Sometimes when Mum is talking to dad it sounds like one of the kids at school getting the cane, whish, whish, whish, and Dad, he pulls a face too. Mostly it’s about me, I’m bad, or the lawn being so high we might get a goat to mow it down. “Or maybe you can chew it down, Ted...” Mum was cross that morning...

Short-listed for the TAG Hungerford Award for fiction, this is an excellent collection of well-crafted and powerful stories by a writer with a gift for characterisation.
CONTENTS

Poems

Dorothy Porter 28
Alex Skovron 47
Lily Brett 54
Eva Collins 64
Yve Louis 73
Alan Collins 75
Raphael Rish 76
Shirley Harrison 91
Phyllis Perlstone 93
Nora Kroul 101

Stories

If I Lived in Iceland You Could Call Me An Icelandic Poet Mal Morgan 5
Seventeen Versions of Jewishness Morris Lurie 30
Kunzel Ron Elisha 37
Breitbart, the Strongest Jew Bernard Cohen 70
Platform 14 Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo 77
Hand Stands Vivienne Ulman 102
Photos and Fragments Jane Trigg 108
Till All Has Been Said And All Has Been Done Serge Liberman 123

Articles and Other Prose

Significant Sojourns Sara Dowse 12
Reflections of a Wandering Jew Arnold Zable 21
Talmudic Excursions Andrea Goldsmith 50
Things Could Be Forgotten: Lily Brett's Poetry and Fiction Roberta Buffi 56
Jews and Films in Australia Jan Epstein 65
The Impact of the Holocaust Muriel Berman 81
Finding Theodore and Brina Terri-ann White 85
How come a good little Jewish boy from Camberwell writes not one but two operas for Germany? George Dreyfus 97
Mother (Excerpts from a biography of Judah Waten) David Carter 114

Reviews

Abraham H. Biderman's, The World of My Past; Mark Verstandig's I Rest My Case; Leo Cooper's, Stakhonovites — and Others: The Story of a Worker in the Soviet Union. Andrew Reimer, The Demidenko Debate — Ron Shapiro 139

Contributors 143
'Shmooz' is friendly gossip, literally 'things heard' from the Hebrew 'shmuos', and I hope it is a term sufficiently flexible to contain the various kinds of submissions united in this special Jewish issue. We're shmoozing here at Westerly.

Maybe it is paranoia on my part, but I believe I already hear certain tetchy rumblings that there is no such thing as Australian/Jewish writing. And I guess I'm supposed to have an answer or else be proven wrong-headed. Well, I feel reasonably comfortable in confessing that I don't know exactly what Australian/Jewish writing is, though shmoozing sounds like it might cover it. Pace those finical people who wish to insist on taxonomic precision in such matters, the point is that I don't think concepts as loose as 'identity' can be, or even need be, too closely defined. I am not really interested here in trying to concoct a definition of 'Jewishness' which will satisfy everyone, mainly because I know it won't. Ethnic, racial and religious labels are notoriously slippery, for some people holding essentialist meanings, for others meanings which are in various ways and to varying degrees socially, culturally or historically constructed.

As I see it, any difficulty with distinguishing a Jewish writing in this country is the same kind of difficulty as distinguishing an 'Australian' writing, or distinguishing a 'women's' writing. The terms employed are not meant to be rigidly all-inclusive or prescriptive or even descriptive in any close sense. But because these are terms which are inexact is not to say that they lack usefulness. The proof of the pudding is shown once again to be in the eating, for this issue contains submissions which are male, female, Australian or Jewish in different proportions and permutations — which is what we wanted. The question-mark of Jewishness remains a connecting theme or interest throughout the issue. But it remains something to be discovered, or not discovered, by each author and reader. Some of the contributors in this issue regard themselves as Jewish, others are people who have an interest in Jewish writers and writing or else in pondering the idea of Jewishness. Some of these voices will already be quite well known; others not so familiar.

My special thanks go to Serge Liberman, Ivor Indyk and the Melbourne Jewish Museum for assisting me with this issue.

— Ron Shapiro
Westerly
a quarterly review ISSN 0043-342x

Editors
Delys Bird, Dennis Haskell, Ron Shapiro

Eastern States Editor
Bruce Bennett

Editorial Advisors
Margot Luke, Julie Lewis (prose), Brenda Walker (reviews) Fay Zwicky (poetry)

Editorial Consultants
John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan (CSAL, UWA)
Diana Brydon (University of Guelph), Yasmine Gooneratne (Macquarie University), Brian Matthews (R.G. Menzies Centre), Vincent O'Sullivan (Victoria University, Wellington), Peter Porter (London), Robert Ross (University of Texas at Austin), Anna Rutherford (University of Aarhus), Andrew Taylor (Edith Cowan University), Edwin Thumboo (National University of Singapore)

Administrator
Denise Hill

Notes for Subscribers and Contributors

Correspondence should be addressed to the Editors, Westerly, Department of English, The University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia 6907 (telephone (09) 380 2101, fax (09) 380 1030), email westerly@uniwa.uwa.edu.au. web address: http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/english/www/westerly.html

Unsolicited manuscripts not accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All manuscripts must show the name and address of the sender and should be typed (double-spaced) on one side of the paper only. Whilst every care is taken of manuscripts, the editors can take no final responsibility for their return; contributors are consequently urged to retain copies of all work submitted. Minimum rates for contributors — poems $40.00; reviews $60.00; stories/articles $90.00.

Subscriptions: $36.00 per annum (posted); $64.00 for 2 years (posted). Special student subscription rate: $24.00 per annum (posted). Single copies $8 (plus $2 postage). Email Subscriptions $10.00 to westerly@uniwa.uwa.edu.au. Subscriptions should be made payable to Westerly and sent to the Administrator, CSAL at the above address.

Work published in Westerly is cited in: Abstracts of English Studies, Australian Literary Studies Annual Bibliography, Australian National Bibliography, Journal of Commonwealth Literature Annual Bibliography, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents/Arts & Humanities, The Genuine Article, Modern Language Association of America Bibliography, The Year's Work in English Studies, and is indexed in APIAS: Australian Public Affairs Information Service (produced by the National Library of Australia) and AUSTLIT, the Australian Literary On-Line Database.

Three Westerly Indexes 1956-77, 1978-83 and 1984-88, are available at $5.00 each from the above address.

Westerly is published quarterly at the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature in the English Department, The University of Western Australia with assistance from the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, and the State Government of W.A. through an investment in this project by the Department for the Arts. The opinions expressed in Westerly are those of individual contributors and not of the Editors or Editorial Advisors.
Westerly Survives! Westerly Thrives!

The editors and all those involved in the production of Westerly would like to thank the many readers who have supported the magazine during 1996, the magazine’s fortieth anniversary year and one of the most difficult in its history. The many and varied expressions of support from the literary community — locally, nationally and internationally — have been very heartening. A substantial number of new subscriptions and new sales has been achieved so that we produced 1100 copies of the Winter issue, 1200 copies of the Spring issue and will print a record 2000 copies of the Summer special issue on contemporary Australian/Jewish writing. Thanks are due to John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan who have joined the magazine as Editorial Consultants and have also done much to promote it. Westerly is now being distributed in Europe, the USA and will shortly, we believe, be distributed in Great Britain.

Thanks are also due to ArtsWA, and the Hon. Peter Foss, the WA Minister for the Arts, for substantial backing of Westerly at a crucial time. In the last funding round the investment in Westerly by ArtsWA was increased substantially and that funding has been guaranteed for three years. At the time of writing Westerly has funding applications being considered by the Literature Fund of the Australia Council and by the University of Western Australia Community Relations Committee. We feel optimistic about the outcomes.

Westerly has its own home page on the Internet, and we are developing a way of selling internet subscriptions; these should come onstream in 1997 and are likely to cost only $20 p.a. We should like the whole literary community, especially the Western Australian literary community, to feel that it has an investment in Westerly. The new, smaller page format has been exceptionally well received and we would be pleased to receive any suggestions for further improvement in contents, design and distribution. It’s your magazine as well as ours.
If I Lived in Iceland You Could Call Me
An Icelandic Poet

certainly didn’t feel different. They told me I was: Father, Uncle Zawatsky and the rabbis! Grandmother said ‘Don’t tell them you’re Jewish and don’t trust the Gypsies.’ That was in England. I was six or seven. So I didn’t talk much about it until I started writing poetry. I was about twenty-eight and a poem must tell you something; must have a freeing quality or it’s no good.

In Grade One I attended a school Christmas pageant put on by the big kids. There they were: Mary, Joseph, the manger cradle and baby, the donkey too. I was terrified. I knew this shouldn’t be happening. I vividly remember my feelings — lies and guilt, incredible lies and paroxysms, yes physical paroxysms of guilt, the guilt of believing it, and I was a Jew! It was such a wonderful story. There you are — ‘give me a child until he’s seven’. I rode my bike home furiously, shaking with fear and rage. Father calmed me. I dressed up in my Red Indian suit, and shot my arrows at three wise men! I wrote a poem about that when I was fifty-four. It appeared in the Age; that was rewarding, so to a writer my childhood terror had been worth it. The experience in itself was a genesis of much philosophical and theological inquiry. Another poem appeared on the same theme, titled Religious De-struction.

Churches are public institutions set up to terrify and enslave mankind: the first line in a book titled The Age of Reason by Thomas Paine, an American radical activist of last century. I opened the book in a train between South Yarra and East Brighton, coming home from a soccer match between Melbourne High School and University High School. I went to Melbourne High; we’d won and I’d balanced the ball in a string bag up above me on the luggage rack. I was high on the win. Marijuana came much later. I was standing in an overcrowded train with my friend. “Look at this” I exclaimed, extending my hand and pointing to page one. He proffered a casual interest and got out at North Brighton. I went on to East. We were seventeen doing
Matriculation. The book had been one in a series — Everyman's Library, including H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, much fiction and 'new science' published in the thirties and forties. It belonged to my father and gave me my first written permission for rebellion, albeit in my mind. One could question the authority of God, King (George the 6th) and country. On an occasion prior to that I recall standing outside a synagogue in Marriage Rd, East Brighton on the Day of Atonement. Members of the congregation were discussing business and football, anything but a religious activity. To my youthful idealism it was sacrilegious. It was my first realisation of 'double-standards'. I used that word a lot in those years, also 'bi-attitudes'. I saw double standards everywhere. They crept out of bushes, out of the aroma of sweet little old ladies I stood up for and raised my hat to in trams and buses. Some years later reading Descartes and Zen Buddhism I stumbled upon 'duality'. It normalised my confusion. Perhaps my double-standards were a natural phenomenon of the human condition out there in the world at large. I felt more whole. Walt Whitman and the Beats came later, with the hippies, marijuana, Albert Langer, Albert Camus, Jim Cairns and Junie.

At school Isi Leibler tried to get me to join a Jewish youth group — B'Nei Akiva. He was persistent but I continually resisted. There was more than a handful of boys in third form 1949, who had come to Australia from Europe, some from D.P. camps (displaced persons). They were all in 3A, (French and German). I was in C — just French. They stuck together, too exclusively for my liking. It was their way of expressing 'fuck you Hitler, you didn't get us, now we can be who we are.' Nietzsche said 'become who you are', but his idea of essence was different. I seemed to mix equally well with all sorts at Melbourne High, whereas in England it had been intimidating being a member of a minority group, a very small one, usually just two or three (once only myself and small sister), at the many schools I attended in my parents' attempts to dodge Jerry and the V2s. After the war I remember standing in Fleet St, London (the street of newspapers and publishing houses) and viewing the deep craters, wreckage and rubble where once buildings had stood. The most difficult times at school had been walking out of the main assembly hall in order to miss 'religious instruction'. That made me different.

Although I had assimilated well in Australia my worst experience of anti-Semitism was at Melbourne High. I'd thought Owen and I were friends. Every morning we'd ridden our bikes along the Elwood canal from Glenhuntly to Gardenvale Central School. He'd told me it was illegal, but we rode precariously along those concrete tunnels, ziz-zagging cracks, dodging hunks of loose cement,
rock and stone, and trickling streams of stagnant water. Owen could handle a bike like Oppie, I always followed him. Then one day at high school he called me a bloody Jew and I started pummelling him, in the face, the throat, all along the flowery plantation and up the path to the main entrance of the school you can still see from the window of a train, if you're departing from South Yarra towards Flinders St, Melbourne. I punched his throat until his face turned red. My body shook all afternoon in class, because I had been merciless in my attack and had wanted to kill him. My conscience told me I shouldn't have. The next day I pondered over what a conscience was, I was that kind of boy, but I had been betrayed by my first Australian friend, due perhaps to what someone had told him about Jews. I don't believe Owen was acquainted with any others.

The Australian Jewish writing/experience? Ron Shapiro editor, what do you mean? Do you mean Oz/Hungarian/Jewish ..... Oz/Polish/Jewish ..... Oz/Russian/Jewish ..... Oz/Litvak/Jewish? “For you I will be a ghetto jew ..... an apostate jew ..... a Broadway jew ..... a Dachau jew ..... with twisted limbs and bloated pain no mind can understand .....” Leonard Cohen said that, and Bob Dylan, “ ..... where black is the colour and none is the number ..... I heard the song of a poet who died in a gutter ..... I met one man who was wounded in love ..... I met another man who was wounded in hatred ..... it's a hard rain's gonna fall!” Or do you mean persecution writing? The Vietnamese, South Koreans, Palestinians, and the Irish have also spoken. Is the Jew the archetypal persecutee? Does he want to be? Is Judith Rodriguez a Jewish writer? She writes sparsely on Jewish themes but her mother was a Jew. If I wrote about a clown in Wirth’s Circus without explaining that he escaped the Nazi atrocity in wartime Paris “and look at him isn't he marvellous entertaining the children!” is that Jewish writing? What if I could write it in Yiddish? Is Max Bruch’s Kol Nidrei, Jewish music? Lily Brett indulges continually in her holocaust stories and poems (second generation ..... the guilt of the children). Her sister Doris is a poet with a much wider vision. Arnold Zable’s Jewels and Ashes rises phoenix-like above the burning embers and presents a cosmic view. Alex Skovron writes witty and erudite Polish Corridor poems.

I am DNA aware that I am DNA wondering and writing about the mystery. The sequence of base molecules which form my DNA varies from yours. Such a rich heritage of random mutation and amazing cock-ups over four billion years, has thanks very much produced my somewhat selfish genes to allow all this to be said. If I wrote about the magpie and the crow both attempting ascendancy to the top branch of the pine tree outside my window in Seaford, is it Jewish writing because
my parents were Jews, because I've known what it's like on the second or third branch down? If I lived in Caulfield would it be more categorical? Are blackbirds different in Tel Aviv and Melbourne? Socrates asked philosophical questions which dumbfounded lesser minds. Am I dumbfounding you? Do you have a greater mind? What is that? I'm more Lenny Brucean than Socratic. Sorry ..... no not so sorry!

I don't live in Jewland. If I lived in Iceland you could call me an Icelandic poet. This is all about identity isn't it? Do you know, Demidenko spelt backward reads OK.NED.IM.ED? One of her reviewers pointed that out. Do you know that if you're an anti-Semite, by definition you're anti-Arab. They're Semites. All that sibling rivalry still going on. Weren't Isaac and Ishmael both sons of old Abraham? Would you sacrifice your Isaac to Jehovah? What has this got to do with my Australian Jewish/writing? Quite a lot. But I still say I just happened to be Jewish.

My writing experience goes back to just before La Mama in 1968, the counter-culture theatre in Carlton that blooded me into poetry. Nation Review was a good rave in those days. They used one of my poems. Call me a Jewish writer if you like. I'm not that perturbed. No, it's not that nothing matters any more, though I confess to nihilism, but culture and history are circumstantial: who had the fertile land ..... the fairest Queen ..... who invaded them ..... who invented the crossbow ..... what the priest said ..... what Paul said about Jesus ..... who believed him ..... what Sartre said. My blue-eyed blond-haired paternal grandmother was perhaps a descendant of the Chazars; there were large conversions to Judaism several hundred years ago. Chazaria was an empire somewhere near Bulgaria; sorry to be so vague, you see I'm not an academic. I'll look it up later.

Some of us outsiders at La Mama became Steppenwolves, writing our cryptic poems, playing our glass bead games, throwing the dice of the poetic metaphor. Some really thought they were shamans, or the new messiahs with a Tarot pack, particularly if they were on LSD. It was dangerous; my life was taking me down avenues and back-alleys that distressed my close family and friends. Some said it was the marijuana. I had to write; it had to be experiential. There was a sly-grog joint in a back alley of Carlton, after 10 o'clock closing. There was a Lebanese restaurant in Sydney Rd Brunswick where Barry Dickins and I started to stoush. There was Frank Kellaway's in Amess St Carlton, where Barry Frank and I drank and talked poetry. In 1977 Barry didn't have a decent suit to get married in. He borrowed one of mine. I was managing a chemist shop in Lygon St Carlton.

My friend Myron had a lot of trouble over his name at school. They called him Moron. But he says he has a lovely name, and although Australian will always be
I lived in Iceland as a Ukrainian. Myron Lysenko once asked me if I knew the Ukrainians had killed a lot of Jews. I said yes but I knew he wouldn't kill me. Sometimes he calls me Mal Morningstar. I like that. The family name was originally Morgenstern. Sol said to me once "Why are you mixing with all those bloody Greeks?" That was in Richmond where I had a chemist shop in the sixties. It was there I met Kon, George and Dimitrius (Jim). With Kon and George I learned to like the Three Stooges on television, every Sunday after the shop, and to drink straight ouzo, then a glass of iced water and fluffy white balls of sweet stuff dropped into the glasses. Jim brought me a tape of an ABC production, a play with the theme of the last days of Socrates. Philosophy started to mean something then. Years later I met Jim with a prostitute. From the conversation I assumed he ran a massage parlour. I'm still a pharmacist, have worked in fifty-six chemist shops (I've counted) and hospitals; still doing it. But I've done over a hundred poetry readings, run poetry gigs and national poetry festivals and that's more important. In the seventies I met another Greek called Peter Ostabasidis before he became Pi O the ‘famous’ anarchist poet. He became who he was, or did he invent himself? Did his audience invent him, because they wanted a hero?

When I'm with Alex or Doris I feel a kind of 'tribal' closeness. Yes that's it! We're part of the same tribe ..... it's not the smell, it could be the humour, or perhaps the sharing of the same myth, which we know is a myth. With imagination you can envisage it disrobing and exposing something you didn't expect. Perhaps it is a transvestite myth, a transsexual. Then it re-dresses; puts on a new mask, a strange hat. But how far back can one go? Which one of the twelve tribes did we descend from, was it Gad, Benjamin or Israel? When I'm with the writer John Irving I feel distinctly English: 'Greensleeves', 'Oliver Twist', 'Know-wot-I-mean?' My first Oz poet was C.J. Dennis. 'The Sentimental Bloke'.

I remember photographs of Jews in concentration camps, particularly of a family we met in Brunswick in 1948; snaps an American soldier took on their release. I felt deep humiliation and personal insult, as some Bosnians feel now. That incident when I was thirteen, and some of the others I have mentioned kept pummelling me (the way I hit Owen) and intensified my search for answers. First and second year pharmacy were filled with philosophy books. I fared badly academically. Yevtushenko claims a Jewish identity in his poem Babi Yar. The continual media exposure of horror and manufactured violence on the TV screen and in video games de-sensitise us into a non-caring accepting world. I've written frustrating verse about it. If I'm altruistic it's the selfish gene in my sperm! It wants the human race
to go on. Sol would say I 'married out' the second time around: a shikse yet! What was I in before? I thought it was the human race.

My writing started by ruminating on the above precursors. It chewed and chewed. I was a cow chewing on a quarter moon, because the rest was blacked out. When I had the full moon, well you know what I'm going to say ..... yes, the dark side! And I think you may be saying 'hey man there's no grass on the moon — bad metaphor', and you're right, but I'm not going to change it.

So I am a man sitting in a red shirt surveying my brick carpet. I call it a brick carpet; once there was a lawn, now red bricks lay cemented neatly side to side, end to end, and it's not Arabian, will never fly away. So I sit on a blue-painted old railway-station seat. I like it more as the paint begins to fade and flake. My two dogs are old; we have a brown Burmese kitten. Sometimes the dogs start up and stand side by side at exactly the same angle. I think of birds flying in the same formation. I think of the herd, of lemmings, of Pavlov's Dog. I have a shit can and shit spade. You get used to cleaning up. It becomes familiar. You can tell which is which by the smell size and colour, but that varies with diet. I like writing about these things, they have a greater sense of reality for me now. Once I wanted to touch God and feel my roots. I can touch the rough red bricks, marvel at the scarlet bougainvillea or the blue agapanthus, smell the jasmine. Call me an existentialist. Not a problem! My essence is on the outside; Wysiwyg. But outside and inside? Ego and Id? We're playing with ideas. Ethnicity, sovereignty, land, tribe — shed blood. Do you want blood and guts, is that what you're after? Well, clone my bone!

What does the gay heroin addict think about as he taps the last drop of methadone from a disposable cup onto his tongue, and tries to conceal a pet rat under his shirt in a chemist shop in St Kilda where I do locums? He thinks about things like that, and the next fix.

My grandfather may have sat in a red shirt in Walowa Street, Warsaw. He conducted a cheder (school for religious study — no girls); his brothers were rabbis. I read in a funny novel that Jews don't know the names of flowers. Perhaps Myer Morgenstern couldn't tell a tulip from a poppy. He went to London in the twenties and became an artificial flower manufacturer. He and my Uncle Motel used felt linen and beeswax to make petals buds and leaves. Better than plastic! My father was a furrier; cut up the skins to his own patterns and designs, sewed them together, nailed them to a wooden board and wetted them with a glue-like substance. This made them stretch and stay straight. He lined the finished garment with silk or cotton. I was a clumsy nailer at the age of ten, ended up with bleeding and bruised
fingers and have had an aversion to practical things ever since, particularly carpentry: nails and hammers. But there was a poetry in turning and lathing virgin wood into an ornate mantelpiece. There is a poetry in any act of grace. You can write it.

