler explains, for "the religious parties to flirt with both Likud and Labour, eventually blessing whichever delivers the best ministries and the most largesse, and snuggling into its lap." Since Likud and Labour, the two main

political parties in Israel, generally split the Israeli vote, often it is the fringe parties that sway the vote. The religious parties tend to have the largest representation next to Likud and Labour, and as a result, have a disproportionate amount of influence. This scares Richler. In the rhetoric of religious parties, he hears echoes of his grandfather. In 1990, the founder of Shas, Rabbi Eliezer Schach, enraged secular and Diasporic Jews with his insensitive comments:

> Does anyone here think that before the Holocaust, which exacted so terrible a price and left no family untouched, all the Jews of Europe were righteous, God-fearing folk? There was a drift from our faith and our way of life. What happened was divine retribution for the accumulated weight of years of drawing away from Judaism.

His comments were not without precedent. Shas ministers had used the "divine retribution" argument to explain tragedies in the past. Richler also cites examples of this argument being employed to reprimand Jews in European history and the Bible. He cringes at their argument. He believes it is a weak, circular argument that can be called upon to explain any circumstance that is in conflict with their religious belief. It also serves to widen the gap between Israel and the Diaspora as the religious right in the Diaspora tends to be more sensitive and understanding. Richler quotes Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the head Rabbi of the Lubavitchers (also known as Habad, an acronym of the Hebrew words for wisdom, understanding, and knowledge), in order to respond to Rabbi Schach's comments:

> All those who suffered during the years of the Holocaust were holy and pure, and they didn't die because of any 'settling of accounts.' What person can make accounts for God? We don't have the power to understand why God allowed these sufferings to occur. But just because we don't understand, does this mean we may say that these events were, God forbid, a punishment? No.

Instead of making his own statement, Richler ironically employs one religious leader's comments to reply to another religious leader's comments, in order to demonstrate the inconsistency and hypocrisy of religion.

In 1992, the Labour party formed a tenuous relationship with Shas, and appointed Arye Deri as Minister of the Interior. On Yom Kippur, (the day of atonement - the most significant Jewish holiday), a Labour member of the Knesset (parliament) was photographed sunbathing on a beach in Tel Aviv. The photograph caused a scandal. These events remind Richler of his childhood and his first major religious transgression: eating a bacon and tomato sandwich. Afterwards he was "not altogether sure that I wouldn't be struck by lightning." His upbringing created in him an overwhelming fear of the outside so that his first experience eating *trayf* (unkosher food), left him completely guilt-ridden. Richler's comparison between the politician and his own religious transgression serves to subvert an idealized vision of Israel and demonstrate that life in Israel is no different from life in the Diaspora.

In his description of his return trip to Israel, Richler comments on the effects of Israel's rapid modernization and continues his exploration of Israel-Diaspora, secular-religious, and Jewish-Arab relations. When he first arrives in Jerusalem, he realizes that he has left his typewriter at the airport. After Richler telephoned the concierge in an effort to locate his lost luggage, the concierge returned his call and responded, "I've got good news and bad news for you. The good news is that they found your typewriter. The bad news is that they blew it up." This was Richler's introduction to modern Israel. Living on a small patch of land, nestled between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, has made Israel suspicious. It is standard practice for Israeli police to destroy any unattended parcels by remote-controlled robot. Richler's experience demonstrates that despite all of the rhetoric of the heroic Israeli Defense Forces, Israel exists in a constant state of paranoia: unable to make peace with its neighbours, Israel's security forces are reduced to destroying tourists' luggage.

Richler's next story discusses a tribute to a cartoonist in *The Jerusalem Post*. One of the cartoons reproduced was titled "Final Solution." The first frame depicted Jews lining up in front of a crematorium. The second frame illustrated a couple being married in a church with the caption "Intermarriage." Richler, married to a Protestant, relates this story to demonstrate Israel's intolerance and insensitivity to the realities facing Jews in the

Diaspora. This anecdote also serves to reassure Richler that his decision not to make *aliyah* was the right one.