You may define me as a writer with Jewish roots, or a writer growing out of his Jewish roots. But at sixty I should have grown into something by now; no? I can say with equanimity that I'm a jew, but I'm not really a Jew. I can't say I'm a non-practising Australian! I'm not saying I've got it all together. I'm not saying there's no shit that ought not to be got together either.

I could never vote National. My poems have appeared in Quadrant, but it's what's in the poem that's important, not the politique of the magazine. Some of my friends wouldn't submit to Quadrant. Tom the Street Poet said 'there is a truth and we are it.' Is that enough? Some of the best writing is being done by my friends right now. But I won't name them. You wouldn't even know they were Jewish, would you Hymie?
“I am a stranger and a sojourner with you”\(^1\), says the patriarch Abraham on purchasing the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, the Jews’ ‘first recorded acquisition of land’. Abraham, an alien from a city called Ur, taking this portentous yet equally tentative step towards establishing himself in Canaan, made peace with his neighbours but was never entirely at home with them and even today his descendants find their settlement more than problematic.

In his magnificent history, Paul Johnson, a Gentile, pinpoints in Abraham’s utterance ‘the ambiguities and anxieties’ of our race. Johnson says, specifically, ‘race’, but that as well is arguable, since according to halakah, or Jewish law, Jewishness is matrilineal, and having a Jewish father does not make you a Jew, though this too is contested outside the orthodoxy. But whoever and whatever we are, we have lived long and wide. Jews have been around for nearly four millennia but Israel, the Jewish state, is only four-fifths Jewish and less than a third of the world’s Jews live within its borders, maintaining a Diaspora which began in 70 AD. There have been Indian Jews, Chinese Jews, Iraqi Jews, Persian Jews, Brazilian Jews, New Zealand Jews. We have made lives for ourselves in the wastes of Siberia, on the Argentinian pampas, on Louisiana’s bayous. As a people on the move we have, not surprisingly, been drawn to frontiers. Contrary to the usual stereotype, we have not been particularly urban — Jews often settled as pioneers, in the American west as in the remote provinces of the Russian empire, places where life could begin anew, where we could fill a niche. Wherever we have gone, wherever we have fled, wherever chance and necessity have taken us, we have faced dislike and discrimination: we were the ‘other’ within host communities, the recalcitrant

heretics. Throughout history we have been burdened with a welter of stereotypes — most poignantly perhaps with the image of the bent Ahaseurus, the wandering Jew.

My own history, in its way, is a rendition in miniature on this theme. In four generations my family has settled in four different continents; I have lived in two. Like most migrants, each family member has retained something of the place where she or he has sojourned. America, my birth country, and the country where I spent my formative years, did much to fashion me. Australia is where I have lived the longest and Australia is my home, but there is the residue of those earlier years, parts which are irredeemably un-Australian. As far as my Jewishness is concerned, it was Los Angeles that made me most conscious of it, because it was there that negative feelings associated with it first emerged.

Growing up in Los Angeles in the forties and fifties was liable to make you antisemitic, even if you were a Jew. One of the most pernicious consequences of racism is that the victims of it come to believe the slanders perpetrated against them. You begin to hate yourself, and others who share your stigma. The Los Angeles of my childhood and teen years was a city divided between Gentile and Jew. Jews had gained prominence through the entertainment industry, the Gentiles had agricultural money and ran the oil and aircraft industries. The old Los Angeleno families on the social register ran the city, and loathed the parvenu Jews. None of their clubs were open to us, there were certain suburbs where we couldn't buy property, certain schools we weren't allowed to attend.

The Jews in the entertainment industry were especially prone to self-hatred. It was the start of the Cold War. Jews were suspect: the Russians, once our allies, were now America's enemy; the Russians were communists, and a number of communists, though certainly not the majority, were Jews — as the Rosenbergs were Jews. So the Jews who ran the movie studios and the broadcasting networks bent over backwards to prove that they were apple-pie and squeaky clean, one hundred nine percent American.

We all know about the testimonies to the House Un-American Activities Committee, purging the industry of those accused of being communists, but it went further. Not every studio head in Hollywood was Jewish, but there were enough to make those that were worried. These men, whose reactionary policies encouraged the work of the Committee, spread a whitewash across the industry. 'Sensitive' topics were no longer to be subjects for the movies, which henceforth would be
restricted as much as possible to 'entertainment'. With the exception of one 'message' film — *Gentleman's Agreement*, dealing with American antisemiticism and released just before the onrush of the anticommunist hysteria — the Jew disappeared. Actors changed their names: Bernard Schwartz became Tony Curtis, Issur Danielovitch became Kirk Douglas and, most incredibly, Rosetta Jacobs emerged as Piper Laurie. The rhinoplasty, an operation to reduce the size of a Semitic proboscis to a petite, retousse, 'Gentile' nose, became almost *de rigeur*. In spite of the fact that a woman named Bess Myerson was once Miss America, if you entered a beauty contest in the fifties your chances were significantly limited if your looks were 'too Jewish'.

All this occurred in the shadow of the Holocaust. Indeed, it could be seen as one response to the shock of the Holocaust. The overwhelming message was that it was not a good thing to be a Jew. Antisemitism in America preceded the Nazis, preceded the concentration camps and the ovens; what compounded the shock was that it persisted in their aftermath. To realise that was to realise the depth of the hatred, and made cowards of many who might not otherwise have been so. As well as self-loathing, there was another legacy: a kind of fascination with the enemy, the goy, the Gentile; a desire to fathom his cruelty, tinged with the hope of acceptance.

This was the climate I grew up in. Being Jewish was not exotic, nor was it funny, nor was it respected; it was a problem. A next-door neighbour refused to have her son play with 'a dirty Jew'. One of my best friends in high school broke down and cried the summer before we went on to university because she felt she couldn't have a Jewish friend there. Two other close friends, Jews and excellent students, missed out on the quota at Stanford. Jews and Gentiles alike were discouraged from intermarrying. Even families that tolerated Jewish-Gentile romances in high school no longer did so after graduation.

Naturally, I rebelled. In my second year at UCLA I fell in love with an Australian and soon after we got married. Like most Americans, I knew little about the country he came from except for the athletes — the wonderful Ken Rosewall and Lew Hoad. I used to joke that for all I knew Australia was a giant tennis court, dotted with an occasional city. But I knew about the White Australia policy, imagined that it applied to Jews, and assumed that I was only allowed to enter the country because I had married an Australian. After I had lived here a while I saw how mistaken I had been, and one result of my moving here was that I stopped

thinking about being Jewish, something I never stopped thinking about when I was growing up in Los Angeles.

If there was antisemitism here I was unaware of it. Australians seemed so much more tolerant and easy-going than Americans. It was only later that I learned about the restrictions placed on Jewish migration between the wars, and thus Australia's complicity, along with America's, Canada's and Britain's, in the Nazi 'solution'. This was around the time I was beginning to address the fact of my Jewishness again. For many years other causes, seemingly more worthy — women, Aborigines, migrants, workers — took my attention. Yet if by coming here it was my Jewishness that I'd escaped, I somehow knew that sooner or later it was this Jewishness I had to face.

I began in the 1970s, reluctantly, by reading the book *The Survivor* by Terrence des Pres, the first thorough account of the Holocaust experience to come my way. In it I read of the Jewish trajectory from home to ghetto to camp and, in the sad majority of cases, extermination. I gained two important insights from the book: one was an understanding of how life in the ghettos depleted the will and energy of the people who were crowded there; the other was a comprehension, woefully incomplete, of how increasingly towards the end of that trajectory, the Nazis used filth in an attempt to finally dehumanise their victims. I had grown up believing that Jews were led unprotesting to their slaughter, and that this passivity was therefore something inherent in Jewish nature, that we were cowards who could be duped without resisting, with promises of vacations and showers, but des Pres' account of ghetto life awakened me to the fact that the war the Nazis waged against Jews was first (if not foremost) a war of attrition. Years of accelerating restrictions, gross overcrowding and disease, combined with slave labour conducted on a starvation diet, did an excellent job of wearing people down, even before the ordeal of the transports and the camps.

Des Pres described in detail the lack of sanitation that dogged them throughout, on the packed trains in which they were forced to stand in their own and others' excreta, and then in the camps, where urine and faeces and the absence of washing facilities were the norm of what was left of daily life. Des Pres argued that this was deliberate policy on the part of Nazis and the SS, to inculcate the worst possible shame in their Jewish captives.

I read this at a time when the Left here in Australia was vehemently anti-Israel, a stance which often degenerated into a barely disguised antisemitism. I was part of the Australian government delegation to the 1975 UN Conference for International Women's Year in Mexico City, at which Zionism was condemned as a form of racism. That year, for the first time, Australia abstained from voting on this motion, enabling with similar abstentions the affirmative to prevail. It was a difficult moment. Like many Jews within and outside Israel I had been critical of official Israeli policy, but it was frightening nonetheless to see the hatred for Israel gain strength as it did, with its antisemitic overtones and the lack of any acknowledgement or understanding of the historical, political or sociological complexities impacting on the Middle East.

I continued reading about the Holocaust, and many other facets of Jewish history and experience, yet it took me the better part of a decade to realise that I too needed to write about being Jewish. But then there was the problem of what to say. By coming to Australia I had removed myself from my family of origin, who were in any case mostly non-observant Jews. I had been the grandchild, not the child, of immigrants. None of my immediate family, or any family member that I knew about, had been caught in the Holocaust. We had all dispersed by the early part of the century — to America, to Argentina, to Palestine. We had been the lucky ones, yet being Jewish had marked us nonetheless. In ways that I found difficult to fathom, I still had deep scars but also a tenacious pride.

Gradually, ineluctably perhaps, two aspects of these confused emotions emerged, totally inconsistent with each other and perhaps irreconcilable, but it was these two things that I came to want to write about. The first had to do with my abiding interest in politics. I wanted to examine several key political movements of the century, movements in which, because of our peculiar history, Jewish people were closely involved. There was socialism, in which, again, we played a prominent if not numerically significant part; feminism, in which we were similarly but problematically engaged; and Zionism, which, as only could be expected, was almost totally Jewish. All three of these movements had their influence on my life (most particularly through the contradictions between them), but it occurred to me that they coalesced more dramatically in the figure of a certain unmarried great aunt whom I never knew but had been, by turns, a Zionist and a Bolshevik. Stimulated by her story, I started research for a book about her, one on which I am still working now. But through my readings I had also been drawn to another side of Judaism, the lesser known one of the Kabbalah, the Jewish stream of mysticism that has
mingled with other, messianic streams over the centuries, but has managed nonetheless to remain apart from them and, dare I say, above them. Out of this impulse grew my novel *Sapphires*, which is constructed according to certain Kabbalistic principles and taps into what had become burgeoning mystical apprehension of my own.

Very little of this, I imagine, comes across to *Sapphires*’ readers. A book of fiction is not a didactic exercise, but works on many levels. *Sapphires* can be seen as a collection of linked short stories, or a novel (since the fragmentation of the narrative is in fact one of the book’s major themes); it can be taken as a Jewish family saga, stretching over four generations; and can also be read as a book about Jewish women — that is, a feminist challenge to the overwhelmingly patriarchal character of the dominant Judaic culture. It is as well a book about stories, and the role that they play in human life. In addition to the Kabbalah I drew on the rich tradition of Jewish storytelling, in particular on those Yiddish writers who flourished at the turn of the century, and then on their successors. My debt to such authors as Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Moicher Sforim, I.L. Peretz, Grace Paley or Isaac Bashevis Singer was enormous.

I was aware, indeed at times afraid, that all I was doing was trying to repeat what they had so movingly expressed, but then I realised that originality in literature is not a question of subject matter but of the writer’s own voice, and that in drawing from my predecessors I was in fact finding mine. What was distinctive about my vision was all the different people and places that went into shaping it, and the corresponding insight that the strongest links are often the most elastic. In this sense, *Sapphires* is most profoundly a Jewish book — Evelyn, the narrator, is ‘a sojourner and stranger’, just as I at times and every other Jew I’ve known have felt ourselves to be.

*Sapphires* was published in 1994, the same year as *The Hand That Signed the Paper*, and, while well received, was generally overlooked in the prize-giving stakes that honoured Helen Demidenko. Named ACT Book of the Year, it was short-listed for the Talking Book of the Year Award, the Steele Rudd Award, and was among the Australian contenders for the IMPAC Dublin Prize, but apart from the latter it was not in the running for any of the highly prestigious or remunerative awards. If prizes were really a matter of merit, I would leave it at that, and take it as read that

---

my book about Jewish women was not as good a book as Demidenko's. But books, like any works of art, appeal to subjectivities; there is no such thing as objective evaluation (and who, in the last analysis, would cavil at that?). The question to ask, then, is why the Demidenko book appealed so strongly to so many sensibilities.

One can hardly discuss the Demidenko affair without referring to Robert Manne's masterly book on the subject,⁷ and there isn't much to add to what he has said, that to ignore, as Demidenko did, the long history of European antisemitism in depicting Ukrainian participation in the Nazi extermination is, in its way, "a form of Holocaust denial". Yet certain responses to Sapphires have led me to think that the issues may be even more deep-seated and complicated than Manne himself supposes. It was frequently suggested that the earlier chapters, or stories, about tsarist oppression and migration, were more 'moving' or 'poignant' than the later ones. Because the chapters are more or less chronological, what seems to be the message here is that it was easier for these readers at least to respond at a remove to the trials Jews endured last century than to grapple with what it means to be a Jew today. It is as though the problems are taken to be resolved, that antisemitism is a thing of the past; that there is no disadvantage now in being Jewish. And somehow this response is on a par with the wistful admiration, or envy, many people express about the 'warmth' of Jewish families, as though family life among Jews is not subjected to the same strains and tensions that other modern families experience. Writers have even told me that I was 'lucky' to have these stories and this tradition to draw upon. Part of me agrees, but another is dismayed by a reaction that tends to overlook or discount the dark side of our history.

While Sapphires is about nothing if it is not about the Diaspora, this is another aspect of Jewish experience which seems at times to be robbed of its meaning. Indeed, 'diaspora' is a fashionable academic term these days, but it is hardly ever used now in relation to Jews. We hear about the Indian diaspora, the African diaspora. An advertisement in the August 8 issue of the New York Review of Books calls for applications for visiting fellowships for the Humanities Research Centre at ANU on the 1998 theme of 'Home and Away: Journeys, Migrations, Diasporas'. The four conferences scheduled are 'Black Diasporas'; 'Romanticism and the Asia-Pacific'; 'Scatterlings of Empire: Anglo-Celtic Migrations of the Pacific Rim' and 'Ireland and Australia, 1798-1998' — but there's not a mention of Jews. The irony

---

of advertising this omission in a New York journal seems to be lost on the organisers.

And how are we to react to recent proposals to lift the ban on a visit to Australia by the Holocaust-denying historian David Irving? I believe that as a matter of free speech he should be allowed to come, but I'm also aware that freedom of speech will most certainly be curtailed as a result. The Demidenko controversy revealed all the inadequacies of our current political culture: the generally shallow historical consciousness on the part of our literary practitioners, the consequence perhaps of over-specialisation; the similarly shallow debate in the media, the consequence perhaps of the valorisation of 'opinion' over learning; the confusion, deliberate or otherwise, between attempts to raise awareness about the sensitivities of minority groups — so-called 'political correctness' — and the thought police of totalitarian regimes. In such a context 'freedom of speech' becomes less a value than an obfuscation, and we are back to the fundamental issue of who in fact gets heard.

The problem for Jews at the moment is the widely-held perception that we have been heard, and now is the time for others to have a voice. Surely this was the appeal of The Hand That Signed the Paper, when it was believed to be the voice of a young woman of Ukrainian origin attempting to come to grips with her heritage. (That it was a betrayal of that voice is, I believe, one of the strongest reasons for condemning the book.) The cultural expression of diverse experiences and sensibilities is a positive goal, but much that has happened recently leaves me with the uneasy suspicion that the specifically Jewish experience is perhaps less understood than ever. As Paul Johnson observes, Jews are seen "as a race which had ruled itself in antiquity and set down its records in the Bible; then had gone underground for many centuries; had emerged at last only to be slaughtered by the Nazis; and, finally, had created a state of its own, controversial and beleaguered".

The relatively high profile of Jews in the English language media, publishing and the entertainment industries has not led to a general understanding of either the longevity or tenaciousness of antisemitism. This might seem surprising, but throughout Jewish history there has been a reluctance to make the facts known for fear of making matters worse. We touch upon these issues gingerly, or laugh at them with a notoriously mordant wit. Reflecting, as I often do, on the farce of Demidenko, I have begun to think again of that Hollywood of my teens, where all mention of the widespread discrimination against Jews was dropped, but where a
play about anti-Jewish discrimination could be turned into a movie (Home of the Brave) about Jim Crow segregation, and I remember that Jewish self-loathing which allowed so many of us to support any cause except our own. Nearly fifty years later there is a willingness and, more, an eagerness, to take on aspects of Jewish culture, without even realising where they come from, that they are indeed aspects of Jewish culture. Other minorities speak of their diasporas, an experience now recognised as emblematic of modernity. People eat bagels, watch Seinfeld; they tell each other to 'enjoy'. This is a marvellous development, so why does it make me uneasy? I suppose because history is all too liable to be repeated when there is so much interest in assimilating, rather than comprehending the past.

Arnold Zable

Reflections of a Wandering Jew

It has always been a part of me, so it seems, the notion of the Wandering Jew. I have always been attracted to it. It had about it a feeling of romance, of mystery, of adventure. To be a Wandering Jew was to be a gypsy. This is how I liked to imagine it as a child. I was a descendant of gypsies, of wanderers, of travellers from distant lands.

Where did this madness stem from? Perhaps it was a mother's song. A Yiddish song. Sung by the cradle. It was not only the haunting melody that enchanted me, but the words of the poet Yitzhak Manger, a romantic who could hardly contain his intoxication when he contemplated this mysterious journey we call life:

Play gypsy, play me a song,
On the fiddle all night long.
On the fiddle, green leaves fall,
What once was is beyond recall.
What once was, will be in time,
Red is blood, and red is wine.
A star falls, then another,
As our hearts reach for each other.

Perhaps it was my father. While mother loved the nigun, the melody, father loved the word, the poem. Yiddish poems. He would recite them, by heart, poems of dreamers, poems of intense longing, poems thirsting for the unknown:

Somewhere distant, far distant,
Lies the forbidden land.
Silver-blue glow its mountains,
Untouched by mortal hand.
Or perhaps it was the tale I had heard about the wandering Yiddish writer, Melech Ravitz. Both mother and father revered him, for different reasons. My mother, because he had helped her find refuge, and shown her kindness at a difficult and lonely time in her life. Father, because of his ideas, his poetry, his outlook. And I, because he was a wanderer.

I was entranced by his travel writings. He had journeyed the oceans and continents of the world. He had embraced each one in turn, and had responded with Yiddish poems which were published in the literary journals of the Old World. I have often imagined his arrival, in the New World, the great Southern Continent, in 1933, standing aboard the French boat the Ville d'Amien as it steamed through Port Phillip Bay. He stared towards the pier where, coming into focus now, was a sizeable crowd of people. They were waiting for him.

“A Yiddish poet is about to arrive in Melbourne.” This was the thought uppermost in the minds of those who waited. A good proportion of the fledgling Yiddish-speaking community of Melbourne had assembled to welcome their esteemed guest. This was an event to be savoured. A Yiddish poet was about to land on these until recently alien shores. From the Old World he had sailed, as they too had once sailed. He was the bearer of news, of greetings from their loved ones, and of a vision etched in words.

This is what they craved more than anything else, those assembled upon the wharf. Words, with the familiar lilt of the ‘old country’ which was fast becoming a receding fantasy. Words that were imbued with intimacy and the scent of wild conifers. Words that radiated the ethereal glow of a silver birch under an autumn sun.

As the Ville d'Amien approached the wharf, most in the assembled crowd did not reflect upon the fact that indeed, they were standing under an autumn sun of a different kind, and that instead of silver birches, there could be seen, on stretches of coastline not so far from the wharves, the ghostly greys of eucalypts, the muted greens and blues of the Southern Continent.

The Yiddish poet, however, as he leaned on the rails of the Ville d'Amien, saw it and was transfixed. The world about him on this autumn morning was fresh, and new. It had about it a raw beauty which he found intoxicating.

He had been intoxicated for days now, ever since the passengers had first sighted land. As they approached the coast of the mainland there had loomed a fiery streak of beaches, naked before an ocean which pounded them with an unabated slow fury.
And on the night of the first sighting, the poet had made an astonishing discovery. Rising above him was a new moon, within a sky on fire with constellations he had never seen with such clarity. And this crescent of a moon, dwarfed by the enormity of the southern heavens, hung upside down, in a reverse crescent to the moons he had seen in the Old World. He was, after all, not a scientist, but a poet, and a Yiddish poet at that.

Melech Ravitz was the archetypal Wandering Jew. He moved on from Melbourne, on a journey to outback Australia. He travelled through the red centre in the cabin of a mail truck, sporting a bow tie, a pipe clinging to his lips, always observing, reflecting, seeing through to the essence of things. He noted the troubled eyes of outback Aborigines, and he could see in them a familiar look, the stare of the outsider, of the outcast, of a people estranged in their own land. He wrote moving poems about their plight. He could see, also, their ability to travel light. They too were eternal travellers, forever on the move, driven by necessity, hunting and foraging for survival. And Melech Ravitz could see all this because he was a Wandering Jew.

The Wandering Jew is a migrating bird. An exile. In search of a haven, a place of refuge. The dust of many lands clings to his shoes. The images of many landscapes thread through his dreams. The languages of many nations fly from his tongue. The ideas of many thinkers flood his mind. And always, there is a receding horizon, beckoning, calling, luring him with unheard-of riches, with unrealised dreams. His mind is heavy with untold stories and schemes. He carries his meagre belongings in the scarf his mother gave him when he set out on his journeys, so long ago that it has become a confused memory. Except for the look in his mother's eyes when she said goodbye. That will forever haunt him. That will go with him to the grave.

And the mother knows it. Perhaps all mothers know it, that there must come a time when the child sets off, to make its own life. So the mother sings, by the cradle, the lament and hope of all parents:

Beneath my little one's cradle
Stands a clear white goat.
The goat set off to trade
In raisins and almonds.
There will come a time, my child,
When you will journey far and wide.
Remember this song I sing today
As you travel on your way.
Raisins and almonds are laden with spice,
You will trade in merchandise.
This is what my child will do,
Sleep my child, lue-lue-lue.

So the child sets out. Often enough through necessity, clinging to the hands of its loved ones, as they flee, yet again, from a marauding army, from an enraged mob, from an endless poverty, from a relentless hatred, from those who despise difference, in search of New Worlds. And they remain wanderers, for months, perhaps years on end, languishing in Displaced Persons camps, in temporary havens, in no man’s land, caught between closely guarded borders, between past and future, in limbo, waiting for a chance to rebuild their shattered lives, waiting for the papers that could return them a sense of identity. Endlessly waiting.

And there are those, also, who wander through choice. Or was it as simple as that? Was it choice that drove me to take to the road? Was it mere curiosity? Or was it the curse and blessing of my forebears, the call of my ancestry, the siren’s song of generations of wanderers, that drew me out, inspite of myself, in search of that endlessly receding horizon.

I set out at an early age, driven by a thirst to know, to see with my own eyes. I embarked on many journeys — from ancient villages in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea, to the streets of New York, from a remote town in south-west China, to the old quarters of New Orleans, from the white beaches of the Trobriand islands, to journeys across a continent my elders called the Old World.

It was on one of my European journeys that I first met with gypsies. We worked side by side, in the grape fields of southern France, near the town of Villefranche, Beaujolais country, in the autumn of 1973. At night I sometimes accompanied them to their camp.

Horses grazed beside a circle of wagons. Families sat around lanterns. The sound of talk rose like a gentle mist. The lights of a nearby village glowed with a seductive yet elusive warmth. And I could see it, clearly, both the freedom and the price one paid for the freedom, both the romance and the affliction of the wanderer. The gypsy was an exile, struggling to live on the margins, always subject to the whims of others, always on the verge of being told to move on, always clinging to a clearing, in a field, in a forest, on the edge of fear, on the edge of the beckoning lights of yet another foreign town.
I too was driven, it seems, not so much by necessity, as by a restlessness, an unquenchable thirst for the new, for what lay beyond the next bend in the road. And as I moved, as I lived and worked in various lands, I became aware, increasingly, of the paradox that begins to confront the wanderer. At the outset of my travels it was the differences between cultures that excited me, as too did the differences between landscapes, between mountain and sea, between desert and valley, between village and city. Yet the more I travelled, the more apparent it became that the similarities were far more potent than the differences. In matters of love and hate, of envy and grief, in the emotions of sadness and joy, of anger and elation, of grief and momentary triumph, we are united by a common potential, a common humanity.

It was a journey to Mount Sinai, a journey to the Mountain of God as it has been called, that highlighted this paradox. In January 1988, I made my way south, from Jerusalem, by bus across the Negev to the port city of Eilat, on the shores of the Red Sea.

It was soon after I had crossed over the Israeli-Egyptian border, as I waited under a blazing sun for the bus that was to take me to my destination, that I first heard the Arabic words: "Shweya! Shweya! Slowly. Slowly. Do not hurry. Haste is from the devil!" It was a Bedouin tribesman, standing beside me at the bus stop, who, on noticing my impatience, had offered me these words of advice.

And in the desert, it is clear, there is no other way. Nature dictates the rhythms of movement. The harshness of the terrain, its austere beauty, its sheer vastness, the fierce extremes of hot and cold reduced my impatience to humility. Stark outlines of bare granite leapt skywards into jagged pinnacles under a ferocious sun. Transparent skies vaulted out into a vast dome that hinted at a time beyond time, a space beyond space. And all the while, as I moved on, there echoed the cool words of the Bedouin: "Shweya. Shweya. Slowly. Slowly. Haste is from the devil."

Mid afternoon I alighted at the monastery of Saint Catherine. The monastery was once a desert fortress, built upon the exact site, so it is claimed, where Moses saw the "bush that burned and would not be consumed." Thick walls and towers enclosed a cathedral, paved alleys, monks' quarters, and a library of rare manuscripts. Olive and cypress trees, orchards of figs and citrus, plots of vegetable and groves of almonds flourished, as if defying the harsh surroundings. A precious blend of simplicity and abundance, prosperity and austerity, could be sensed as soon as the traveller entered into the monastery grounds.

At three the following morning, in the pre-dawn darkness, I left my room in the monastery hostel and set out along the path that led towards the slopes of the
mountain. Both behind and in front of me trekked a procession of pilgrims, in a trail of flickering lights. Some walked alone, others in small groups; some rode on camels led by Bedouin guides, others made their way by the faint glow cast by their torches and lamps. And all of us were drawn by the same goal, to arrive at the summit in time for sunrise.

Several hours later we stood, perhaps seventy of us, at the peak, or rather, we huddled against the walls of a chapel to shield ourselves from the bitter cold. The crimson dome of a sun emerged to unveil a landscape of mountain ranges. Peak after mountain peak was set alight. The flames descended, coating the slopes with gold, penetrating crevices and ravines until, by mid-morning, even the valleys were on fire.

Towards noon, having returned to the monastery, several of us were invited to a gathering of Bedouins and monks. We were served cups of coffee and glasses of wine, slices of cheese and chocolate. The monks sat beside us, chatting quietly, intermittently, until we lapsed into silence. Streaks of sunlight filtered into the courtyards and in that moment I could understand why some choose to spend their lives here, in this forbidding landscape, which demands, above all, simplicity and work, prayer and silence. And in return, they have received moments such as this, moments of total serenity.

On the final morning I awoke with a sense of restlessness, a feeling that somehow my journey was incomplete, that something had eluded me. I was to catch a bus in the afternoon, so I decided to go for one last walk. I followed the path toward Mount Sinai. I veered off on a tangent and began climbing one of the hills that rise from the lower slopes. There was no one in sight. I could hear the sound of my footsteps as I ascended, the quickening beat of my heart as I pushed myself up a steep, rock-strewn incline. "Shweya. Shweya. Haste is from the devil." All my thoughts were reduced to just this one thought, "Haste is from the devil."

The air was laced with a freshness that cooled the lungs. My movements seemed to become effortless, in harmony with my breath. Slowly. Steadily. Patiently. And in no time, I stood on the summit. A new moon hovered in the mid-morning skies, crescent shaped over a whitewashed chapel. Above me towered the peaks of Mount Sinai and Mount Catherine.

And it could be heard. Pure silence. Utter silence. Perfect silence. There was not the faintest trace of breeze — only warmth, clear skies and a blessed silence. In that silence there was a sense of oneness, a feeling of harmony. In that silence there dwelt unlimited freedom. In that silence all the labels by which I had travelled through life
were stripped back, to the essentials, to pure being. It transcended the ideas that govern our lives, our separateness, our separate nations, our separate creeds. It conveyed me back to the pure oneness with which we enter and depart from life. All of us. And in that moment I recalled a phrase that had once caught my eye: “Silence is the language of God.”

I remained by the chapel for as long as possible. I did not want to let go of the experience. I wanted to absorb the nuances of this subtle language. I wanted to savour the stillness. But I had a timetable to follow, a life to return to. Reluctantly I descended to the monastery. I retrieved my belongings and set out for the long walk to the village from which I was to catch the bus.

Just as I reached the outskirts I heard the chant of the muezzin, calling the villagers to afternoon prayer. The resonant voice flowed from a minaret, and evaporated into silence. And it seemed obvious. There are no differences within this silence. The desert is a great leveller. All differences are reduced to a common impulse, to a longing for a higher truth, for a deeper experience, for that same elusive sense of oneness. The prayer, the chant, the song of longing, are universal, driven by the same desire. The language, the costume, the form of ritual may differ, but the goal is the same.

This is the paradox of the wanderer. He starts off with concepts, with loyalties, with allegiances of one sort or another. But in the course of the journey, in the course of his wanderings, all is stripped away, shweya, shweya, slowly, slowly, back to pure being, beyond all our posturing, beyond our tribal conditioning, beyond our endless warring, to a resounding silence...
My Grandmother's Chair

I'm not sitting in her chair
her chair
with the blue roses
where she would stare down
the waspy St Ives dusk
with her evening sherry
and two cigarettes
I'm not sitting in her chair
I'm watching it
warily
as it sits on the grubby carpet
of my Melbourne flat
bereft of my grandmother's
neat bottom
and duster
but it sits
as she would sit
slender oak legs
firmly planted apart
I'm waiting for it
to talk
to talk in her old
insistent shrill
critical to the last
to talk to her grand-daughter
guarded provocatively
against the dusty window

talk to me, chair,

not about germs
or dirt
not about nature strips
or even roses

talk about the dead and buried

those semitic
unchristian family faces
worming through her
composting in me.
Seventeen Versions of Jewishness

One
Seventeen? What's this seventeen? All of a sudden it's seventeen. He dreams up suddenly seventeen. Who had seventeen? We never had seventeen. He wants seventeen. Listen to him, seventeen. A head full with seventeen. I'll give you seventeen. I'll give you your ears will ring seventeen. I'll give you you won't sit down for a week seventeen. I'll give you in a minute you won't forget it in a hurry believe you me such a seventeen. Drop dead, seventeen. A darkness may it descend upon you, you and your seventeen. Go push up daisies, seventeen. You can eat it, this seventeen? Make from it an honest living, this seventeen? A family, shoes, bread on the table, a decent holiday you wouldn't be ashamed to be seen there once a year if that's not asking too much, your seventeen? Get away from me with your seventeen. Don't touch me with your seventeen. Get out of my house with your seventeen. Who needs to hear it, your seventeen? A junk, your seventeen. A rubbish, your seventeen. A bad smell and worse than a bad smell, seventeen, seventeen. I don't want to hear it, your seventeen. I don't need to hear it, your seventeen. I don't want to hear it another single time, not today and not tomorrow and if not even ever again that will be soon enough for me, go away, get out of here, it's finished and enough, you and your seventeen.

You need it for school?

Two
My mother takes me to the doctor. I play him the Bruck No. 1 in G, the Mozart No. 2 in D, a movement, a piece Mendelssohn, Bartok, a touch Brahms, a little Rimsky, naturally some Bach, finally two choruses (my own arrangement) The Battle Hymn of the Republic, a wind-up Irish jig.
A genius, says the doctor.  
My mother falls to her knees as though shot, her face a sheet of tears.

Three

Deleted.

Four
The diningroom table was mebel, furniture, gleaming, polished, important, for best, on top in each corner a small round rubber, black, flat, making a space for my mother's handworked white doily in a pattern of multiplication like the magnification you see in snow to lie under the glass above undisturbed and untouched, an additional doily or sometimes a proper full tablecloth flung over them both on an occasion of specialness or certain guests.

I'm not talking about that table.
Because the table, our real table, the only table to spread a newspaper, to count money, to sharpen a knife, to do your homework (except it's too early for homework, I am still a child), to roll out the flour and water and egg and whatever else is in it for lockshen (the word noodles of later acquirement never completely conjuring the case), to talk, to listen, to leave in a temper, to just sit, to be, where the warmth is, where the life is, where my mother always is.

He's playing with his food! howls my hounding sister.
Eat! says my mother, not even looking.
An engineer! teaches me his sarcasm my dad.

Five
Now it's time for the teppul, the pot, not to mince words, the chamberpot, of which we have two, the second one smaller, the teppuleh, memory dividing here, maybe blue, possibly green, one or the other certainly, what's not so certain is why I'm not so sure, except if you think it's the fifty and more years then I don't even know why I'm bothering with you in the first place, you understand nothing. I'm inclining to the blue. The blue is suddenly stronger. Yes. Let's say the blue. It was blue. With the main major adult vessel a proper adult good clean surgical hospital white. Yes. Got it. With on the edges of the handle how it was made a line of black, as also where it turned over around the top, the rim. You know the type. You know the style. Unless, wait a minute, that was the one that was green. In which case, except I'm not stating definitely, maybe zaydeh had his own, it's three teppuls in the house,
versions of Jewishness

not merely just the two.
Enamel.
Tin.
When you do your business it makes a sound.
This is the night business.
The day business you do in the lavatory outside.
Where zaydeh, if you're not quick, and who can be? who can arrange such things? who can plan and plot and allow and accommodate to life's every twinge and sudden stir? which you think a psychiatrist can clear up for you forty years later on? as though it never happened? you understand nothing, never was? is already in there, with his taken in cigarettes, with his matches, with his taken in special Jewish newspaper, already wearing his glasses, you can hear the sound of the pages, the matchbox, his smoke slipping from the slotted window escaping into the yard outside.

Before or after, his daily job, was how he cleaned the teppul.
Watch.
Because he tears up grass. And not just the green and not only the roots but all the dirt inside and around as well. Which is the main part. The green is just for holding. The dirt from straight out of the garden is the real part he wants.
Tin.
Enamel.
As the little boy watches.
Who is named, if you require it all cute and nicely explained, for a first born beloved son, why he scratches, my father his uncelebrated second, how he scours, taken by cholera, scraping down to shining metal, his grandson to witness, life's foul issue, how he rids and banishes, death's endless loss.

Six
A Chinaman with vegetables (who we never bought from) you spat on the ground and ran around three times in a circle for luck.

Seven
Pending.

Eight
On the other side is a kid I go to school with I will bump into many years later a
dozen years ago bled of all ferocity working in insurance. A big brother in the army with a .22 to go rabbiting and one day a ferret, a yellow flash, out of its cage in our back yard, the brother no slower straight over the side fence. An older sister too, Dulcie, infrequently glimpsed, sort of a sort. A little brother too who’s not very smart.

A bald dad.
A yellow dog called Tiger.
Come ‘ere ya mongrel!
Firewood and chooks in their brick back yard.

A rough hessian bag will summon them up. That’s the bottle-o taking away the empties. A cooked crayfish. The bald dad with one under his arm roughly wrapped in a page of paper coming home Friday happy from the pub. The smell of their food is not the smell of our food. Fights. A shy smile from the mother in the morning ducked out for a minute on their verandah boasting a classic black eye.

It’s the beer talking, says my dad.

But when a new comic appears, where I love the drawings, the story, the style, the sophistication, the way each day it’s told, a daily strip in the morning paper we don’t get, Graham each day the day after gives it to me torn out on our way to school so I can paste it into an exercise book I have to get the money for from mum who says only the usual thing.

You need it for school?

Nine
And on our side, the other half of our rented maisonette (which my mother loathes and hates, rent, to pay rent, money wasted down the drain you’ll never see it again, that old cliche, go marry a Rothschild, mum, leave me alone) is a so nice and quiet Mr and Mrs, lovely front garden, even the path spotless, we can listen to them listening to the news on the wireless, the serial straight after during tea, the Mr so small you might imagine a jockey, she from all sides a barrel he must have required a footladder to mount, if he ever did, no children, lovely back lawn, should I describe for you the look I get from her, in the innocence of my just beginning burgeoning sexuality, I can’t take my eyes away from what I notice for the first real time she’s got there in front?

Ten
My mother stands on her feet all day in the heat and the dirt and the wind and the
cold three and a half days every week at a stall in the market, bras, panties, stockings, briefs, also a special of repaired tartan travelling rugs my father brings home mangled seconds from the factory where he works, a torment to me to go there, to stand there, to be there, to, as my mother pleads, help out, and each time to have requested of me, I can't tell you how many times, her Caravaggio, her Rembrandt, her Rubens, her Picasso, that I make her some placards, here, I've got the card for you all ready, a quickly flattened out old stockings box, make me, she implores, a sign.

Selling out cheap today! roars my father, when he remembers, equally bored.
He holds up a newspaper you shouldn't see an Italian girl there with her mother buying her first bra.
You don't need a bra you need a bandage!
Thus a Jewish boy went to school.

Eleven, Twelve, Thirteen
The uncle with the car takes us for a drive. Adults in the front, children in the back. A crush. A pleasure. An excitement. A boredom. Will I do the same to my children? Did I? Maybe it's raining. Is this the occasion when it's raining? Is this that time in the rain when we all have to get out of the car and it's my raincoat the uncle lies on to fix a puncture in the middle of the wet street? I can still show you in my mind today the very street. Six, seven of us all in the same small car. Did my father come too? Was dad there? Maybe it's even eight. And all the time my mother's eyes swinging, watching, looking, staring, and always with the same question, which is the real business of the drive after all, in awe and terror, in the heat, in the rain, studying the houses, memorizing the streets. _Menschen leben da?_ People live here? Which we all know, even us crushed kids bored in the back, certainly this one, yours truly attentive to every nuance me, she doesn't mean just people.

Let's skip some years. She's triumphed. She's bought. We've shifted. We own. A triumph of not a tealeaf ever thrown out while it still made colour into your cup. Zaydeh departed. A baby brother in his place. Skip, skip. Suddenly a policeman comes to the house. I can still see his blue uniform sitting in our kitchen. Our shining yellow cupboards. How he's taken off his cap. And the story? Well, the story is the parcels, the unbelievable parcels she manages without a second thought backwards and forwards for the market every day, all of a sudden today a tiredness, I don't know, a something, which just in time this beautiful policeman helps her
with the packages home. A cup of tea, naturally. Look at him. Have you ever seen such a sweat? And how does she repay him, my mother, a policeman, after all, in our house? My son, she says, is phoning taxis for people who don't want taxis! My son, she informs, is throwing stones on roofs so afterwards it's a flood! My son, she reveals, she blurs, she blabs, to this exhausted policeman, floored by my mother's parcels, a red nose too, I think, he says, I'm catching a cold. A cold? says my father. You don't want a cold! Here's what you need for a cold! And in five seconds flat he has put inside that poor policeman a good glass to the top of his own homemade plum wine from the dozen bottles fermenting in the washhouse, a second glass quite unnecessary, his son has been saved.

A homeowner notwithstanding, a businesswoman nevertheless, when she sews you on a button, the garment still upon your person, an instant amendment, a lightning repair, she will remind you, advise you, order you, provide you a thread of cotton to chew the while, funay nicht dem saykel, that your sense not be sewn up, your logic, your thinking, your reasoning powers, your brain, and if that isn't Old Country dirt floor peasant village voodoo black magic witchcraft, then I don't know Jewishness from zilch.

Fourteen
A boat of brides arrives in the country, my mother first up the gangplank to bring one home. Fumigated, deloused, anything of the slightest uncertainty taken immediately straight outside and burnt, she stands, calm as cattle, this bride, on a block in the kitchen, my mother in her usual whirling rush all around. Look! she cries. Examine! Take a touch! Give a feel! She taps with a silver hammer, sounding sturdiness of bone. She thumps with a broad stick, demonstrating dimension of wind. A flashlight in the mouth she shines inside too, not to find hidden a bad tooth in the back. As also the eyes, the armpits, every nook and cranny, under the breasts. A beauty! she cries. A bargain! A one in a million! Appraise the quality! Contemplate the width!

But mother, I say, I don't love her.

Love shmove! says my mother, opening for the first time the most horrendous door. You'll get used to her!

Fifteen
Alive today, which she's not, those parcels with the policeman already the first sign, gone now thirty-four years, my mother would be eighty-eight, my father, similarly
vanished, following his wife two months later exactly to the day, a fettlesome ninety-two. I go to see them.

Pidgeon Walter, says my mother, her favourite actor.
Hanging’s too good for him! says my father, pretending it’s TV, really it’s me.
My mum, never mind the eighty-eight, is, naturally, on top of a chair on top of a table, with her bucket and scrubbing brush, washing the ceiling.
My dad, at another table, except it’s also the same table, is repairing the toaster so it will never work again.
I take out to show them my latest published book.
Not now, says my mother. Later. Very nice.
My father shakes the pages to see how much money is hidden inside.
Eat! says my mother, manufacturing in a minute from out of empty cupboards a fatty soup, three kinds of fish, the rest of the chicken, a simple baked apple with jam and raisins inside, no top of the milk, because we’re eating fleischichts, on top, sit, she says, I’m making a cup of tea.
Dad, with one of his famous pocket knives where you could lose a finger in a second, a pisher like me, whittles a wooden match to pick at the table his teeth.
Feh! admonishes my mother.
Dad applauds himself with a fart.
The neighbours! slips in my outraged mother.
As though she hasn’t seen and heard and suffered and tolerated it at least ten million times.
Dad, slips in this supposedly gentle son.
Who you think, if he could, wouldn’t force one himself as well?
If he dared?
Except places, instead, as is the custom, as is our custom, as is the Jewish custom, picked up from the path lying plentiful at his feet, in proper respect and memory, on their stone a stone.

Sixteen

In extremis.

Seventeen

Seventeen? Again with the seventeen? It wasn’t enough for you the last time seventeen? I’ll show you a seventeen.
My first meeting with Chaim Kunzel was on a Saturday morning, seven years ago.

It was bitterly cold, and I was called to his home during surgery by one Eleanor Thompson, his amanuensis and one-time mistress.

The call was an urgent one, as it was feared that the ailing septuagenarian might not see out the morning.

Upon my arrival, I was at first glad to get in out of the rain, but I soon found, to my dismay, that the air inside the solid-brick bungalow was in fact colder than that outside.

I was led to the patient by the solicitous Miss Thompson, and found him spreadeagled on top of the bedcovers in the posture of one preparing to meet his Maker.

"Mr Kunzel."

The steam puffed from my mouth, and the cold of the floor penetrated the soles of my shoes.

Kunzel arose and gave up thanks to God that I had arrived.

The apparition was a striking one, for the man who now confronted me had all the appearances of a corpse.

The skin was pallid, tinged blue, pearly, with the consistency of a bar of soap. Stone cold.