Richler describes how the conflict between secular and religious Jews has created a sense of paranoia. When the Jerusalem Cinémathèque, a cultural centre that overlooks old Jerusalem, began opening on the Sabbath, the *haredim* protested. Mrs. van Leer, the director of the institution, describes the conflict, and the feeling it left her with:

> after the *intifada* started, the *haredim* put up posters in the city saying it was my fault, the *intifada* was God's punishment for my opening the cinémathèque on the Sabbath. It's terrible, but I can't stand the black-coats. Once I was getting into my car when I saw one of them rushing toward me. I immediately began to raise my windows. But it turned out that all he wanted was to return my eyeglasses case. He was a nice man.

Richler's exploration reveals Israel's social problems, the kind that any modern country experiences. He shares stories that demonstrate how it is plagued by racism, theft, and prostitution. He explains how Ashkenazi Jews' (the majority of Jews in Israel), use of derogatory terms to label non-Ashkenazi Jews, demonstrates how they are "terrified of being overrun, reduced to minority." When Holocaust victims first began arriving, Ashkenazi Jews dubbed them *avak adam* (human debris). Moroccan Jews were called savages by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. Other Sephardic Jews were

called "medieval." This is not the country Richler imagined he would make *aliyah* to when he was a member of *Habonim*.

While in Israel, Richler meets with two friends from Montreal who made *aliyah* in 1950, Sol and Fayge Cohen. When discussing the Diaspora's contributions to Israel, Sol explains how "those contributions are more important to Jews in the Diaspora than they are to us - it's their channel of Jewish involvement." Richler notes that after they parted ways, he realized they never asked about Canada. Richler's story points out that his friends had left Canada and never looked back. They did not care about it, and like the Diaspora, deemed it irrelevant. Their point of view demonstrates Richler's belief that Israelis are too self-centered to understand the complexities of the Diaspora. They see things in black and white, literally and figuratively, and for them, the Diaspora is black.

The next day, the headlines of *The Jerusalem Post* described how a kibbutznik had been murdered by a terrorist while working in a settlement in the Gaza Strip and that two Palestinians had been shot and killed by an IDF (Israeli Defense Force) patrol along the Jordanian border. The *Post* also related a recent conflict between the IDF and stone-throwing Palestinians in which several people were injured and some killed. Later that afternoon, Richler met with the paper's editor, David Bar-Ilan. He explained how the *Post* had taken a sharp editorial turn to the right after it was purchased by the Canadian

newspaper tycoon, Conrad Black: "Now...the *Post* has the *chutzpah* not only to assert that Israel is more sinned against than sinning, but to suggest that a Palestinian state in the heart of Jerusalem and the suburbs of Tel Aviv,...may not be a good idea after all." Richler is clear in his response to Jewish-Arab relations, and especially to intolerant, right-wing Israelis: "There is no denying Jewish accomplishment is Israel, but much of it was achieved on land where another people, however unambitious, was rooted. Their failure to cultivate their gardens does not justify their displacement by a stiff-necked people." Richler completes his commentary by paraphrasing Israeli writer Amos Elon: "Zionism had an unexpected triumph. It had created...a mirror-image of itself: Palestinian nationalism - the longing of a dispossessed people for their own state." In other words, in the struggle to become an independent state, Israel's birth created a new group of displaced people, ones who began to fight for their independence in the same way that Jews did when they were without a state.

A couple of days later, Richler visited the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel (AACI) in order to find out about how former North Americans were faring, as a whole, in Israel. The director explains to Richler that their organization provides "organized *protekzia* (connections)." She tells him that roughly seventy-five thousand Americans and Canadians were living in Israel in 1992. A former North American, she comments, "Many

Israelis see our *olim* (immigrants) as refugees and some North American Jews look at us as people who didn't, or couldn't make it in America. 'Why did you give up the good life?'" While there, Richler is introduced to two former Montrealers. The first is Frances Neumark. He asks her why she moved into a settlement in the West Bank. She responds:

> originally we moved to the territories because a house in Jerusalem would have cost us triple that, but after we had settled in, we began to feel strongly about never giving it back.... But I don't think peace will happen just because you give up settlements. Me, I don't believe in giving any of it back, not an inch. If anything, we should be getting more.