Only at the edges of the eyelids had the blood managed to suffuse the tissues, so that the fleshy margins of those apertures almost burned with a fierce intensity.

All else on the person of Kunzel was dead.

Even the air that was pumped from the giant bellows of his chest had about it a coldness, a musty oldness that spoke not of the biological but, rather, of the stone wall, the yellowed document, the linoleum floor of the old and drafty public library.
And one was not at pains to inhale his breath, for he stood like a colossus and leaned forward in an attitude of perpetual supplication, so that his pinched features were never more than inches from one’s own. Yet nary a lick of steam issued from the arid coldness of his mouth.

A torrent of supplication spewed forth from the thin, blue band of his lips, for the stoma of Kunzel was never still. It cracked and chapped against itself, as the dry mucous folds adhered to and were torn apart from one another. In due course, the mouldering detritus of locution worked its way forward to form crescents of dry, white spittle clinging forever to the corners of the straining orifice. All was a bellowing, passionate hoarseness. A dryness. A fevered yet bloodless desiccation. This was Kunzel.

And with the intensity of utterance came a bulging of the eye, striving to escape its vermilion borders, held back only by a few, tiny, straining blood vessels.

The elbow bent, the shoulder hunched, the palm upturned: The archetypal attitude of the eternal Jewish supplicant, yet:
“I am no Hebrewist!” he was quick to assure me.

It was the opening gambit of the first of many monologues to which I was to bear-witness for, unbeknownst to me at the time, the bearing of witness was to become my sole function in dealing with Kunzel.

I was told of a wedding. A Jewish wedding. The wedding of his son. I was told how his son was called up to the Torah. Of the pride that swelled within the mighty breast of Kunzel. I was told how Kunzel himself was called up to the place of honour. How the father of the bride rushed forth, pointing the finger of accusation.

“Infidel! Heathen! Pagan!!” A hush fell upon the synagogue. “Kunzel shall not read from the Torah! He is a goy!!”

A great madness descended upon Kunzel, and he was seized with the passion of every Kunzel that had gone before him. The veins lifted from his neck, the arms flailed wildly, and the knuckle-white hands groped for the throat of his accuser.

This man, who had so strenuously denied the label “Hebrewist”, was incensed to the point of derangement at the accusation “Gentile!!”

At the last moment, however, he was restrained by the hand of God, whose finger reached out from the holy parchment and touched the thundering Kunzel in the centre of his prodigious chest.

Immediately, the breath was sucked from the giant bellows of his lungs, and the pain of five millenia of persecution scourched the marrow of his sternum.

In the midst of his awesome apoplexy, he fell to his knees, and had to be carried
bodily from the house of worship.

Hence the weakened state in which I now found him, for his heart still had not recovered from the massive insult it had been dealt.

“It is because of this woman.”

He referred to the venerable Miss Thompson.

“They say I have defiled myself with her,” he whispered, with the formality of an English learned from ancient texts. “It is true — we were once very close. But there is no longer anything sexual between us. I am old. You see how I am laid low with my illness. I can no longer partake of sex. But she has been a good friend.” He leaned closer, his eyes bulging yet further with intimations of conspiracy. “Though even she, I fear, has now turned against me!”

The man’s instinct was unerring. Not ten minutes earlier, on my way into the bedroom, the redoubtable Miss Thompson had taken me aside and, in hushed and reverent tones, warned me of the pharmacological profligacy of Kunzel. It seemed that he knew not how to look after himself, and chose to ignore the advice of physician and friend alike.

He coupled, it seemed, an inveterate hypochondria with a total dereliction of patient compliance. Added to this was a morbid mistrust of all things ingestible, rendering the combination potentially lethal both to patient and doctor.

Miss Thompson was not mistaken.

No sooner had I been made privy to the wanton virulence of his in-laws than there rose to the heavens a litany of lamentation. For it appeared that every fibre of Kunzel’s being was prone to the most agonizing dysfunction.

Every vein from the neck down was thrombosed, every joint swollen and painful, every muscle tortured and tender, every nerve searing and lancinating, and every vein, joint, muscle and nerve saturated with the morbid syrup of his sickened blood.

This was the blood of his ancestors. A thick, Jewish broth made up, in equal parts, of sugar and cholesterol. For Kunzel worshipped daily at the altar of Diabetes Mellitus.

His prayers, however, were hollow, for he pricked no finger, drew no blood, observed no dietary restriction. Yet he feared the terrible vengeance of this sugary god, and wept pitifully lest his soul be submerged in the shameful syrup of dietary neglect.

“The diabetes!” he lamented. “It’s out of control!”

Physiological anarchy raged within the person of Kunzel, and it seemed, for a
fleeting moment, as if a tear might cross the parched expanse of his eye.

“You’ll need a blood test.”

A man awaiting the scaffold knew not the terror of Kunzel at that moment.

For forty days and forty nights, the tortured Kunzel struggled with the terror that filled his being. For he was doubly cursed.

***

“Doctor, you must help me!”

I looked up from my desk to find that the pale colossus of Kunzel was before me.

“My condition is worsening, doctor! Day by day, I feel the dissipation of my strength. You were like an angel that day, doctor! When you came to see me. An angel! Only you can help me!”

“Have you been to see the diabetes specialist yet?”

Kunzel looked to me as one Jew to another who should know better.

“Doctor, what will he do to me? He will tell me that I must undergo an estimation of the sugar in my blood! Is this not so?”

“That’s what I told you six weeks ago.”

“But, doctor — you are asking me willingly to expose myself to infection with AIDS?”

This was Kunzel’s dilemma — death by diabetes, or death by AIDS.

I reassured him that the needles used were disposable, and that there was no risk of AIDS, but Kunzel was not one for reassurance. I showed him the sterile needles, unopened.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, doctor, but I don’t know the people responsible for packaging these needles. They could be drug addicts.”

My efforts to persuade him of the groundlessness of his fears only confirmed him in his resistance. It was at this point in time that he resolved to instruct me in the limitlessness of human unreliability.

From the depths of his raiment, he began to draw forth papers. Bundles of papers. Ageing, pocket-pressed bundles, secured this way and that with an endless assortment of rubber bands. From this pocket and from that. From layer upon layer. The massive frame of Kunzel was a Trojan horse of yellowing documentation.

“All my papers!” he boasted, in the hoarsened strains of habitual supplication. “All my papers I carry with me! Always! They are never out of my sight!” The cold spittle of his paranoia cut across my cheek.
For this was the life of Kunzel. The labour and the love of Kunzel. These fraying, folded bundles of documents.

"You see this!?" And he held up a massive, bone-wracked hand. "I had here a tumour! You can see for yourself the terrible scar! The wasting! This was from an injury I suffered in the service of Her Majesty's Post Office! In the year..."

And here he turned to his beloved documents. Unerringly he reached, into the upper, inner right-hand pocket of the third jacket. Deftly he pulled back the rubber bands and, without hesitation, filleted from the tight, curling bundle the very document that gave credence to the depth of his suffering.

"Nineteen hundred and seventy-seven. Even now — 10 years later — I am woken in the small hours of the morning by the terrible pain, and I must press my hand upon the cooling plasterwork of the bedroom wall!"

In a gesture that would become all too familiar, he changed to his reading-glasses — a makeshift affair of tortoise-shell and masking-tape, standing askew the bridge of his nose, reminiscent of a bird with a broken wing — and read out to me — nay, proclaimed — the pain-filled litany of his suffering.

The case, it seemed, had begun like any other. An injured worker, making a claim against a monolithic employer for injuries incurred in the prosecution of his duties. Documents from an early solicitor, attesting to the strength of his case. A succession of barristers, in a ceremonial progression from pleading to rebuff to appeal to pleading to rebuff to appeal. From one court to another, reaching always, always higher. Shedding, as he climbed, the barristers, one by one and, in the arrogant ignorance of his semi-literate Eurocentricity, taking upon himself the management of this most Kafkaesque of cases.

Thus consumed lay a full decade of the life of Kunzel, sacrificed to the indefatigable pursuit of justice. Until, at the end of this seventh age of his existence, in the Supreme Court before the venerable Justice Beech, justice was finally meted out.

Chaim Kunzel himself, armed only with an archaic English ideally suited to the minute dissection of weighty legal tomes, had won out against Australia Post in the Supreme Court of Victoria.

But his triumph was to be short-lived for, as a further bundle of documents attested, of the $21,000 owed to him, Australia Post had withheld some $8,000 for the purposes of taxation.

For the two years prior to our first encounter, Kunzel had been locked in a do-or-die legal battle with the Australian Tax Office for the recovery of his final $8,000.
Over the past seven years, Kunzel’s visits to the surgery have made up in duration what they lacked in frequency. He arrives, always, in the foulest of weather, always in the midst of a hellishly busy session, and always without an appointment.

Though retired, his time is at a premium, and he is unable to wait his turn in a queue. By means of the most heart-rending supplication, backed with assurances of the briefest of consultations, he often succeeds in displacing those gullible souls in the queue before him, only to occupy (and I use this term in its wartime sense) the surgery for at least a full hour. During this hour, however, those luckless individuals in the waiting-room are regaled by the booming account — given always in its entirety and at length — of his legal travails.

No force on earth has been known to divert this torrent. A reminder of the lateness of the hour will bring forth only more desperately insistent supplication. A move to the door will be blocked at its advent, utterly routed by a volley of close-range, high-velocity spittle. And, should one manage to reach the door, its opening will provoke instant closure with time-on for impatient behaviour.

But towards those august few who have been anointed with the mantle of trust, Kunzel shows a breed of generosity peculiar to the survivor of European oppression.

“For your son!” he beams, the edges of his eyelids kindling with pride as he proffers a box of diabetic wafers.

“The wafers, of course, are deficient in sugar,” he explains, “but this deficiency is abundantly compensated for by the presence of artificial sweetening.”

Over the years, his particular brand of generosity will manifest itself in the form of gold coins, Tattsotto tickets (in return for which he will demand an equal share in First Division winnings) and offers of the right of first refusal on the purchase of his properties at the time of his death.

For these are gifts predicated upon survival. Untrammelled by spurious considerations of taste or aesthetics, they form the building blocks of life itself. Property, sustenance, wealth. These, like genetic material, will extend and diversify the life and the essence of Kunzel himself, suffusing those around him with the indomitable spirit of this wheezy colossus. Hence the telling of the stories of ancient and glorious deeds, the passing on of the wisdom, the enshrinement of the gospel.

There is no escaping it. I have become nothing more than a witness to survival.
Kunzel himself has become pure survival, to the exclusion of all else, even the biological. He has no other purpose, no other reason, no other embodiment but that of survival. He has achieved the platonic ideal of disembodied existence.

Never was this more in evidence than the occasion upon which he presented me with an Australian $200 gold coin.

"I have a pain," he uttered, lending to the pronouncement the weight of prophetic vision normally reserved for presentiments of global catastrophe.

He held the swollen knuckles of his hand to his left flank, and reared back his head, the fleshy rims of his eyes, like watchful stigmata, welling with the bloodied tears of martyrdom.

"I know the time will come when I must meet my Maker," he foreshadowed, "but I am able to confront my fate with a certain equanimity. I have done nothing for which I need feel regret."

He went on to reiterate his devotion to the woman for whom he had risked the charge of religious dereliction, in the same breath expressing grave misgivings at the wisdom of medical intervention.

In some four years, it was the first time he had ever consulted me upon a matter even remotely concerned with the practice of medicine. After due examination, (which was not easy, considering that he carried his entire wardrobe upon his person) I took the opportunity to prevail upon him to undergo an ultrasound scan of the abdomen.

This, by some miracle, he did, and the result showed a large, ill-defined mass at the lowermost pole of the left kidney.

Despite my best efforts, Kunzel to this day has steadfastly refused to follow up on this finding. It remains the strangest of ironies that whilst his every outward action reveals the spirit of a man consumed by the will to survival, there lies at the core of his physical being a dark and hidden adversary that threatens to annihilate the tiny flame that burns at the very core of his immortal vision.

It was some months before I heard, once more, from Kunzel.

"I am very sick," came the message. "You must come and help me, immediately."

The Kunzel who unlocked the fortress bungalow for me was, if such a thing were possible, even paler and more haggard than was his wont. The unlocking of locks seemed interminable, as I stood in the bitter, lashing wind and rain.

"You must understand," he explained breathlessly, "that the Post Office, aided and abetted by the Taxation Office, are observing my every move. When I am
absent from the premises, they search through all my belongings. Nothing is safe from them. They have poisoned my cat. That fantastic creature. Poisoned! They have moved essential items upon which they know I rely. They listen to my telephone calls. They read my letters. They are trying to dissuade me from my course. But I will not be so easily diverted.”

And, with this, he ushered me in.

Instead of the claustrophobically cluttered room into which I was customarily shown, he led me to a neat, cold, cell-like chamber, which boasted only a small, simple bed, neatly made, a tiny bedside table, upon which rested an enormous bible and, upon the wall above the bed, a crucifix.

“This was the dwelling place of my beloved Eleanor Thompson,” he lamented. “She passed away some six weeks ago.” The magnitude of the pain in his voice was neither greater nor less than it was when he described the tumour in his hand or the swelling of his joints or the villainy of public institutions.

“I have kept her room exactly as she did,” his voice almost broke, and he was forced to pause.

He drew forth a tissue from the lower right pocket of his fourth jacket and proceeded to wipe his eyes.

“This is a method I have devised myself,” he demonstrated as he wiped first the right eye, then folded the tissue over neatly, wiped the left eye, folded the tissue into quarters, then placed it carefully in the lower left outer pocket of his first jacket. “Here it can be quickly at my disposal when my cough has been productive of sputum. You see? Nothing is wasted.”

With this, he pulled open a zipper on his right sleeve, dug deep into the recesses of the pocket therein, and withdrew an old, shallow matchbox. Carefully, he opened the matchbox, withdrew a tissue folded into eighths, meticulously proceeded to unfold it and, finally, presented me with a stagnant, green specimen of the aforementioned sputum.

“This is the discoloured effluvium with which I am afflicted,” he bellowed, indicating that I should examine more closely the purulent produce of his ailing lungs.

Once examined, the specimen was carefully returned to the site of its previous incubation within his arm, and he was again ready to venture forth into the legalistic minefield that consumed his every waking hour.

As he waded, once more, through the rulings and the appeals and the audits, I was left to wonder at the method within the madness of Kunzel. Was there a
method? Was there indeed a madness? Or was this simply the ineluctable end-point of single-minded survivalism. Surely, I felt, the wondrous fabric of his eccentricity was sufficient to defy the label of simple madness.

Into the midst of these musings, there obtruded a cold, musty rush of air.

"Are you familiar with the Romanian mazurka?" came the excited question, the hint of a twinkle momentarily lending to his eyes the illusion of vitality.

With this, I was whisked into the cheek-by-jowl equivalent of a drawing-room wherein, jammed in amidst the towering piles of old papers, there stood a warped and shoddy old upright piano, evoking for me the spirit of an ageing, crescent-spined nag, ready for the knackery.

Before the piano stood a tiny stool, rising barely a foot from the floor. Once seated upon this stool, heavily encumbered by the many layers that encased his trunk, Kunzel’s chin only just rose over the edge of the yellowing keyboard.

Unconscious of any notion of incongruity, Kunzel launched his swollen knuckles into a spirited, largely anarchic rendition of what I presumed to be a Romanian mazurka. The theme established, his hoarse, bellowing, bleating voice now joined the fray — tentatively at first, with a shuddering, quavering, lurching quality reminiscent of a run-down hurdy-gurdy. But, as the cold, knobbly fingers pranced their way back and forth before his mildly deranged features, the voice began to pick up in strength and momentum. Soon, he was singing at a gallop, at the top of his gargantuan lungs, in Romanian. No sooner was this under his belt than he cried out “Polka!”, and switched to a peppy French number. Once satisfied that I had grasped the pith of the polka, the cry of “Bagatelle!” heralded the launch of a bravura German assault.

Despite the knowledge of a waiting-room full of disgruntled patients, I stood in fascination before this flailing, Beethovenian puppet, as he raced maniacally through the remnants of the linguistic edifice that had once been the pride and joy of his academic armamentarium.

Who was this man? And why was my opinion so important to him? Was I witnessing within these crazed cadenzas the subtle traces of a strange and singular happiness, torn adrift from its social moorings by the exigencies of solitude? Or was it merely the desperate, clamouring throes of a lonely soul, wracked by the torments of self-loathing.

My next encounter with Kunzel did nothing to clarify these questions.

He arrived at the surgery, one Monday morning, in a highly excited state. Quickly bypassing the queue, he deftly slipped into the surgery, closed the door and
leaned forward over my desk, his lips only inches from my face. The excitement shone through the faded grey of his eyes, and he could barely contain his delight.

"You must congratulate me, sir!" he exclaimed, in a booming whisper. "For I have won my case against the Australian Tax Office!"

The inevitable folded bundle was produced, and we embarked upon a full reading of the case.

"So you see?" he cried, finally folding up the bundle a half-hour later. "Justice has prevailed!" And he went on to repeat this aphorism in misremembered schoolboy Latin. "The victory itself took place a week ago, but the bank cheque for $8,000 arrived just today! And I knew! I knew that they were lying in wait for it! I knew!"

By now, he had slipped forward off the chair and, on his knees on the floor, almost rested his chin on my blotting paper.

"So you know what I did!??" He could barely contain his self-satisfied delight. "You know what I did with this bank cheque?. I burnt it!!!"

The triumph in his voice was absolute. Finally, after a battle lasting seventeen years, the $8,000 that had so long been owed to him had finally been secured in such a way that his adversaries would never again lay a hand on it! Vengeance was his! As God — and only God — was his witness!

My head reeled. This was no Shylock who knelt before me in the glory of his triumph. This was Kunzel! Who burned the fruit of almost a quarter of a lifetime’s obsessive labour and rejoiced in the ashes!

***

To this day, I still see the great Kunzel, from time to unappointed time. And his many coats still bulge, and his swollen joints still throb, and the bundles still continue to grow in size and number.

He consults me, as the fancy takes him, on the name of a good solicitor, a kind of professional shoe-horn back into the system, for he is presently in the process of issuing writs against Tattslootto which, according to documents produced by the said Kunzel, has owed him — for some nine years now — the sum of 9.4 million dollars!

My money is with Kunzel.
from Polish Corridors

1
When I was maybe six
I stole a small
date-stamp machine
from the toys
of the boy who lived
in the downstairs flat
a couple of doors
from our own — we shared
the U-shaped yard
with fifty families.
I confessed and gave it back
though there was nothing
I had wanted more —
until I got my own.
When later my shiny
little black limousine
got stolen at school
I knew how it felt.

2
A roughneck yard,
a sandpit up the front
under the pantry window
on the second floor,
the monkey bar down
at the other end
I seldom seemed to share
with the other boys,
but in between
was the black smiling slot
of our communal tip
sheltered
under its concrete
(or was it timber) overlying lip
ideal for clambering in,
keeping a lid
on the rude aroma
for those in the flats above
but magic to children:
we didn't mind
the rotting rubbish smell —
part of the fun,
all part of what you might
happen to find,
a serendipity
dependable as the sun.

3
My first brush with death
was the doorway roughly opposite
the tip — an acrid,
mysterious, unsettled
disinfectant smell
from an apartment somewhere
upstairs: forbidden
staircase. I recall as well
the warning symbol
of a skull
of death — in my first tongue
an image and a name
more terrible,
taboo; I thought
of that special book
kept high above my reach
showing the photographs
of naked women
walking in long lines
for disinfection.
It made me strangely shy
the way they covered up
their private parts
with pathetic hands —
how foolish they must have felt.
4

On a Sunday I suppose
quietly I climbed
the stairs, stung
for some reason
I couldn't divine
by what I had been called.
The play-yard sank
into its cryptic dusk
behind my mounting something ache,
the playmates scattered
to their respective plates
of cabbage soup
and beetroot and potato broth
and steamed sinewy meat,
and tubs made hot by stoves
and coal, and candles
always standing by;
and so did I.
But as my mother, my father
flung wide the door
I balanced two questions
on my breath: one
might well have been
about that death,
but also
what was a jew?
WHEN the journey was first conceived it was vague and intellectually shapeless. A Cook's tour of the concentration camps. Auschwitz, of course, and Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen, Theresienstadt, Buchenwald and Dachau. It is hard to remember exactly, it was all so long ago. And in the interim, so many books read, films seen, personal testimonies heard, so much gathering to this Australian heart places and events external to my own shamefully safe Jewish history. I thought the only authentic definition of a Jew in the twentieth century was to be found in the horrors of the Holocaust. Now I wonder whether it was a lack of imagination, or perhaps — and I am a fiction writer after all — too much of it, that propelled me to Europe.

Over the years, the journey became more defined and at the same time more diverse. I needed to see the site of the Warsaw ghetto, and the Polish towns where Jewish life had thrived for centuries. I had to linger in squares where synagogues once stood, and wander ancient cemeteries searching for derelict Jewish graves. And the first ghetto, the Ghetto Nuova in Venice, surely I should see that. And the little town of Slonim that bounced back and forth between Russia and Poland over the centuries, the town that bares the name of my grandfather who travelled to Australia at the turn of the century, I should visit there too. And the other concentration camp sites, their very abundance an eloquent reminder of the efficiency of hate, those would need to be seen. And the tasteful memorials of prowling guilt that were springing up across Europe marking this massacre or that pogrom, more of them as the passage of time conveniently reshaped memory, those should be included too.

Every book I read expanded my trip. Then I saw Claude Lanzmann’s film Shoah, and the journey spilled into years. There were train tracks to travel, and ageing faces to see, and thinly disguised protests to hear, and the courage to stand my ground when confronted by people who were, and remain, perfectly happy for my sort to be
destroyed. You can still look death in the eye, thirty, forty, even fifty years on. Indeed, if the Shoah proved one thing, the Jew will always be aware of the pale eyes of death. Life is oneself, death is the other.

I read my books, I went to films, I spoke to survivors and the children of survivors, and the journey grew. Bear witness, Primo Levi said. I had to bear witness and I wasn't even there.

A Jew, a fifth generation Australian through three of my grandparents, raised in a family that observed Shabbat, that went to shule regularly if not assiduously, that did not keep kosher but would never eat pork. An Australian Jew who attended a Methodist girls’ school, who made the annual pilgrimage each Christmas to the Myer window display, who would have followed Australian rules football if it had been more to her taste, and as homeless as if she had just landed on these shores. It simply did not make sense. I went to live in Carlton, in the block adjacent to where my grandfather’s family lived when they first arrived in Australia. “It took us decades to move away from there,” my cousin said. “Why do you want to go back?”

But I was not going back. I was collecting memories, I was searching for history, I was trying to construct foundations to what I was increasingly experiencing as an illegitimate life. I wanted to find a home, I wanted the certainty of belonging, I wanted to feel comfortable as an Australian Jew. And after all, isn’t this what we all want when we search for roots?

I did not find home in late twentieth-century Carlton with its renovated terrace houses, its students and academics and labour lawyers. I did not find it in the resonances of Jewish life that still remained: old Mr Pose the cucumber man, the former Nth Carlton synagogue, the building that used to house the Yiddish theatre. Oddly, I found a greater sense of home with the Italians, the migrants who came to Carlton after the Jews, whose culture still thrived there. I found a home, but it was not mine.

So I gathered up my emptiness and returned to Europe. How is it possible to dream of places never seen? The craggy monuments of Treblinka, the railway track leading to Auschwitz, and running helplessly through foreign streets chased by shadowy men with huge mouths, their black boots thundering on the flag-stones. How could I dream of these things when I was never there? I read about the nightmares of children of survivors. In texture, sometimes even in the images, they were similar to mine. My parents were born in Melbourne, they had no family in Europe during the war, why then did I have the nightmares? Dreams, I read, fill in the gaps of the waking consciousness. How fitting, I thought, for a Jew to find her identity in the shadows of night.
The Jew as the archetypal outsider, it strikes even the most privileged of us. And guilt over not having suffered enough. And homelessness. And the need for roots.

I used to think it would have been easier if I had been born in a different country, one with a longer documented history. Five generations of Australian-ness did not provide an antidote to the otherness of Jewishness. But if, I reasoned, I had been born in a country where I could trace not five, but ten or twenty generations, then, I thought, I would belong. As if sanctuary were a place. As for Israel, I visited it only briefly; the politics, the landscape, and most particularly the unselfconscious Jewishness, marked me out as a different Jew. No comfort to be found there.

And I thought it would be easier if I were a different Jew in Australia. In this country, the stereotypical Jew has a European background. Who was I with my fifth generation Australian heritage and not one relative killed in the Holocaust?

Only much later did it occur to me that the search for identity is the search for certainty. A common enough human desire, but pure illusion. And for those with minds attuned not to facts and truths, but possibilities and the maddening chameleonics of meaning, to hunger for certainty is surely to starve.

It is the journey that matters, indeed, there is nothing but the journey, and for this Jew, like so many others, it has become a word-journey, a textual journey. I've not visited the concentration camps, nor the sites of the shtetls, I've not said kaddish over crumbling Jewish graves, nor stood my ground against dogged enemies. I've read books. My entire journey travelled in books, in words, in what is portable and invisible, what can be carried when the next pogrom strikes. Identity, that mysterious, elusive, mutable texture of being, finds a natural home in the hidden, elusive, encoded world of language. I am no talmudic scholar, I don't even understand Hebrew, but this excavation of identity is Talmudic in quality. And it is a process that connects me to others: different Jews from different places and different times. Five generations will never be enough for anyone to find a home, but through books the opportunities are greatly increased.

And it is a home in uncertainty. Not the words, they are always there, neatly tattooed to the page. The uncertainty resides in the semantics, endless and clandestine, a boundless landscape for the wandering mind. Uncertainty, whether we like it or not, is the connective tissue of the human condition. As for the flight from meaning, it is nothing other than a desperate hurtling towards the brick wall of certainty.

I was thirty-two when I first read George Steiner's essay 'Our Homeland, the Text'. There are illuminated moments in every reader's life and for me this was one of them — as indeed, had been Language and Silence several years before. Steiner writes: "In post-exilic Judaism, but perhaps earlier, active reading, answerability to
the text on both the meditative-interpretative and the behavioural levels, is the central motion of personal and national homecoming." He was referring to the Torah ("...wherever in the world a Jew reads and meditates Torah is the true Israel"), but I recognised its wider application for an Australian Jew searching for her roots, a Jew who lacked all the acceptable accoutrements of Jewishness. I did not even ‘look Jewish’ as so many non-Jews felt obliged to tell me. I think they meant it as a compliment, but it simply added to my shame.

The book. The word. Its miraculous survival. Its convenient portability. The book provides private connections to help construct the public Jew. “The text” Steiner writes, “was the instrument of exilic survival; that survival came within a breath of annihilation.” Orthodox Judaism holds no attraction for me; the traditional observance of Judaism is not where I locate my Jewishness. Yet I feel none the less a Jew, am none the less a Jew. I have chosen my own texts, untutored choices and deliberately contemptuous of order. It is not that they keep me Jewish, rather they build the Jew and support the Jew where religious observance is not an option and secular culture turns a suspicious eye.

The Jew of the diaspora always feels in the spotlight. We are not alone in this, it is an experience shared with many minority groups. Don’t draw attention to yourself, European Jews were told when they first arrived in Australia. And from my own father I learned that Jews had to be better citizens than non-Jews; that when a Jewish Australian committed a wrong it had repercussions for all Jews. It is not surprising then that so many Jews congregate behind the protective mantle of orthodoxy and community. The non-observant Jew is excoriated in orthodox circles, the non-observant Jew would be barred at the Yeshiva door, yet for the observant and non-observant alike, the text prevails.

Talmudic exegesis is essentially an exercise in the impossibility of certainty. The same texts subjected to literally thousands of years of interpretation, commentary after commentary and still proceeding in the Yeshivas of the world. Homelessness, otherness, forces one to confront the uncertainty that is the situation of us all. It makes sense to resort to the text to know better not only that one must live with uncertainty, but actually practise how it is done.

I began my journey all those years ago with a desire for solid and immutable meanings to define who I was. This, I decided, would be my home, my sanctuary. But there is no end of the road for the Jew— not the Shoah, not even contemporary fundamentalism. We Jews stand buried in paper; the stock-pile grows even while our allotted three score years and ten contract. Home is where the books are, raucous and uncomfortable, vibrant and enduring. It is a sanctuary of sorts, although not the one I originally sought.
Mud In My Tears

For two thousand sessions
and three analysts
and so many tears

I've gnawed over
this division of roles
for twenty years

what happened
what happened to her
and what happened to me

I've sorted and sieved
and dissected
I've strained

through this corset
and shamed myself
I've repeated and remembered

and divided
the borders
she was the mother

I am the daughter
I am the daughter
born after the war

after the hunger
after the torture
after the typhoid
after the disfigurement
after the disinfection
after the dead

and well after
the rape
and the German Shepherd

I am the daughter
born after the war
but I've stalled

I am stuck
like a pig in mud
mud from the barracks

mud from the huts
mud from the bunks
mud from my eyes and lungs

mud in my liver
mud in my mouth
mud ringing in my ears

mud in my fingers
mud in my screams
mud in my tears.
SINCE the laceration in the history of humankind represented by the Holocaust, thousands of witnesses have attempted to put it into words. Some of them consider the effort to be futile, and opt rather for silence as the most suitable form to convey something which, after more than fifty years, for many remains still unsayable. In one of the main critical contributions to this issue, George Steiner's *Language and Silence*, the author questions whether it is still possible to rely on a language which for twelve years had been used to say the unspeakable, to write the unthinkable.

In a range of books written on l'univers concentrationnaire, from celebrated works such as Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Jorge Semprun's *The Long Voyage*, to the poetry of Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, the Holocaust haunts writers who belong to the second generation, those children of survivors who have made the memory of the genocide the subject matter of their writings. This is so for Lily Brett, who was born in Germany in a refugee camp in 1946 and brought to Melbourne as a two-year-old by her Polish parents. Through her writing, Brett attempts to recuperate a narrative which was silenced by the torture and suffering endured in concentration camps. She describes the *Auschwitz inferno* from the perspective of the survivors' child whose process of both estrangement from and identification with her parents' traumatic journey allows her to restore its articulation. In particular, Brett's strong empathy with her mother prompts her constantly to investigate and highlight women's experience of the Holocaust.

2. "The unspeakable being said, over and over, for twelve years. The unthinkable being written down, indexed, filed for reference", Steiner, 122.
As in the works of first generation Jewish Australian immigrant writers such as Janka Abrami, Ibi Keri and Maria Lewitt, the Holocaust recurs in Brett’s poetry and fiction as an almost obsessive theme. In her two collections of short stories, Things Could Be Worse and What God Wants, and in her novel, Just Like That, Brett’s female protagonists record chilling recollections of extermination camps which parents and parents’ friends tell furtively in bits and pieces, with a shame which decades later is still difficult to elide. This is that “shame of the world” which Levi, speaking from the survivor’s perspective, illustrated with his peculiarly sharp and touching insight in his last book, The Drowned and the Saved:

The ocean of pain, past and present, surrounded us, and its level rose from year to year until it almost submerged us. [...] The just among us, neither more nor less numerous than in any other human group, felt remorse, shame and pain for the misdeeds that others and not they had committed, and in which they felt involved, because they sensed that what had happened around them in their presence, and in them, was irrevocable. It would never again be able to be cleansed.

The feeling of being irrevocably contaminated by Nazi barbarity is one of the first issues Brett deals with in Things Could Be Worse, where she portrays Renia Bensky, a survivor of Auschwitz, as being overwhelmed by a sense of painful alienation in the moment of her release which will jeopardize her reconciliation to both the world and her former self:

She could hardly look at Josl when they met. She felt separated from him by what she had seen, and what she had breathed. She felt poisoned. She could hardly accept who she was now. Her new knowledge was embedded in her. It seeped through her every thought. Sometimes it attacked her in her sleep and she would wake up crying. She knew it would always be like this.

In Brett’s writings, the moral fracture left by both the physical and psychological degradation inflicted by the Nazis on deportees is ineradicable. Austrian philosopher Jean Améry — himself a survivor of Auschwitz — claimed that “[A]nyone who

has been tortured remains tortured. [...] Faith in humanity, ... is never acquired again”. Améry could never recover from this sense of loss, which resulted in his suicide in 1978; nor could Celan, whose expressionistic language and disconcerting visions convey an always present torment: “TO STAND in the shadow/of the scar up in the air”. This is the indelible scar which Brett, as a daughter of survivors, inherits as an unsettling existential mark and transposes into her poetry and fiction. Obsession with death, sense of guilt, anxiety and dislocation — both physical and mental — are feelings which the daughters of her narratives share with their mothers who experienced the tragedy of the Holocaust. Lola, Rosa, Golda and Esther constantly explore their mothers’ past in order to come to terms with their disquietude and to partly reappropriate a sphere of memories and events, however grievous, that they feel excluded from. They do so by incessant reading of documents and accounts of concentration camps, by interviewing people who survived Auschwitz, by catching the fragmented recollections shouted by their parents in moments of anger and, as an extreme act, by re-experiencing physically the misery and abuse perpetrated by the Nazis. Lola and Esther do this — the former by boiling herself a pot of potato peels, and the latter by duplicating on her skin her mother’s mark as a deportee, as Brett describes in What God Wants:

When Esther was seventeen, she had had her mother’s Auschwitz number tattooed on her right forearm. She looked at it now. A4257. The letter A was given to those who were chosen for work.

Esther had had a strange sense of relief after she’d been tattooed. As though some missing link had been relocated. Looking at her tattoo always made her feel calm.

These clandestine actions, which automatically bring about the contempt of Esther’s parents and cause uncontrolled wrath in Lola’s mother, are meant to bridge the gap left by a burdensome silence about the trauma of the Holocaust which keeps the world of Brett’s survivors separate from that of their children. The mothers portrayed by Brett are reluctant to give their daughters a thorough account

10. “[Lola] had often wondered what [potato peels] tasted like. She was halfway through her first mouthful when Mrs Bensky came home unexpectedly. Mrs Bensky, who had never laid a hand on either of her daughter, took the bowl of potato peels. Then screaming and crying, she shook Lola by the hair until Lola fainted”, TCBW, 118.
of their concentration camp experience. The sense of humiliation and the awareness that certain events are beyond words raise a screen through which daughters can perceive but cannot enter their mother’s world. In Just Like That, Esther’s mother says to her: “You will never know what we went through” [...] Esther knew that her mother was right. She would never know. The recollections of the depravity and inhumanity endured in Auschwitz by Renia, Golda’s mother and Rooshka generate at times a split consciousness which makes them wonder if certain incidents truly occurred to them, inducing a pretence that if they did it wasn’t to them they happened, as in the case of Rooshka mentioned by Esther:

You know my mother told me about a woman in her barracks who was forced to have sex with one of the guard dogs for the amusement of the Gestapo. For years I wondered whether it was really my mother who had been fucked by the dog. I felt so ashamed. I felt awash in the degradation she had suffered. (JLT, 7)

Brett illustrates both a schizophrenic response to abominable facts and a disjointed verbalization evinced by women survivors which convey the ruins of a past hard to admit.

Before their mothers’ unspoken angst and persistent sense of dislocation in a new country which increases their fears and alienation, as young girls the daughters withdraw into muteness, aware of the inaccessibility of their parents’ memories. For Lola:

As a child, Lola had longed for silence. She envied those girlfriends whose parents were omnipresent. At the same time she felt that they were not there. She felt as though she couldn’t get a grip on them. When she spoke, she felt that they didn’t listen. They were distracted by something. Something larger. Something Lola couldn’t share. (TCBW, 161)

The barrier of silence which keeps the lives of mother and daughter apart is a ubiquitous motif in Brett’s poems, where she attempts to voice the tragic experience which her mother could seldom articulate with words — a grief she would rather let out at night, when, as the lines of ‘By Yourself’ go, “Your teeth/rattled around/your mouth/for years//you’d shout/in your/sleep”. By availing herself of a
things could be forgotten

soliloquy addressed to the mother, Brett endeavours to restore that I/Thou dialogic vitiated by Nazis’ iniquitous use of language. In some of her poems, Brett’s exploration of her mother’s inner world yields a process of identification which moves even further, as in the poem ‘I Followed You’, where she goes back over the stages of her mother’s life, trying to empathise with and live through again the dramatic moments the mother had endured:

I stood in each step you took
and pressed the same print
into the earth
[...]
I screamed
in your nightmares.

Recreating her link with her mother by means of words — “If/with/my white biro/I could string/some strong words/into a thread/I would spin/myself a cocoon/a second womb/and/gently/tuck us in together”, Brett reconciles herself to her mother’s past on the one hand, and on the other makes explicit her moral responsibility both as writer and as woman to keep alive the memory of Holocaust victims.

Brett’s focus is on women’s experience: in her skeletal poems she speaks repeatedly of “left-over daughters/and missing mothers”. In her prose fiction, with her sobriété de l’écriture — which Charlotte Wardi remarks is distinctive of survivors’ accounts of death camps and which Brett shares with them when it comes to describing the facts of the Holocaust — she tells of rape and damaged wombs, of miscarried maternities and forced abortions, of lost children and children killed at their own mothers’ hands. Whether Brett’s narratives are set in Melbourne or New York, her portrayal of post-modern characters and cities rendered through witty dialogues and a sharp irony is always interspersed with the epigrammatic use of statistics and chronicles of the genocide which spring regularly to the mind of Brett’s female protagonists and which more often than not make reference to women’s

13. As Anthony Rudolf claims: “The Nazis contaminated everything including language, that repository of culture, thought and feeling; language, that mode of I/Thou dialogic in which lovers speak; language, the 1 and 1, if not the we, of nation speaking peace unto nation.” At An Uncertain Hour — Primo Levi’s war against oblivion, London: The Menard Press, 1990, 46.
dramatic experience, in some respects different to that of men. Marlene E. Heinemann maintains that gender was destiny in Nazi concentration camps and illustrates to what extent Jewish women’s experience could have been more grievous than men’s:

Maternity, fertility, and sexual assault, experiences of relevance to women at all times, have a special importance in Holocaust literature by women. These themes do not, of course, exhaust the ghetto and camp experiences that women describe, but they do suggest certain aspects of it which outline an area of uniqueness to women. [...] In the context of mass death and compulsory sterility, the association of women with reproduction and the preservation of life gives them unique torments and sometimes, forms of resistance.\(^{18}\)

Brett is aware of this gender difference, and gives voice to Jewish women’s destiny by recalling her mother’s loss of her child — “I had a son/I kept mine//you’d/lost yours//they brained him/in the ghetto//smashed him/against/a wall”;\(^{19}\) by describing Renia’s absence at the burial of her son and the sexual abuse she endured in Auschwitz; by depicting Lola’s identification process with Lodz women — “She saw herself in a photograph of a small girl sitting next to her dead mother in the ghetto. She saw herself in photographs of Jewish women smiling for the camera in displaced persons camps” [TCBW, 166].

The daughters wish to enter their mothers’ pictures, they want to become agents in piecing together a legacy which one day they will pass onto their own children, with the constant endeavour to keep alive their war against oblivion. In Memorial Candles, Dina Wardi explains that the children of Holocaust survivors are expected by their parents to fill the emotional void left by the horror of the genocide and to reconstruct the entire family history.\(^{20}\) In Brett’s books, by coming to terms


\(^{19}\) Brett, ‘I Followed You’, 25.

\(^{20}\) Dina Wardi explains that “The content of the messages transmitted by the survivors to their children was thus anchored in the traumatic inner imprint of the Holocaust on their tortured souls. They contain an ethical appeal, partly overt and partly covert, that can be summarized in a few sentences: you are the continuing generation. [...] It is your obligation and your privilege to maintain the nation, to reestablish the vanished family and to fill the enormous physical and emotional void left by the Holocaust in our surroundings and in our hearts. [...] Therefore, because of the unique significance of the role the children were chosen to play, the word ‘scapegoat’ is not appropriate, and it would be better to call them ‘memorial candles’”. Memorial Candles — Children of the Holocaust (trans. Naomi Goldblum), London: Routledge, 1992, 30.
with their role as 'memorial candles', Lola, Rosa and Esther break the barrier of silence and attempt to accomplish their main task as witnesses. By diverging from Steiner’s distrust in language and T.W. Adorno’s argument, frequently cited, that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, Lola “shouts” her poems at the end of Things Could Be Worse. Langer argues that “[T]he realities of the camp continue to contradict the premises of form and of language itself, resulting in a split that may in fact define the bond between the writer and this material, and our possible access to it.”21 Brett’s fiction represents the difficulties of bridging the hiatus between signified and signifier in this particular instance, and her female characters acknowledge the limits of language to speak the Holocaust:

Lola hated the word Holocaust. It was too neatly wrapped into a parcel. There were no loose ends and no frayed edges. The Holocaust. It was a nice, compact abstraction. But what else could she say? The alternatives were so wordy. She could say the Nazi extermination of European Jewry. She could say the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis. She could say Hitler’s murder of six million Jews. (TCBW, 166).

Esther too “[looks] for explanation [and writes] herself a summary of a book she [has] read about the children of Holocaust survivors” (JLT, 32), yet without finding an exhaustive list to sum up and define the psychological damages which affect the lives of second generation survivors.

Brett’s is a tenacious search for words adequate to utter what Levi would name as unimaginable. Her work has the status of testimony. Levi’s warning, “[I]t happened therefore it can happen again”, 22 resonates in Just Like That, where Esther reminds her friend Sonia that neo-Nazi violence is still operative in some European Countries. Hence Lola, Rosa and Esther’s concern to check and re-check numbers and statistics in their books on the Holocaust, their urge to speak of the abuse and degradation which Jewish women had to endure, and ultimately their intention to bear witness against any form of oblivion and revision. As Fay Zwicky writes:

In Jewish ritual, there is one constant prayer which is said every time Jews gather to pray and that is the prayer for the dead called Kaddish. […] “Can a people disappear and be annihilated so long as a child remembers its parents?” If we extend the implication of this to all mankind, then the poet

who has the courage to remember has an important function. For it is through the act of memory that people survive — not by renouncing allegiances, but by retaining them, however painful.23

Critics have remarked at times the repetitiousness of Brett's subject matter, especially in her prose fiction. Some of them have expressed reservations about the way she deals with and portrays stories of first and second generation survivors, which they see as becoming progressively predictable. I rather view Brett's treatment of the Holocaust as a necessary cadence in her narrative, a presence which challenges and invites the reader not to forget. In Brett's books, faces and figures surface from the Lodz ghetto and Auschwitz death camps and wander through the streets of Melbourne and New York, at a pace which seems to mark the rhythm of Celan's mournful refrain in 'Death Fugue' — "Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night".24 Like the black-ink survivors drawn by David Rankin, they keep questioning and staring at the reader with their ghastly eyes. They do it silently, not preventing Brett from creating new characters and plots, as she has done in Just Like That. These are thus the faces and figures which Brett's women characters keep searching and fostering, however painful; reminding us that memory and written words are things which the Holocaust could not annihilate.

Mirror

My parents were not in a camp
but running and hiding
shattered their nerves.

It caught up with me
when I became a mother.

I walked for miles
carrying my baby
in case I had to flee.

I breast fed
till I was sucked dry
in case there was a famine.

I knitted a jumper
from scraps of rough wool
in case
there was a long harsh winter.

My girls look Aryan
their ethnic traces buried
deep within
for safety's sake.
Jan Epstein

**Jews and Films in Australia: The Impact of the Holocaust**

Since 1990, Australia has had a Festival of Jewish Cinema which screens Jewish films from all over the world. Each year thousands buy tickets in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth to view Jewish films made in France, the US, Canada, Britain, Belgium, Mexico, Hungary and Poland. Yet in all this time, not one feature film or documentary has been shown during these Festivals which reflects Jewish life in Australia.