Her answer illuminates the transition that, sometimes unexpectedly, takes place when one emigrates to Israel. Richler is wary of such dramatic transformations, especially when they include a militant, unwavering stance. The second Montrealer is Michael Goldstein. He expresses equally strong convictions in his dedication to Israel, especially compared to his life in Québec under separatist government:

> I can't tell you how good it is to be here and not have to deal with the nutty language laws and sign laws any more, never mind a referendum on independence or a new constitution every ten years. I feel like a great weight has been lifted from me. Here I never think about being Jewish. We're all Jewish.

As Richler's story progresses and his attitude toward Israel continues to evolve, his condemnation of religion, especially right-wing extremists, grows. Almost every description of a *haredi* includes an Uzi. Up until this point in the autobiography, Richler has limited his

attack on religion. Increased encounters with religious extremists lead Richler to observe, "it's probable that more deadly sins have been committed in the exalted names of Jehovah, Christ, and Allah than were ever perpetuated in the service of pride, covetousness, lust, anger gluttony, envy, and sloth." Richler's statement suggests the deceptive and insidious nature of religion is at least as responsible for evil as are the seven deadly sins.

During his trip to Israel, Richler decides to visit Kiryat Arba, a settlement of Zionist, orthodox, and *haredi* Jews in the West Bank. While there, Richler meets with one of the settlers. Their discussion covers a wide range of topics, including reports that Israeli police use torture in order to punish and extract information out of prisoners. The settler responds by saying that Israel is a Jewish state, and despite being Jewish, it will function as all other corrupt states. He also uses the excuse of the history of Jewish victimization: "Why must we prove to be better? We were rewarded for that with Auschwitz. So I needn't excel any more. I don't have to show how good I am." Richler's meeting demonstrates that modern Israel is no longer the embodiment of the Zionist dream. It has run amok. The ideals have been lost and have deteriorated, in this case, as a result of religious zealots who inappropriately use the Holocaust as an excuse for abusing their enemies.

Eventually, Richler leaves Jerusalem and heads to Tel Aviv. His description of his departure illuminates the burden that Jerusalem represents: "A liberation from Jerusalem's

sublime but crippling heritage." Jerusalem reminds Richler of his childhood and his Jewish upbringing. It is permeated with the conflicts between past and present, religious and secular, Jew and Arab. Tel Aviv, the most European of Israeli cities, offers a haven from Jerusalem.

Despite this relief, while in Tel Aviv the tension that defines Israel overwhelms Richler. It makes him long for his Canadian home. In a passionate, confession-filled paragraph, Richler reveals his true feelings:

> All at once, I was fed up with the tensions that have long been Israel's daily bread. I resented the need to stiffen every time an Arab came striding toward me. I was weary of the West Bank's loopy, God-crazed *yeshiva buchers* toting Uzis on the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv...but now, after five weeks in a land choked by the clinging vines of its past, a victim of its contrary mythologies, I considered the watery soup of my Canadian provenance a blessing.

Richler's description of his feelings shows the dilemma that broods within him and illustrates that in the end, the Zionist dream that *Habonim* planted in him, has died.