Drawing attention to this fact is not meant to imply that Australia has produced no films at all about Jews. We have. But relative to films made by and about Jews in many other countries, the number is slight. Since the beginning of Australian cinema in 1900, some fourteen feature films have been made in which Jews are represented. Of these, five were made prior to 1935. No Jews were featured in Australian films for almost fifty years until Henri Saffron’s *Norman Loves Rose* in 1982. Since then, eight films with Jewish content and characters have been made, six of them either directed, produced or written by Jews.

In 1996 alone, two feature films with Jewish characters, and two documentaries about Jews were released, each of them to wide acclaim. This burst of filmmaking is heartening. But the crucial question remains. Why have Jewish filmmakers been so thin on the ground in Australia, while other film cultures, notably the French, the Americans, and even the Canadians, have been busy over the last thirty years or so building a sub-genre of films that reflects the richness and diversity of Jewish life in the Diaspora?

The simple explanation is that Jewish film production in Australia mirrors the

---

1. Scott Hicks’ *Shine*, Emma-Kate Croghan’s *Love and Other Catastrophes*, Monique Schwarz’s *Bitter Herbs and Honey*, Rivka Hartman’s *The Mini-skirted Dynamo*. 

*Westerly Summer 1996*
fate of the Australian film industry, which after an efflorescence of activity from the turn of the century to the 1930s, declined post-war to virtual non-existence. It did not begin to recover until the renaissance of Australian cinema in the seventies. However, a full answer to the question is more complex and interesting.

While one can never underestimate the importance of the way in which an impoverished host film culture inhibited Australian Jews from celebrating their Jewishness in celluloid, there are additional reasons why the marriage between Jews and film did not occur in Australia as it did for instance in the US.

First, the Australian Jewish population was and still is tiny in both total size and proportion. Even more to the point, more than two thirds of this population was the consequence of post-World War Two immigration.

Although Jews have been part of Australian history since the First Fleet sailed into Sydney Cove in 1788 carrying at least eight Jewish convicts, by 1933 only 26,700 Jews called Australia ‘home’. These comprised mainly Anglo-Jews who had trickled into Australia slowly but steadily since the first Jewish free settlers arrived from Britain in 1816. By the late 1930s, however, Australia’s largely Anglo-Jewish community was beginning to be transformed by refugees fleeing Nazi Europe. Quotas were introduced restricting non-British emigration in an attempt to stem this development, but as restrictions were lifted after 1945, the number of Jewish immigrants rose rapidly.

It has been estimated that close to 35,000 Jewish refugees came from eastern Europe to Australia in the early post-war years. By the 1960s, these survivors of the Holocaust far out-numbered their Anglo-Jewish counterparts, and by 1971, the Australian Jewish community, which had taken almost 150 years to reach just under 30,000, more than doubled in less than forty years to number 75,000. Today, there are roughly 90,000 Jews in Australia, but this still only represented about half a per cent of the total Australian population.

In the US, where Jews still dominate more than any other single group in the media, and in movie making in particular, Jews number five to six million. More than two million Jews live in New York alone, and more than a million in California. Australia cannot match this concentration of Jewish activity, or provide the ‘critical

mass' necessary to generate our own spontaneous creative flowering.⁵

Second, any explanation as to why Australian Jewish filmmakers were tardy in responding to Australia's film industry revival, must take into account not just the small numbers of post-war Jews available to provide a creative 'pool', but the mood of this predominantly survivor Jewish community in response to the magnitude of the tragedy which had befallen it. Morris Lurie has described the numbed grief experienced by post-Holocaust Jews in Australia as 'shell-shock';⁶ and oral history research with survivors supports this view, although today this state of mind would be termed post-traumatic stress disorder on a grand scale.

The immediate impact of the Holocaust on this traumatised community was to drive the unendurable memories of the past underground, while bringing to the foreground obsessive concerns for the physical safety and well-being of their children, often to the exclusion of other less tangible ambitions and goals. Another effect was to import in the minds of these Jews part of the 'victim mentality created by European anti-semitism. Fear of gentiles and shame at being Jewish led many Jews to adopt a low profile, and exhort their children to do the same. Most Jews wanted their children to 'do well' in the professions, which were considered safe, stable, and independent of government. These attitudes were further reinforced by despair at the end result of European intellectualism and high culture, and the materialism and philistinism of the wider Australian culture which in the fifties' and sixties' generally placed a low value on 'art'.

The reticence of survivor-immigrant parents to draw attention to themselves, was largely duplicated by their first generation children. Of the 5% or so of Australian Jews who have excelled across the board in all professions since the 1960s, few have chosen to become creative artists.⁷ This is in sharp contrast to their North American counterparts.

The experience of Australia's post-war Jews was very different to that of the

---

⁵ The following figures, provided by the Makor Jewish Community Library in Melbourne, support this contention. They give an estimate of the number of Jews living in countries with large Jewish populations, relative to the general population: USA, 5 million Jews (250 million); France, 700,000 (57 million); Canada, 305,000 (27 million); UK, 300,000 (58 million); Argentina, 250,000 (32 million); Brazil, 170,000 (156 million); Australia 90,000 (18 million). In Poland, where Jews had lived since the ninth century, the pre-WW2 population numbered 3 million, representing 10% of the total population. At the height of emigration to the US early this century, more Jews came through Ellis Island in a month, than the total current Jewish population in Australia. Russia, before massive emigration in the late 1980s, numbered over a million Jews.

⁶ Personal communication.

survivors who made their way to America. In the US, these Jews encountered the
dynamism of a large, established Jewish community which dated back to the mass
migrations of Jews from eastern Europe in the 1880s and 90s. It was this
momentum that lay behind Hollywood, helped create north-east American
literature (Miller, Bellow, Roth, Salinger and others), and built an ersatz Jewish
capital in New York, the largest urban concentration of Jews in the world.

In contrast, in Australia, while determined to succeed in their new country, the
Jews who had fled Europe were forced to cope with feelings of desolation and
displacement largely on their own. They experienced little help from the Anglo-Jews
who saw them as foreign and 'funny', and as a threat to their own acceptance in the
broader culture which, while relatively benign towards Jews, had nonetheless
imported populist anti-semitism from Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth
century, and prior to World War Two.

The collapse and slow revival of the Australian film industry, the small size of
the Australian community, its composition, isolation, and psychological
dysfunction after the cataclysm of the Holocaust, all need to be considered in any
discussion about the contribution of Jewish filmmakers to Australian cinema.

The Holocaust is the defining experience of the twentieth century for Jews
everywhere. But in Australia, it is doubly so. It has determined the composition of
the Jewish community, coloured its thinking, and in large measure shaped the way
Jews see themselves. This is nowhere more evident than in the features, television
dramas, and documentaries made after Australia's film industry revival in the
seventies and eighties, in which the children of survivors attempted to come to
terms with both the Holocaust and the special nature of being Jewish in Australia.

Pre-World War Two films depicting Jews were all made by non-Jews. In these
eyear films Jews were peripheral to the main story; nonetheless, they give glimpses
of how Jews were perceived by their fellow Australians, from matter-of-fact
acceptance (Raymond Longford's The Sentimental Bloke, 1919), to pumped up fear
and suspicion (Gerald Hayle's Environment, 1927).

Ken G. Halls' Strike Me Lucky (1934) is the most interesting film of this pre-war
batch. Made when anti-semitism was on the rise everywhere, it showcased the
Jewish clown, 'Mo McCackie' (Roy Rene, the son of Anglo-Dutch parents), and
turned prejudice on its head by transmogrifying the vicious, centuries' old European
stereotype of the grasping Jew, into the paradigm of the 'little Aussie battler'. The
film has much to say about pre-war Australian tolerance, and the belief in a 'fair go'.
But more pertinent to this article, is the way that Jewish films of the Australian
renaissance illustrate the post-Holocaust mentality of the Australian Jewish

68
community.

Saffron's *Norman Loves Rose* (1982), about a Bar Mitzvah boy who falls in love with his sister-in-law, owes more to Phillip Roth than anything coming out of Sydney, where the film is set. Yet within the constraints of the sex comedy genre, the director is making perceptive and frequently moving comments about parental over-protectiveness and emotional dysfunction in Holocaust families.

Scott Hick's *Shine* (1996), based on the life of concert pianist David Helfgott, is similarly illuminating. Whatever the truth about Helfgott's overbearing father whose love turned to possessiveness, the film argues powerfully that many concentration camp victims suffered a debilitating emotional anaesthesia, which in Helfgott senior's case (so the film suggests) caused him to internalise the brutality of his oppressors.

The television mini-series *The Dunera Boys* (1985), written and directed by Ben Lewin and produced by Bob Weis, won several awards and was ground-breaking on two scores. It was the first Holocaust story told in film from an Australian perspective, and the first Australian film made by Jewish filmmakers, which captured the unique quality and texture of the Australian Jewish experience. It was the first film, too, after *Strike Me Lucky*, which held a mirror to both the tolerance that characterised the Australian attitude towards Jews then, and latent anti-semitism.

Other films illustrate further aspects of the Australian Jewish experience. Ted Robinson's *Two Brothers Running* (1988), scripted by Morris Lurie, is about Jewish displacement and existential angst. *Father* (1990), directed by John Power, was a clumsy attempt to contribute to the debate about war crimes trials, which resulted in Auschwitz being placed inappropriately on a par with My Lai. However, perhaps the most interesting film from the point of view of this argument, is Emma-Kate Croghan's highly original *Love and Other Catastrophes* (1996). Co-scripted by Yael Bergman, this film vanquishes Jewish shame by the inclusion of a character called Ari. His name not only conjures up the blue-eyed hero of *Exodus* (1960). It resonates with the power conferred upon it by the Jewish state.

In the past, Jewish Australians were inhibited from making films proclaiming their identity by the absence of a viable film industry, the small numbers of Jews, and the post-Holocaust mentality of the Jewish community which fostered shame, promoted safeness, and discouraged careers in the arts. There is every indication, however, that as the renascent Australian film industry continues to grow, more Australian Jews at all levels of production will feel comfortable about expressing their identity in this art form.
am Breitbart, the strongest Jew in Galicia, the strongest in the world, and when I flex these bony, ridiculous arms, I can bend a horseshoe. I can tie it in a knot. Biceps like boulders, elbows for shoulders, legs as toned as the courthouse columns. When I stretch my arms upward, it makes not a gnat of difference whether they lift an anvil or press the pungent air.

But don’t worry yourselves, if you hear fearsome tales of my terrible deeds. “Heart of gold” is also me: so says my sister explaining the accident with the rock and the window. I’m muscly as a ferryman, but still soft inside, soft as the torn centre of a loaf which, believe me, I appreciate eating. And I’m young enough to sip the strawberry wine, innocent as anything, straight out of my father’s glass, and feel the dizziness my parents’ guests take hours to accumulate.

My big sister laughs because she thinks I’m under control. She thinks that I’m cute as a rich man’s pony. On the contrary, I’m stringy and tough as the neighbour’s goat. At the Shabbes meal, we see that the soil is softened by the grass which is softened by the innumerable stomachs of a cow, whose meat distils all that has gone to feed it. This is wonderful, and proof that the world is divine. With that I have no trouble agreeing. But you should know this: I’m tough enough to eat the unprocessed dirt. No pastry wrapping for my mudpies, folks, no bread and butter to diminish the fulsome earthy taste. I’m Breitbart and — though, as I said, I’m not about to eat up your house — if I were so inclined, I’d chew my way through to Australia.

I’m five years old and daring as a Maccabi. I’m so powerful, the evening sun stands still in the sky that I might play under the fruit trees for ten extra minutes while my mother calls “Shmuel, Shmulik! Come and eat! You want me to cook the soup dry?”
Of course I don't, but there are times when a young muscleman must prepare himself for the forthcoming day, a day when Breitbart himself — no dwarfish imitation, this one — comes to Horodenka.

Tomorrow in the market place I will see Breitbart lift a cow above his head and hold it there while the crowd shouts in unison: “One! Two! Three! Four!” and the cow trying to kick, trying to figure out about gravity now the earth has been so assertively displaced, trying to bellow “put me down, you cheeky little urchin”.

“Five! Six!” call the men, as Breitbart puffs out his cheeks like a trombonist, and all the vermilion sunsets of Europe take place on his forehead.

“Seven! Eight! Nine!” as the cow gives up the struggle and — cattle having shorter memories than people — forgets that she ever walked on the ground.

“Ten!” and the whole village cheers because Breitbart is still the strongest Jew who not only can pick up a cow and hold it in the air for Ten, he can put it back down gently. Breitbart regains his pallor and the cow gingerly steps towards a patch of long grass.

I will lift a cow in each hand, pressing them upwards so they sag somewhat and their four legs make a cube, and while I hold the cows up in the air like this and the village cheers, I will dance a cow-holding jig. I will do this now and Breitbart will see what I can do — and me a five-year-old child! — and will say, “Oy! Little boy, you must come travel the country with me. Together we will lift the heaviest carriages. Together we will be the strongest and — if they will speculate ... no, no ‘ifs’ ... they will speculate, endlessly — no one will be sure which of us is the master and which the apprentice.”

Rivka, my sister, overhears. Her eyes momentarily hold a meniscus of tears then overflow. I'm going, she knows but she doesn't say, “Don't go, little brother. Don't go my Shmoo.” She is silent.

And though I too am crying — and not ashamed to admit it to the entire village, for my sister is the best friend imaginable for ever and ever — though I am crying, I know I must go with Breitbart. My sister and I embrace in silence: we will not see each other until our childhoods are gone.

***

In the future when the first cellar is full of drunken soldiers shouting and asking my father “Where are your daughters?” and laughing, we are hidden in the second cellar behind the sliding panel which my father installed for just this event, for such
a happening as this. In the future when I am no longer five-years-old — five and already I know how not to cry though in the dark, in the dusty dark and when something brushes against my leg in the dust of the second cellar, when we are there, I will be Breitbart’s best-ever apprentice with the strength to hold shut the door of the second cellar against the “what’s this?” of the soldiers, and if the panel appeared to give a little at the soldier’s first push, it doesn’t budge further and the soldier thinks he must have imagined it and proceeds with his drinking and asking my father “What vintage?” and laughing until all the soldiers are calling out the names of years and my father is pretending to laugh along with them; and when he offers them two jars for their journey one says “yes, we will” and another says “thank you” — more polite than he’s ever been to a Jew, most probably, as my father says later when we have come out into the day and he can boast quietly, and my sister and I can admire his courage.

In the future when the borders of nations try to intervene between a boy at school and his family at home, when the boy has been sent to a larger town to continue his education and the borders try to cut the old nation in two and cleave each part to another nation, and I am stuck in the large town though it’s the middle of summer and the school has closed and everyone else has gone home and I sleep on the schoolmaster’s sister’s kitchen floor on a thin mat: when I see this future approaching I will grit my teeth and grip the border in my strong fingers and wrestle it like Samson tearing at the pillars — like Breitbart stilling a bull — and fight that wriggling boundary right back to where it was. And my father will come to collect me, not noticing that anything could have been amiss, never noticing that his son’s fingers are black with rubbed off ink and that the streets are smeared with the disturbed ink from the worn marks on the map, too.

In the future, further again, virtually unforeseeable, there will be a banner in Horodenka which reads ‘The Two Breitbarts’, and the entire village will turn out to watch us bend and straighten lamp posts, juggle sheep and lift carts clear into the air. My mother and father will be in the crowd, so happy, so much naches I have brought to them, and they will be whispering to each other, “But he was so thin as a child, so thin.”
Hannah Ziebel

1
There is no one left to ask, those
who might unravel
the silence of her life.
A few scraps, broken threads.
Even in sleep, I listen. A heartbeat
to trace blood to its source.
Or the calligraphy of my hands, lines
etched, aging over bone
blue raised veins that reveal
nothing.
    Until I remember
her hands
    creamy plump pigeons
never freed from her lap.
I twist the hoop of gold
she was the first to wear
willing it to speak,
translate for Hannah Ziebel.
It spins
worn-smooth, no message engraved.

2
I never heard her sing.
She brought no child’s song, nursery chant.
Were they trampled
into Vilna’s snow? Buried there
with her father’s bones,
songs drowned by nights of pogrom,
the smuggled Channel crossing.
Perhaps she remembered to croon
for her firstborn my father
but forgot again
in the rolling sea fugue to Melbourne.
How could I ask,
her eyes and hands always withheld.
Half deaf, eternally old, she was someone
apart, sat alone
however many in the room.
We were children then, and frightened.
Reluctant to enter, we hurried from her house,
its dark breathing,
silences we could never fill.

3
To know nothing, but to know this:
that my grandmother willed her own death.
Rabbi’s daughter tell me,
is such a thing possible.
Who were you
who was I?
Was I your fatal wound, the goyim’s child,
a knife to twist for seven generations?
You would never speak
though I would wear the ring,
polestar of my inheritance.
Speak to me now,
hold out your hands to these that dig.
Let me tell you at last
this is the task they were made for,
earth under the nails, in pores of the skin.
It is late, Hannah Ziebel,
may our lives persist.
Ballad of Sid

“How do I look, son?
I mean for a man of me age
I’ve seen a bit of trouble
in me time but always kept
meself lookin neat yer never
know what’s around the corner,
Get me drift, son?”

He preens and prims and winks
at his image. He steps back,
strikes a pose and leers like Mo.
“Ish kabibble” he sings. He thinks
it means in Yiddish “I should worry.”
He’s got it on a scratchy Parlophone.
“Wind it up for me, son.”

He’s had four wives, y’know.
He’d go again given half a chance.
Buried two (one’s me mum), lost the other two
but not to other blokes, he boasts. “I’ve had
four ma-in-laws. Loved me more than their
girls did. And that’s God’s truth.
Exceptin’ ya mum, son.”

He turns the record over, “Abie, Abie,
Abie my boy, vahrt are you waitin’ for now?”
He named me Abie after the song and ten men
sang it at my circumcision. The mohel joined in.
What am I waiting for? Waiting for him to die,
to take with him all that I fear. The vanity:
“Leave me teeth in, son.”

He’ll leave me shiny, cracked leather shoes,
sheeny blue serge suit, phylacteries and four Jewish
wedding documents: Franny, Agnes (me mum), Jessy and Lil, all signed by the same rabbi. Fourth time lucky, Sid? And there will be a mirror, swivelled so Sid could look up his nose for hairs or down on to his pate. "Still got all me hair, son."

I am now of the age he was when he died — but half of that when I buried him. I cannot pass a mirror without I see him winking out. His teeth were carved and even. I've let mine go their own way. My hair is wispy, my face is gaunt. His lips laugh Where mine can hold no humour. His eyes draw me on: 'I'm waitin' for you, son."

Raphael Rish

Despatch from Canaan (Judges 4)

Deborah, primal Jewish mother, broke my men beside the Kishon.

I fled on naked foot to Heber, the Grass, prudently from home.

"Come in." said Jael, and tucked me up with a nice glass of milk. As I slept she drove a spike through my head.

Said Jael, half in mirth, half in passion "I have loved thee, Sisera, after my fashion."
IVER-FORTY. Platform 14. Spencer Street Station is eerily quiet for peak hour. Few passengers are waiting for the Williamstown train, for any train.

Arrival and departure announcements made by the chief stationmaster are heralded by tinny, chiming notes of the chromatic scale, disturbing this strange peace at irregular intervals.

*Doh mi sol doh.*

"The Fra...ton...ain...eavin...om...lat...orm...ix."

Dusk has almost faded. Cumulus clouds, flocculent and plump, have built up and filled the sky: inky blue in the north, the hard grey-blue of steel in the west. Behind their billows, a narrow, brushstroke arc of clear, pallid blue lingers. A lone cluster of purpleblack clouds flaunts the remains of pink-tinted edges.

Lolly wrappers and styrofoam cups and crisp autumn leaves are tumbled along the railway tracks by a gusting northerly. A soft-drink can is bounced, rattling, across the sleepers and gravel between the rails. At the east end of the platform, the walkway to the Crown Casino, an ugly, concrete construction, is bedecked with creamy yellow light globes which sparkle brazenly against the brooding sky. As far to the west as the eye can see, myriad railyard lights glow, an endless field of fireflies.

Across the tracks from platform 14 is a carpark. It is surrounded by a Cyclone wire fence, six feet high and mounted a further three feet by two taut strands of barbed wire, one atop the other. Inside this enclosure, scores of cars stand idle in neat, colourful rows. A maroon Jaguar cruises the lane parallel to the fence, rising and falling gently on its perfect suspension as the driver navigates the speed humps; a white van, other vehicles — reds, yellows, powder and navy blues, one turquoise — travel at moderate speeds as drivers search for a parking space. Spotlights beam
watchfully over the parked cars. The eyes of two cameras, secured to the top of lamp-posts, also do their work.

The wind turns a little to the west.

Solitary punters, with uniform dreams of good fortune, demeanours nonchalant or urgent, furtive or excited, proceed on foot, walking the few metres from the carpark to the casino. Hands in pockets, heads tucked into coat collars against the intrusion of the biting wind. A few walk in groups, swaggering braggadocios, their faces twisted into grimaces of forced hilarity.

Unnatural quietness blankets the carpark, too; the motors of the cruising cars are inaudible from the platform. No voices or laughter of hopeful gamblers reach the waiting commuters, though the distance between platform and carpark is short. Perhaps the north-westerly is blowing the sounds away, down the tracks to the casino.

Looming above the far side of the carpark, at its southernmost edge, is a shed with a corrugated iron roof. The building, well over seventy metres long, is dark and menacing; no lights glow in its small, barred windows. The atmosphere is penal: wire pen, watchful cameras, glaring lights, and the long, internment-like shed. The concrete, prisonlike casino. The wind. The absence of human voice.