The longer Richler remains in Israel, the stronger his contempt for Israelis grows. While waiting in his hotel to meet Hillel Halikin, author of the book *Letters to an American Friend: A Zionist Polemic*, he mulls over its thesis which argues "that for any Jew in this day and age who cares seriously about being Jewish, the only honest place to live is Israel." Halikin's rejection of the Diaspora and the Jews that live in it pushes Richler into a

passionate defense: "My God, here was a writer who in one sentence managed to impugn the honour of nearly seven million Jews who feel at home in North America.... And in the same sentence he also managed to dismiss [them] as uncaring about their Jewish heritage." The black and white, either/or approach of Halikin's polemic as well as of many of the Israelis that Richler encounters during his trip, contradicts his liberal morality. Born in Canada as a Jew, Richler has been forced to negotiate between the two poles. He does not believe in absolute positions. He is repelled by the intolerance that Jewish extremism promotes. Richler's liberal sensibilities are constantly challenged while in Israel as he repeatedly confronts those who propose a single identity for all Jews. He believes that he can be both Jewish and Canadian. He does not believe that he has to choose one over the other. In a review of Richler's work, Morton Ritts comments that "Richler asserts he needs neither to live in Israel to be a Jew, nor to deny his ancestral culture to be a Canadian." He is unconvinced by those who argue that Diaspora Jews are vulnerable to another Holocaust, or assimilation, or that new Jewish pride demands that Jews make *aliyah*. In a prolonged half-page sentence, Richler proudly summarizes his identity and proclaims: "I am Canadian, born and bred, brought up not only on Hillel, Rabbi Akiba, and Rashi, but also on blizzards, Andrew Allan's CBC Radio 'Stage' series, a crazed Maurice Richard."

The structure of Richler's book, a frenetic movement between past and present, mirrors his technique as social commentator. Through the course of his book, he is in a constant state of motion: commenting as a detached liberal moralist, as a social critic, and as a Jewish avenger. He raises issues with no intention of providing solutions. As a writer working in the satiric mode, Richler resists and targets all forms of social, political, and religious orthodoxy. He provokes society into reconsidering its inflexible philosophical positions by questioning and destabilizing society's absolutes. While Richler is concerned about the outcome of a variety of issues, he is more concerned by individuals' inability to see beyond their own ideologies. Klein's idyllic vision of Israel is systematically dismantled. While Richler supports Jewish empowerment, Layton's heroic vision of Israel is seen as false. Richler is in a constant state of flux, always moving from a position of simplicity towards one of complexity. His autobiography demonstrates his complete unwillingness to be cornered into a uniform response and his resistance to being labeled.

The excuse for Richler's 1992 trip to Israel is to track down friends who had made *aliyah*. In his review of *This Year in Jerusalem*, William Dunphy suggests that "the major purpose in writing this book is for Richler to come to terms with why he never made *aliyah*." Dunphy argues that since Richler's work focuses on his two trips to Israel and generally avoids addressing other biographical details between 1950 and 1992, then his

autobiography must be an exploration of why he didn't make *aliyah*. Dunphy appears to be missing the point, at least in part. Richler's autobiography does explore why he didn't make *aliyah*, but it is a question the book clearly answers, as Darling explains, "as a skillful film editor." By piecing together stories of his experiences while in Israel, Richler builds an argument to show that the ideology that fueled the Zionist dream is dead. He does this by exploring the relationships between Arab and Jew, religious and secular positions, Israeli and Diasporic Jews, and Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. They all exist in a state of conflict. Israel is at war internally and externally. The ideology that once drove Israel has deteriorated into an uncontrolled charge towards a Western form of modernization where the Diasporic Jew is rejected, but ironically, the values of capitalism are embraced. What happened to Richler's *chaverim*? Myer rejects his name and completely assimilates into Canadian culture. Hershey becomes complacent and indifferent. Jerry, Richler's role model, turns out to be a thief and a liar and dies in the NorthWest Territories. Through it all, Richler steadfastly retains a sense of his Jewish heritage and considers "the watery soup of my Canadian provenance a blessing."

Conclusion

Although A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Mordecai Richler grew up in a similar set of circumstances, their writing reveals many differences. In the exploration of their Jewish-Canadian identities, especially as they relate to Israel, their individual temperaments tend to coincide with different periods in history. Klein's strong sense of Judaism and Zionism expressed in *The Second Scroll* coincides with the historical impact of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. The contrast between the victimization suffered by the Jews during the

Holocaust and the heroism symbolized by The Six Day War offered Layton's reactionary poetry an occasion to celebrate a new kind of Jew. Richler's satiric perspective explores the contradictions of the modern state of Israel.

The Second Scroll, Klein's only novel, personifies his life. Woven into a simple tale are layers of literary and religious allusions. His work has a strong autobiographical component as its narrator struggles to understand many of the same issues that plagued Klein's life. Klein's approach to his novel corresponds to the historical period in time in which he lived. In his life and in his novel, Klein understood the birth of Israel as a Divine response to the Holocaust. With the birth of an idyllic Jewish state, Klein sought to come to terms with his place in the Diaspora as a Canadian.

While Layton was born shortly after Klein, they were a generation apart in understanding their relation to their dual heritage. In his poetry, Layton uses the Holocaust and the anti-Semitism that existed in Montreal to fuel his anger and fight back. After The Six Day War, Layton's poetry began to concentrate on Jewish themes. It was as though his pugnacious temperament waited for a triumphant and empowering moment in Jewish history to respond to a previous state of Jewish victimization and announce a new heroic future.

In a review of Richler's *This Year in Jerusalem*, Morton Ritts explains what fuels his autobiographical work: "Richler tackles head on the painful tensions that exist between Israeli and Diaspora Jews and between secular and religious. These tensions are part of the book's underlying concern with the dual identity issue that Jews have dealt with throughout most of their history." Growing up with both ideal and heroic visions of Israel, Richler was filled with ideological beliefs, but as he grew older, literary pursuits supplanted Zionist dreams. By the time he made his first trip to Israel, Richler had already decided that it was not the place he had imagined it to be in his youth. As a satirist and someone who had decided not to make *aliyah*, Richler demonstrates that his previous understanding of Israel was problematic and then systematically reveals Israel's hypocrisies. Richler finds in the contradictions of modern Israel the substance for his satire. It is at this point that Richler returns to his Canadian home. Richler has a relationship to both his Canadian homeland and his Jewish heritage and believes that one does not negate the other.

Literary critic Rachel Brenner compares and contrasts the relationship the three authors and Israel in relation to the post-Holocaust era:

> Klein does not advocate Jewish independent action to redress injustice, but also steers away from the danger of assimilation. In spite of his disappointment and disillusion with the post-War world, he tries to preserve a vision of accepting the Jews as equals into the democratic system of the Western World. In relation to Klein...Layton's and Richler's writing display varying Jewish reaction to the

> post-Holocaust world. In contrast to Klein, both writers are capable of envisaging a strong, independent Jewish identity materialized in the State of Israel.... Eager to forgo the unique position of the Jew as outcast among the nations and longing to merge into Gentile society, they are ready to renounce their Jewish identity.

Brenner is correct to point out the fact that Klein is careful not to stray too far from his Jewish roots and that an empowered Jewish state constitutes a significant component of both Layton's and Richler's Jewish identities. What she fails to add is that Richler believes that while Israel is an important home and symbol to the Jewish people, the Diaspora is equally vital to his vision of the Jewish people. Richler also understands that Israel's existence creates a problem for the resident Arab population, and in the words of his *Habonim* mentor Ezra Lifshitz, "the only way to solve the problem" is to give the Palestinians their independence.

As Klein's, Layton's, and Richler's work has demonstrated, these authors' relationship to Canada is informed by their relationship to Israel, the generation and time in history into which they were born, and their individual temperaments Despite taking interpretations of their identity in different directions, by engaging with the question of identity, Klein, Layton, and Richler have created an evolving dialogue and emerging sense of the struggles that a Jewish-Canadian identity creates. While all three authors struggle to

come to terms with the tension created by their hyphenated identities, none of them resolve it; to do so would result in a loss of the fuel that feeds the intellectual, religious, and cultural tension that provides the stimulus for so much of their work.

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