With a brisk pace to her step, a young woman wearing a long black coat, her ginger hair flowing behind her from beneath the rim of her chic velvet hat, appears at the top of the ramp leading to platform 14. She makes a sharp left turn and strides the length of the platform — the click-clack of her high heels on the bitumen audible only in the immediacy of her passing — until she reaches the open door of the stationmaster's booth. There she stands, in the security of his presence, and places her black leather briefcase on the ground between her ankles. She stares straight ahead, into the carpark, making no eye contact with anyone.

The sky is black now. The evening grows colder as the wind turns inexorably to a westerly. Commuters waiting for the Williamstown train button up their coats, turn up their collars, wrap their scarves more snugly around their necks. Spencer Street Station, with its open platforms, offers no protection from the westerly's bluster.

Doh mi sol doh.

"Lil ... ale ... Lily ... ain ... on ... lat ... ix."

The stationmaster's voice is cracked into little pieces, smaller than syllables, by the static of the public address system. Or is his voice, too, being carried away on the wind, two and three letters at a time?
Doh mi sol doh.

"Dan...ong, de...ar...ing..." and so forth, every few minutes.

After each announcement, silence falls over the station, interrupted only by another fractured proclamation, and the arrival or departure of trains. Dandenong and Frankston trains have pulled out; Upwey will depart momentarily. Running footsteps break through the quiet, perhaps on platform 11, the Upwey line.

Silence, but for the wind humming in the overhead wires.

Without warning, shockingly, the voice of Marlene Dietrich singing Lili Marlene - in German - fills the entire station. No static fractures her voice; the wind does not bear it away. Dietrich is instantly recognisable: husky, sultry, with an undercurrent of mockery. Who is playing this song? Why? Is it an entertainment provided for passengers by the stationmaster to alleviate the bleakness of the evening? Do my fellow passengers on platform 14 hear her? They appear not to; certainly none respond. They continue to stare into the distance, or down at their feet; some snooze. One reads a newspaper, another a book. A young man, his eyes vacant, licks chip grease and salt from his fingers. An elderly woman consults her watch and peers down the tracks. A man wearing a football beanie and matching scarf jiggles his leg while thwacking his rolled-up newspaper into the palm of his hand.

This song, so familiar, so moving, sounds frightening here on this eerie night.

Below the platform, steel tracks glint in the beam of halogen lights. The cameras, ominous now, continue their surveillance. The iron-roofed shed appears more forbidding. Cars cruising the carpark are transformed into sentries on patrol. The platform feels more bleak, the evening spectral.

Dietrich sings:
Vor der Kaserne, vor dem großen Tor
Stand eine Laterne und steht sie noch davor...

In the blink of an eye, they are there: hundreds of Jews, trapped in cattle cars, their fingers gripping the wooden-planked sides. They are shoved and crammed into the old carriages, right there on the rails in front of platform 14. A brilliant white tallit, a prayer shawl, ripped from the shoulders of one of the devout by a protruding nail, flaps wildly, crazily, in the wind, beating against the side of the carriage where it has become stuck, from whence it seems to be attempting to make its escape.

The prisoners cry out to loved ones from whom they have been separated; they call to neighbours. Some pray. Horrified, I cover my ears against their cacophony.
Wenn sich die späten Nebel drehen
Wed’ ich bei der Laterne stehen
Mit dir Lili Marlen, mit dir Lili Marlen.
It is over; Dietrich has finished.

Slowly, the train bearing its cargo of Jews pulls out of the station and vanishes, as vapour, into the Spencer Street railyards, into the field of fireflies.

“Wi . . . ms . . . own . . . ain . . .”

The stationmaster's voice and the sibilance of brakes are startling. Weeping softly, I pull my coat around me as tightly as I can and board the five fifty to Williamstown. Ten stations, and I will reach my home.
Think of Jewish life in Australia and you will almost automatically think of the eastern states' communities and, in particular, Melbourne, which is home to one of the biggest communities in the world outside Israel, London and New York. People in Australia's east have long been vaguely aware of a small community in Perth, but the first synagogue in Western Australia was actually consecrated in 1896 in the remote town of Coolgardie, 550 kilometres from Perth and situated on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain, an empty expanse of near desert which divides Australia into East and West.

Coolgardie expanded rapidly after gold was discovered in 1892. It is difficult to estimate with any accuracy the size of its Jewish community; within any period of time the drifting population of Coolgardie rose and fell quite markedly. In 1896 the population was estimated at about 11,000 and the names mentioned in the Coolgardie Pioneer and the Postal Directory of the period suggests this included a little over 100 Jews or just under 1% of the total population. In any case, it was considered to be a sufficient number of observant Jews to warrant building a synagogue. The synagogue, in Shaw Street, was officially opened on 8 November 1896 by Rabbi Boas and the opening was reported in the Coolgardie Pioneer: "The building is for its size an imposing edifice, surmounted by a gilded cupola which, from its elevated position, can be seen all over Coolgardie." The President of the new synagogue was Councillor Levinson. David Mossenson, in The History of the Jews in Western Australia, estimated the membership of the synagogue in 1897 at 55 people; 40 men and 15 women.

What kind of place was this Coolgardie, the unlikely home of a sizeable Jewish community? A visiting journalist published his impressions in a Glasgow newspaper on his return home, and an excerpt was subsequently re-printed in the Coolgardie Pioneer:

A patch of desert, with a blistering sun, rain as scarce as in the nitrate country, a mixed population of assorted tastes and patterns, a woeful absence of sanitation. Condensed water, tinned meats, dust storms and chaos. Days in the blistering sun, and evenings in the bars, and when the thick yellow blaze of the kerosene lamp goes out, the night shuts down on a scene of collective desolation and individual misery. The ends of the earth have tipped their ne'er-do-wells into the huge refuse box that a big goldfield invariably furnishes.

That was one side of the story. But the pages of the Pioneer tell of another: a vigorous community with many clubs and societies where the Jews were well represented in all aspects of life. From the pages of the local newspaper it is possible to reconstruct some of this vigorous activity in the years from about 1893 to 1901.

The Pioneer during these years reports on the lives of Jewish doctors and businessmen, shopkeepers and hoteliers, politicians and public servants. There was Henry Friedman, the first Jewish doctor in the Colony, who practised in Sylvester Street. Judal Lipman who was the licensee of the Freemasons Hotel and later the Grand Hotel, and with a business partner also ran the Lion Hotel and the Club Hotel. There was Henry Fein, the licensee of the Prince of Wales Bar, who also ran the Cremorne Gardens Theatre and Restaurant, and a Mr P. Levy of the Cafe de Paris. A number of shops and stores were owned by Jews. There was B. Stein & Co., Booksellers and Stationers, and Meyer and Cawthrey, Pharmacists. Cohen and Dethridge were Tailors and Mercers in Bailey Street, and Silbert and Sharp later ran a drapery business in the same street. This was a street which suffered a number of serious fires at a time when fire was a major hazard in a town consisting of wooden shops and habitations.

There were Jews in the mining industry; some names mentioned are Dr Alfred Leon Simon, an engineer and analytical chemist, plus Messrs. Mannheim, Hertzburg, Daniell, Aarons and Feldman. And there were the public servants: Mr Nathan, a veterinary surgeon, was Health Inspector; L.F. Hyman and S. Solomon were clerks; Joseph H. Myslis was Bailiff to the Warden's Court. But the two
characters who stand out are I.J.K. Cohn and Lesser Levinson. Cohn's name cropped up with great regularity when he sat on the bench of the Magistrate's Court but also in relation to many other contentious issues. On one occasion, he took action against a man called Toll by whom he had been publicly slandered. Toll was fined a sum of £2 for this slander, and the Pioneer reported the case with obvious sarcasm: "A few of Mr Cohn's admirers in Coolgardie have raised a sub of £2 whereby to pay the fine inflicted on the man Toll for having exhibited his appreciation of I.J.K. Cohn's good qualities in too marked a manner." In the same edition Cohn expressed his bitterness over the paper's reporting of the event. It appears he was a man far from the hearts of his fellow residents of Coolgardie.

Jews were also active participants in the social and cultural life of Coolgardie. There were actors and musicians, with on one occasion a Mr C. Perlstein as the Honorary Conductor of the Coolgardie Orchestral Society. Of particular interest is the name of Mr Hermann Mandelstam of the Coolgardie Dramatic Club, who was related to the famous Russian Jewish poet, Yusip Mandelstam. In a letter to the Pioneer on the subject of the local water-supply, Hermann Mandelstam seized the opportunity to display his own florid literary capacity:

Alas! Coolgardie, the city seated on matrix golden, whose mighty magnetism drew waves of muscular and sharp brained humanity, all aglow with a fever of gain, rushing to feast on fortune. The oasis of gold, where emotion seethed to delirium, and wine flowed freer than tears in London, and wild thanksgiving symphonies raged unceasingly, like the surge of the ocean, seduced to capricious flights by the clang of glasses and siren lilts of Hebe, and the laughter that tells of fortune, etc, etc.

While Hermann was involved with the Thespian Society and the Dramatic Club, his wife for her part seems to have spent most of her time with her dressmaker. We read of her attendance at the St Andrew's Church ball, at which she wore pink silk and pearl trimmings, the Rectory ball clothed in buttercup silk, red poppies, chiffon, pearl and passementerie trimmings, the Queen's Birthday ball in red satin covered with very old black lace, and the Mayoral ball in heliotrope brocade with pearl trimmings.

Since Jews were represented in all facets of Coolgardie life and mixed freely in the community, how were they regarded by non-Jews? There are hints that certain Jews of a too abrasive manner occasionally ruffled the feathers of fellow citizens. The aforementioned I.J.K. Cohn, for instance, seemed to have attracted a certain
amount of antisemitism. Joseph Dickson was charged with using insulting words to Cohn. In court, Constable Poyser gave evidence that he heard the accused, who was drunk and noisy, say the town was run by Jews. On this occasion the Bench felt there was insufficient proof that the accused had used abusive language to Cohn but sufficient to suggest the accused had made himself highly objectionable, and on this note the case was dismissed. Despite such occasional hints of antisemitism, it appears that the community preferred to concentrate their collective venom on the Asian population. There was a society called the Anti-Asiatic League which received great popular support, and Asians who made the columns of the newspaper were often referred to in the most scurrilous terms. For instance, an article titled 'Alien Immigration' stated: "We want a white, not a pie-bald or whitey-brown W.A., and we intend to secure this by preserving the soil as far as possible from the contamination of the black or brown or yellow foreigner." This is quite mild compared with other comments. On October 1, 1895, a deputation of white men appeared at a Municipal Council meeting with a request. They were objecting to Afghans getting licences for cutting wood. The paper reported, "After much discussion, Councillor Hill moved, 'that the Government be asked to grant the Council power to refuse licences to Asiatic aliens for any purpose whatever'. The motion was passed, regrettably with Lesser Levinson as prime mover and seconder; later when campaigning for a seat on the Legislative Council he announced he would lend his support to Asian exclusion. It is certainly disturbing to find a prominent Jew taking this kind of racist attitude towards other minorities.

By and large the Jews were accepted and respected in Coolgardie at the turn of the century along with the various other religious minorities. Yet the Coolgardie Jewish community was destined to last only a few more years as the gold and mineral boom was drawing rapidly to an end. David Mossenson writes:

Despite the boom conditions which it generated, Coolgardie declined rapidly. By 1899 the congregation had become so decimated that the synagogue was offered for sale in order to liquidate the debt its construction had entailed. The process was not finalised until 1905 by which time the Goldfields Hebrew Congregation had long become nothing more than a memory.²

² Mossenson, 43.
Finding Theodore and Brina

My head holds dead people. I have fallen in, unwittingly, to a pastime I am sceptical of — searching for my roots. I see people in libraries and archives and Family History Centres, obsessed with finding traces of family in microform, in scraps of paper either official or arbitrarily preserved for posterity. Going blind, forgetting about their own lives, learning to love a different intensity of light in this search for clues. The linking of ourselves with strangers, through our blood. What value is there in that?

Why do I want to know about people dead for over one hundred years, people who left so few traces? What if I find unpalatable evidence: betrayals, madness, cruelties? I don’t imagine I’m looking for any grandeur here, no kings or popes or buried treasures.

Am I trying to validate myself through these people?

The stories my family told about themselves and how they came to be here, in this place. Well, they didn’t: they told no stories beyond those of kitchen cupboards, lost fortunes, bus timetables, the sanctity of silence in families. Shame drove this: a common enough story.

Theodore Krakouer, my grandmother’s grandfather, arrived in Perth, the Swan River Colony, in 1851, twenty two years after the British invaded. He arrived as a convict on the Mermaid. Let me tell you, at the beginning, the scant details. He was already married, had a son, and a variety of occupations including wool sorter, and he had been convicted of stealing clothes and money. He spent time in Portsmouth Gaol before making the journey to Fremantle. He was literate, a Jew, and, in his convict papers it is declared that his state of mind was hopeful.

So, starting with Theodore, I ask myself what it is that I want from these dead
people? Not just dead, but long gone. Aren't my extended, living, family enough for me?

Jews in Perth in the middle of the nineteenth century. Can you believe that? Just a handful of them, without community. To begin with, they were from different classes. I can only wonder where their faith was placed in that isolation. I consult a book about the history of Jews in Australia and it tells me that none of the Jewish convicts sent to the Western Australian colony remained after their indentured period. My great-great grandfather did, though. He died in the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum: so much for an escape. I can think of more artful ones.

The first story I need to tell myself is about me: how I was formed and where I belong. I may need a little fortitude to absorb the details from history, of their exclusions and hardships that have not been part of my life.

I am attempting to return to my roots. I may have to invent most of it.

My transformative moment in my family saga happens this way. A weekend away in two towns named Katanning and Broomehill. Homage to dead people who had done some good deeds. It is 1993. The Broomehill Historical Society has been planning a centenary celebration for at least twelve months to honour the men involved in the Holland Track, an invaluable passage between the wheatbelt and the goldfields opened up during the Gold Rush. Two of the four men who took that journey are my kin: my great-grandfather David Krakouer and his brother Rudolph.

We had organised a contingent, including two of David's daughters, the eldest and the youngest, the only ones still living. I travel with family and we stay in a motel in Katanning. A motel room that holds all the smells of the life that was there before us, and more fleas and bed bugs than the six adults sleeping in its three rooms can cope with. We don't sleep well.

The next morning we drive the thirty minutes to Broomehill. This marks the beginning of my story, where its focus is found. In a full day's proceedings that we are ill-equipped for with memories of scratching and tossing and turning in bed, there is a moment of awakening for me. Here, in my own time, many of the practices of the past seem to come together and subtle exclusions are enacted. We are gathered together in a Shire Hall with soup and roast chicken meals to remember our forebears. It may be that nobody else in the room takes affront as I do. I am sensitive to how people are positioned in a community, who is allowed in and who is not, how decency works.
The Krakouer men were as important as the other two on the expedition, some say that Rudolph even bankrolled it. But in the speeches, in the acknowledgments, and in the plaques that spelt their surname incorrectly, was this marking out, this judgement. And it read to me as a roll-call: sons of convicts, Jewish, merchants, outsiders. As well as the legacy of just how many Aboriginal people came to have this same funny Polish name. One hundred years after the event, Mr Holland and Mr Carmody managed to be handed most of the responsibility for the heroism of the six month journey. There we were, proud of our two men, the largest family gathering in the big Broomehill hall, and what I received was a diminished message, that there was something lesser in their effort because of who they were. But perhaps I am just too sensitive.

The second story I tell myself is Theodore and Brina's, and I had to make most of it up until now.
The parents of David and Rudolph.
Theodore Krakouer.
And Brina Israel.
He came on the second convict ship to this colony; she arrived at the age of 20 with her younger sister Esther on the Travancore two years later than him. Their first baby Abraham was born in the same year of her arrival and, I suppose, their first meeting. He is the first Jewish baby born in the colony; that at least is the claim. Eight more children were born, the last being my great-grandfather David in 1869.
To come on such a long and difficult journey and to end up a wreck. First a convict, then in gaol, and in the asylum as a lunatic. Sun-struck, worked too hard, under too much pressure and isolation. Theodore was born in Cracow, Poland between 1818 and 1820, was educated in Berlin, Germany and somehow made his way to London. For his twenty two years here he carried these names: Convict, Ticket of Leave Man, Expiree, Free, Colonial Patient. Twenty-two years of hard living and then he goes mad, out of control with syphilis, alcoholism, the works. Poor old man, younger than my own father today. Dead at 59 in 1877 after four years in the loony bin.
Delusions of grandeur: a family in Berlin. His wife, Jane, and a son, Samuel, living in London. They never came; he might not have wanted them here. Too harsh. Too wicked. A wild west town.
But I am given a gift when I sift the records: a set of correspondence on
finding theodore and brina

microfilm, letters back and forward between a woman who signs herself Mrs Brina Krakouer and the Colonial Secretary. About who was to pay for the keep of a lunatic in the asylum. They wanted her to pay, and she was a wily woman and they kept saying she could pay but would try to get away with it if at all possible. Does this mean 'Jew'? I keep wondering as I read these reviews they made on her ability to pay. Her loopy handwriting, her articulate argument and then her desperation and sense of justice: that shocked me. It was easier to think of her as illiterate and compliant, an alien to me.

The family has followed an obvious 'Jewish' occupation in Fremantle and along the Williams Road, as teamsters, merchants; it appears that they had got on and worked hard. When Theodore is locked up, mad, Abraham's labour keeps the family together. Brina says, in one of her letters about who is to pay:

*How willing I should have been to do so had I not been left with a large helpless Family & the only dependence I have is in my eldest son a Lad of twenty years of age who has to work very hard to support us. (Most people say great credit is due to him.) Too much put on him must be the cause of him wishing to leave the colony. He my son is willing or am I if we can get some assistance from Government to send my Husband home to his native country to his relatives in Berlin for the present it is as much as we can do to keep out of the Poor House.*

I do not know who paid for his food and care for the four years.

Krakouer. Still seven listings in the Perth White Pages. The most famous individuals with that name since 1942 are Nancy Rachel Krakouer and the brothers Jimmy and Phil Krakouer, renowned footballers. We are all family. Nancy was my great aunt.

The third story researched by me involves politics and Nancy Krakouer, and the observation, without surprise, that all of Theodore and Brina's nine children who married chose non-Jewish partners, even though some of them were buried as Jews. Un-surprising? To maintain the faith, and to find a partner across the social distance of free and convict classes must have been impossible.

Nancy, my great aunt, David's daughter, who died in 1985, was a failed political activist. She fell in love with a man and she followed his calling. Her infamy is so topical in the highly charged Australia of 1996, which is currently wearing racist simplicities boldly, and getting away with asserting them again in public. Graeme Campbell, a failed politician, has just formed a new political party, the Australia First Reform Party. It seems a homage to the party that Nancy's membership of allowed her name to be printed four times in the New York Times in 1942. The
Australia First Movement — Western Australian branch. With only four members: a merry little band of rabid fascists. Perhaps Nancy was simply lovestruck, smitten, and didn’t think through the consequences. She wouldn’t have known about the logic of the Nazi Party at the time: that her two Jewish grandparents would have made her a mischling, first degree and therefore non-exempt from the Final Solution. It was lucky that the diaspora meant Nancy’s daddy had been born in Fremantle and not Cracow or Berlin.

Nancy was interned. In my childhood when I was told stories of Nancy as a wild woman, the coda involved the punishment for being wild. Nancy had been deported out of Australia for her bad deeds. I never asked where, as an Australian citizen, she could be deported to, because I liked the mystery too much. Later, it is always later, I read of her dislike of Jews, her desire to see Roman Catholic priests put on road-work and the church hierarchy shot. The New York Times, covering the treason trial, records that the group had drawn up a list of persons to be assassinated. “Nancy Rachel Krakouer, a post office employee and the only woman among the defendants, was said to have suggested that the victims be tortured before being shot.” In the proclamation of an ‘Australia First Government’, which included a welcome for the Japanese and relief at liberation from the Jewish domination of Australia, Nancy was to be appointed minister of all women’s organisations. She was acquitted in their 1942 trial on the charge of conspiring to assist the Japanese forces, but ordered interned under national security regulations.

Do I even want to go into the detail of her kindnesses, her generous actions. Her manipulations when she returned from three decades of exile, her ‘deportation’ to Melbourne, the prodigal aged aunt come to clear up her business and prepare to die. Her final Will and Testimony? What about her complete eschewing of the notorious past she had lived?

The fourth story I could tell you might be about legacies, how things are made, a synthesis in an age of cynicism about synthesising anything. A story with elements of madness, of being locked up, of handing down to a child a birthright. (I’m still deciding if I will tell it. Bear with me.)

In 1994, I worked with a group of women artists: writers, visual artists, historians, performers. We set out in our project to recover the presence of women in two institutions that were now museum sites: the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum and the Fremantle Gaol. The curators found an absence of evidence that women had ever been incarcerated in these places: the traces were diluted, indistinct. We found ways of re-spiriting these lives, redressing history’s oversights and its collection of
information and detritus. Through our own expression we called up the spirits of individual women and worked around social and political implications of their presence, and their absence. I was interested in making links between how women are locked up now and how it might be different from last century. Our research period stretched over a long hot summer in the grounds of the old Asylum, now the Fremantle Arts Centre. I came to my conclusions early: that for women who are locked up change happens slowly.

What I thought of in this female-centred space we built for ourselves over those months was the old man, Theodore, who had died in the building. The trump card for me was the discovery in the State Archives of his certificate of lunacy, signed by H.C. Barnett in 1873. Theodore was suffering from delusions, was in a state of delusional excitement, and told the doctor that he “hears a voice operating from his belly giving him messages from God Almighty to destroy the world”. His death certificate in May 1877 gives cause of death as Softening of the Brain, Paralysis and Exhaustion. His age is recorded as 57. Brina was 44, and I am unable to find her in any more official records: no more births, no marriages, and details of her death so far still obscured.

My quest is a simple one: to name these people, my family, to invoke their spirits, and to reclaim a little space in a town that was governed in every sense by Scottish men, a place where public office was often a matter of birthright and some lucky fathers and sons could work a productive partnership.
Our father dabbled in stamps,
And pelargoniums,
A fairly ordinary guy,
Except now and then
When we would have to say,
"Sorry, Dad isn't home".
We all knew of course
Our name wasn't really Smith,
You don't flee Europe
With a name like Smith.
The eldest could remember
It was a longer name
With a 'z' in it somewhere,
But "Mr Smith" stood between
The now and then,
And erected doors
That we could never open

On the Dad's not home days
We heard him crying out behind locked doors,
In some strange tongue,
Like a man possessed,
By what, we didn't know.
After some hours he'd come lurching out,
And stand at the lounge room door,
Eyes gripping us like hands
And give the usual warning
Which we didn't heed much,
"Don't ever tell anyone
That you're a Jew".
Then he would walk the dog,
Poor little mutt,
For mile on mile,
And leave his devils behind
As he tramped through suburbia.

After he’d gone,
We’d turn back to the screen,
Rather than look at each other,
Continuing our coke,
And munching our hamburgers,
We’d concentrate
On less embarrassing displays
By characters like Superman
Or Donald Duck.
We learned quite young
That the fantastic
Is far more comfortable
Than the real.
Part 3 of
'you chase after your likeness'

Moyshe
my grandfather
my father's father
whose description appears on the margin
(of the naturalization certificate)
age: 49

... renounced his allegiance
to the government of Poland...
has status
of a Natural-Born British
Subject signed
Baron Foster of Leith
Governor General

you were round-eyed
in asthma’s hiatus Da
without breath or English

no Polish either
pure Yiddish only for prayers Hebrew
you bound yourself with your tefilin every
day
you lived with us Da
when my mother was sick my father
panicked my brother and me
into a home temporarily
he didn’t ask you for help

it’s harder for men
my mother again
but my mother ambulanced
worried
my face was holding
the shape of her own
when her mother died

we were sent not to an orphanage
but a place in the country
a convalescents' retreat
where I was taught
magic an already-eaten-egg
turned over
looked unbroken again

I was three years old
could see my father
coming across a South coast paddock
bringing a birthday cake
I'd already had
a convalescents' treat

my father's train-ride
to get there and not be first
with the cake he'd made for me

smelling the orange icing
in the tin he held
catching the taste
I almost let slip
the separating guilt
of feeling sorry for my father
bringing me this gift

yet
for us my brother too
somewhere out of sight with his own find
a toy pedal-car
our luck or love held
in this stand in
for an orphanage
and the long lasting 12 months
when once a paid-to-help girl
cared for us at home

I caught sight of her
hitting my brother
with a hair-brush
she put me in a bath
told me to lick her

showed me pale body hair
then as if cunningly
turned on me
angry

my mother's recovery or something else
made her disappear

Da
no-one thought you should've helped then
though later
like a teacher's assistant in the shtetel
you took me
five-years-old to school
every day
for a week
I wanted to go alone

now alone means
you belong to no-one
it is like saying
no-one means you
are the one they know

last night's party

turning over finger food

language's telling
power
making me nervous
if it could be different
not knowing who
was speaking

having speech
is like having faces

Da
inside your face and what you said
were thousands of thorns

I don't have a photo of you
with my father as a boy
or at any time an image
of father and son together
there are single portraits only
stems
showing where the cut-off starts
How come a good little Jewish boy from Camberwell writes not one but two operas for Germany?

It is a miracle, no other Australian composer has ever achieved anything like it. There was G.W.L. Marshall-Hall’s Stella, a truncated version, which was massacred at London’s Palladium Theatre in 1913, between the balladeer and fire-eater, driving the composer to the brink of suicide, and then his Romeo and Juliet was slated for the Nürnberg Opera in 1915, but Intendant Hofrat Bader had committed suicide and by that time everybody had declared suicidal war on everybody else anyway, and that was the end of that.

But miracles hide deeper things.

Comedians are in reality tragedians. Just look at my face on Matcham Skipper’s sculpture of myself. The suffering expressed is exactly the opposite to the public image I have tried to project as an entertainer, you will know what I mean if you have been to George Dreyfus Live, A Dollar for the Autograph, Open House with George Dreyfus or whatever else I have called the various versions of my “Show” over the last twenty years.

I do not dare to confront my catastrophes directly, they are so traumatic that I need a detour to get at them, and this I do with great caution.

An early catastrophe for me, I was 23 at the time, was the premature death of my father. A second degree victim of Nazi persecution, he was able to save his life, but could not survive the separation from his German cultural environment. After the war he wanted to return, firstly in 1948 by way of London, and then directly in 1951, but his reluctant family made it impossible, and inwardly the fear of being unwanted in Germany, his mother Paula’s suicide in 1942 — the year of the great deportations — all these conflicts were too great for him. He just died and I retained a deeply buried guilt feeling, I retained a wound. Perhaps I should have gone back with him. It is all somewhat unclear, but certainly mirrored in my own relationship with Germany which is equally unclear. One moment here, one moment there,
always backwards and forwards, just like the waves of the ocean. At ten years of age I was torn away from Germany, but in my cultural soul have always remained there.

Like my father I had terrible anxieties to return completely to Germany. I had to take being unsuccessful there into consideration and to take my family here into consideration, I had to take my local success as a film composer, which gave me an income, into consideration and to take my two 'Australian' operas which were completely irrelevant to Germany, into consideration, Garni Sands, unsuitable with its story, The Gilt-Edged Kid, unsuitable with its music. Very much like my father I did not want to sit alone in a room in Cologne or Berlin and fear that no-one would take any notice of me.

I could not work directly about my father. The personal guilt problem that I did not help to save his life was too traumatic for me. It is my way to encircle, to circumvent, in a sort of Till Eulenspiegel way, but not to confront problems directly.

In the case of my father, the problem which slumbered deep within me, could not be dealt with in my usual superficial, if enthusiastic, show-biz manner.

I needed to write indirectly about him, concealed in the guise of Walther Rathenau, the German-Jewish foreign minister, assassinated by proto Nazis in 1922. I needed to write about the traumatic conflicts in his being, but not about his death, for which I could have had some responsibility. This would have been far too direct for me.

Like Rathenau, my father loved Germany, was a through-and-through Germanophile, "die Tieck und Schlegel Übersetzungen sind besser als das origineile Shakespeare", may I quote him. He accompanied Schubert Lieder beautifully, but in 1951 he just died suddenly, of his unsolvable problem.

I, on the other hand, did not want to die of it, not as a young, not as a middle-aged, not as an old man. No, I want to die of my own problems, not those of my father. I did not want to grapple with this "minefield of belonging" so directly. Nor did I want to grapple with the problem of having anything to do with Germany at all. "How could you, George, after what they did to my family, your family, one million Jewish children", or Avraham Cykiert, who does not even get off the plane during a Frankfurt stop-over, a deep-seated trauma it is for all of us, all round.

Being a cunning, crafty, wily person, I could not confront this problem directly, but rather had to creep around it stealthily, like in the world of German fairy tales, even had to outwit myself.

I disguised the fundamental father problem by playing pass-the-parcel,
unravelling the wrappings one at a time, quite unlike young Jonathan ripping open his birthday presents in fits of furious expectancy.

There was the overt aim to have a project suitable for gaining the Don Banks Award money, which I needed, as my film world had collapsed around me. There was the overt aim of overcoming the trauma of the 'rejection without reason', let alone performance of my opera The Gilt-Edged Kid by the Australian Opera in Sydney, and there was the overt aim to contribute something significant to the history of opera, something I dreamed of in The Last Frivolous Book, often hoped for but never really expected and held for nigh-on impossible.

For a fact, over four hundred operas have been written in Australia, but till now they have never made world operatic history, like Melba, Austral or Sutherland have. For this to eventuate, the performance has had to take place in Germany, the nation with a culture that still takes the future of opera as an art-form seriously, where its future is still a major discussion point, just see the massive reviewing in press, on radio and television that followed the Uraufführungen of my two operas there.

Into all these traumas of fatherdeath, of hiding from oneself what one really wants, of not knowing where one wants to be, my two opera protagonists fitted perfectly, Rathenau with his trauma of wanting to remain Jewish, but at the same time wishing to fit snugly into German society, showing off his money of which he had more than enough, and Marx, with his trauma of rejecting his Jewishness, hated by German society, railing against money and always needing more.

With Rathenau and Marx, both of them, I was on the right track. Personal stories could be told, personal feelings could be revealed, all in a round about way, without ever declaring to oneself or others, openly.

It started on the surface, quite well. I had come across Ernst Schulin's paper on Rathenau to a conference in Sydney, I went to see him at his University in Freiburg, he was lukewarm about the idea of turning the major figure in his own public life into an opera, after all, he is the editor of the Rathenau Gesammtausgabe. Schulin wrote despairingly about the final result after attending the Uraufführung in Kassel, but he did give me a stack of relevant books at the time, and I set to, sketched a scenario, quite hopelessly old-fashioned, and through contacts approached August Everding in München, who passed it on to his Betriebsdirektor, Gerd Uecker, who had libretto pretensions behind him, who stated, just like composer Siegfried Matthus in Berlin, who did have opera successes behind him, "Da steckt nichts drin" unanimously, leaving a traumatic experience for me in far off Melbourne behind me.
But miracles do happen. In 1989 I had heard Volker Elis Pilgrim speak at a Sunday afternoon German get-together. He had impressed me greatly. I did nothing. Three months later, at a similar function, a third force propelled him back into the room after he had said goodbye to the gathering. I offered to drive him to his destination, we stopped off for a coffee at Tamani's Restaurant in South Yarra, our fate was sealed, just like in the Bible, for the next seven years. Pilgrim offered to look for a librettist while in Germany, of course returned empty-handed, was resolute that he was going to do it himself, wishfulfillment, and the good little Jewish boy from Camberwell, without knowing it, is on his way, writing not one but two operas for Germany.

We matched perfectly, even if the traits of our character were diametrically opposed to each other. Our two operas, *Rathenau* and *Die Marx Sisters* are filled to the brim with simultaneously delivered multiple texts, much to the despair of the majority of the multitudinous German critics who came to the Uraufführungen in Kassel in 1993 and Bielefeld in 1996 respectively, and whose writings Pilgrim discusses endlessly to this very day.

In the simpler scenes the libretto looks as set out below — heaven protect you from the more complex ones — and I have adapted Pilgrim’s layout to list our characteristic traits of differences.

**Dreyfus**

- is adaptable
- is pragmatic
- is realistic, lives by the world.
- circumvents evil
- practices hybrid in art,
- Jews are adept at mixing
- claims money allows you to be an artist
- answers every phone call,
- it may be Hollywood
- manages without money
- just wants to survive

**Pilgrim**

- uncompromising
- is fanatic
- is idealistic, lives by the unconscious
- confronts evil
- practices purity in art,
- Germans are forbidden to mix
- claims money destroys an artist
- pulls plug out of the wall,
- it may be Hollywood
- manages without women or is it men
- just has deep convictions

At first I doubted, Pilgrim had nothing to show, no credentials, no operatic experience, a book scribbler, what did he know about opera?

In 1991 he rang from Germany, the opera was a third finished at the time, and
he had it with him. “You can’t imagine the interest in Rathenau, it is phenomenal”. I still doubted, but he was right. “Wir sind neu” and to our detriment in our own lifetimes, “Wir sind zu früh”.

Pilgrim was correct on other fronts as well, if I had returned with my father in 1948 or 1951 I would have been burnt out by the sheer effort of simply keeping up with the ever changing German cultural trends, but no, I made it, late in life, in my sixties, a real survivor, again I did not perish, and this is how the good little Jewish boy from Camberwell wrote not one, but two, operas for Germany.

Nora Krouk

Sponsoring Migrants

We sweat over the forms.
We sweat.
After the name calling,
the threats,
prospects of zilch
— no prospects,
foot on a wobbly bridge
over polluted waters
cousin, sister and daughters
— applicants,
the world’s Jews,
fill in the forms.

Points for their skills,
blood ties, age,
character testimonials
and good health.
Striving for an acceptable
profile of solid citizen:
magic eighty five points.
Casting their fates
onto distant seas,
agonizing over the
hundred and five questions.
WHEN my grandmother died I refused to cover the mirrors. “You’re being stupid. Selfish. You have to do it out of respect for your grandmother.”

I stood dumb. Determined. Those sheets were not going to shroud the mirrors. There were things I needed to see. And besides, I would have no creepy white ghosts in my house.

“Leave her. Leave her alone. Let her mourn in her own way. The important thing is that she mourns.”

But I didn’t intend to mourn. I was too angry. Not with my grandfather who had spent my childhood poring over his books and ignoring the screaming between his wife and their daughters. With my grandmother. I wanted to yell at her the way my mother and my aunts always had.

My grandparents live with my parents and me. They are my family. We fill the house; there is always someone cooking or eating, always someone shouting. My mother and her sisters speak to each other on the telephone every day. They discuss the arguments they have with each other and with my grandmother. Who is right and who is wrong. Usually one of them cries.

My mother is my grandparents’ youngest daughter. The only one born in Australia. Her sisters were born in Poland, in a city called Warsaw. When I am older I will never think of the word Warsaw without the word ghetto, but that will come later. For now my world is small and safe. Every day I follow my grandmother around the house as she tidies and cleans and chats to me in her musical Yiddish. Do I understand her? Maybe, although soon I will not.

My grandparents and their friends have taken me with them to eat afternoon tea.
in a cafe. Perhaps it is someone’s birthday. I am wearing my new lemon dress and although earlier I allowed my mother to brush my hair, now I am too excited to sit still. All the grownups laugh and talk and feed me cheese cake and spoonfuls of the rich cream that floats on the top of their coffee. It is warm and noisy and steamy. A large red faced man enters the cafe and hisses at us.

“Speak English, why don’t you.”

We swallow our coffee and leave.

When I come into the house my parents and their friends are watching a film projected onto the living room wall. I slip into the room expecting to see myself or my cousins building sand castles, waving to the camera.

But this is something different.

There are men — gaunt men with sad European eyes sunk in their sockets. They shuffle towards us dressed in striped pyjamas. They are bewildered, as though they have just woken from a sleep where they’d been locked inside a nightmare so profound it had become more real than reality itself.

There are piles of bodies. Nightmare bodies. Skeletons with elongated arms and legs covered in paper thin skin; skeletons with staring eyes and screaming mouths. More bodies are tossed onto the pile while we watch. The picture shudders on the wall as my father’s projector whirrs. Nobody speaks.

Then there are more piles: suitcases, spectacles, shoes, hairbrushes. Long wooden sheds where these shuffling men, these bodies, have been living.

I leave the room. My parents and their friends haven’t noticed me coming in and they don’t see me leave. I never speak to anyone about it but what I have seen has burnt into my flesh. I feel as branded now as my grandparents’ friends whose arms bear the Nazis’ permanent tattoo. Except that mine is inside me where no-one can see it.

I am in the school shelter shed with the other Jewish kids. I don’t know any of them because they’re from other classes, but when the Christians have Religious Instruction we’re all lumped in together.

A boy walks past on his way to the toilets.

“The Jews killed Christ,” he yells.

No-one speaks for a moment and then the others continue their conversations.

I didn’t kill Jesus. How could I? I love him. That sweet baby in the manger with the beautiful mother. Whenever I can, I sit in the Religious Instruction class
listening to the stories the soft voiced teacher tells. He has an easel covered in green felt, and red, yellow and blue felt pictures that he moves around to illustrate these stories. At Christmas I learn their songs.

Away in the manger
No crib for a bed
The little lord Jesus
Lays down his sweet head.

So if the Jews — if we — if I — killed Jesus, then who killed the Jews? Who turned them into those skeletons with expressionless eyes? Who piled them up into layers of dead? Who left them to flicker in black and white on my living room wall while I learn the words: Bergen Belsen, Auschwitz, Hitler, Eichmann?

At home I ask my mother if the Jews killed Christ? “We don’t believe in him,” she says.

What does that mean? We don’t believe in him. Is that the same as killing him? This is obviously something to keep secret. If the Christians knew, you’d be pretty unpopular. Maybe they’d holocaust you.

I’m not the same as they are. The idea is for them not to know it, not to find out how different you are. You have to pretend you are normal. Ordinary. Pretend you get Christmas presents.

At night my father and my grandfather speak about the State of Israel. This is the same as the Land of Israel, the Land of Milk and Honey that I learn about at Sunday School.

At Sunday School I learn to do hand stands. I can stay upside down for ages. Longer than anyone else there. Sometimes I am afraid I’ll never be able to be right side up again. When I swing my feet back down to earth and stand up the world turns upside down.

My heart aches for olive groves and the rocky hills of Jerusalem. I long for an ancient homeland I’ve seen only in photographs. My father’s family were pioneers in Palestine, clearing the rocky soil, draining the swamps, risking malaria and attacks by Arabs. Like the people in the Bible.

I love the Bible. My father sits on the end of my bed and reads me Bible stories. I am the beautiful Rachel fetching water from the well, and the brave Yael who welcomes and then kills the Roman general Sisera. I rejoice in the victories of the Israelites against their enemies the Amalekites, the Philistines.
In the street I play with the neighbourhood kids, all of us swept outside from under our mothers' feet. We play cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, Robin Hood. We run into someone's house and on the wall hang pictures. I try not to look at them but I can't help it. A grown up Jesus with a beard and long wavy hair. His mother is young and beautiful with a blue shawl over her head and a red exposed heart. Their eyes follow you around the room and look right into you, seeing your terrible thoughts. They know you are different, foreign, that you don't believe in them.

I run home.

I am always spying on people. I listen at doors. I hear my grandmother whispering to my mother.

"If it happens here...".

"Oh, Mum."

"Listen to me. I know what I'm talking about. If it happens here take her to the nuns. They'll hide her."

They're talking about Germans, Nazis, the Holocaust. Jews are not like other people. We have to be careful. It could happen again at any time. But we would be ready. We'd have plans. We wouldn't be caught unprepared. I would be safe in a convent.

Except for those pictures.

My best friend is called Patricia. She is pretty with a smooth white face and long plaits hanging down her back. She learns tap dancing and her father won a medal in the war. Her grandmother lives in the country. I like to go with Patricia and her father to meet Granny Martin at the station when she visits. In the car on the way home we lift the lid of Granny's basket so we can stroke her ginger cat, whose soft fur feels like the coats that lie heaped up on my parents' bed when we have visitors.

When we return to the house, Patricia's mother puts the kettle on and brings out home made scones and sandwiches made with thin slices of white bread.

"How are you, Mother?"

"I'm well, dear."

They speak softly and listen to each other's answers.

"You may leave the table, girls," Patricia's mother says, and my heart sings. I love her.
Afterwards Patricia and I lie on the floor of her room and talk about films we have seen.

I never invite Patricia to my house. My grandmother and her friends have been playing cards at our house. Now they are eating cake and talking with their mouths full. I try to sneak past them into the kitchen but they see me.

"Come here and kiss me." My grandmother waves me towards her. "You don't love your Buba any more?" She kisses me noisily. "My sheine girl. Isn't she beautiful? And your aunties? What about a kiss for them too." I am passed around the table, plump pairs of hands clasping me, pinching my cheeks. "Such a beauty. What grade are you in? Do you know my granddaughter? Such a big girl. What are you going to do when you leave school? I knew your mother when she was your age. You look just like her."

I escape into my bedroom and slam the door.

The mourners fill the house. My grandfather and his three daughters sit on small black chairs which remind me of the children's furniture my mother handed down to my young cousins when I outgrew it. My grandfather has shrunk to fit his chair; he looks tiny next to his daughters.

My mother and my aunts wear scarves over their heads, knotted under their chins. The edges of their cardigans are ripped. Their faces are pale and their noses and eyes red. They hold hands with each other. I don’t recognise them.

I move out into the dining room with the women, my grandmother's friends, whose plump arms glitter with bracelets and rings. Each woman's hair is a gleaming helmet, hard to the touch from the spray that has been pumped onto it. Their well lipsticked mouths reveal large teeth with occasional gold fillings. Tears run down their powdered faces leaving silver snail tracks. They blow their noses and dab at their eyes. Black mascara smudges, blue eyeshadow spreads and flakes.

Their kisses leave lipstick imprints on my cheeks which I rub with my hand when they turn away.

My grandfather recites the mourner's kaddish. The house grows quiet as he reads. Even the women stop murmuring and fidgeting though you can hardly hear his words. Each time he repeats the prayer there is this same stillness.

I can tell when the minyan is over by the crowding of people into the living room where my grandfather sits with his daughters on their low chairs.

My grandmother’s friends speak Yiddish to me. I don’t understand a word even
though I have heard this language spoken around me all my life.

They kiss. “Hello, how are you? How are you?” they ask each other as though this were a mantra to be repeated and not a question requiring an answer.

I wriggle out of their grasp.

They fill the house with their foreignness: their smells; the gefillte fish and fried fish balls, the herring, the dry sponge cakes that now cover the kitchen table; their cloying perfume; their sharp unintelligible conversation; their too ready laughter, their too ready tears.

Already now they are talking loudly. Don't they know this is a house of mourning? Don't they know they should be silent, respectful?

“Yiskadal v'yiskadesh shmai rabah.” My grandfather is unshaven, wearing his slippers and his familiar grey pullover now torn at its v-neckline. He looks old and tired. Tears are suddenly hot and painful at my eyes which is strange because I don't feel sad.

When all the visitors have left and even my aunts have gone home I knock on my grandfather's door. He is sitting on his bed as though he doesn't know what to do next. Like when I was much younger and really tired and sat waiting for my grandmother to undress me and put me to bed.

I notice he has covered the dressing table mirror with his jacket.

“Do you want that I should take it down? Does it upset you?”

“No, Zeide. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have uncovered the mirrors.”

My grandfather never says much. There are no answers for me here.

In the night I dream of ghosts in white sheets leading an endless procession of dead bodies, which jerk as though they are marionettes whose strings are being pulled by some unseen person. I open my mouth to call out a warning but although I scream and scream there is only silence.
was in my mid teens before I knew, that according to Jewish law, I was Jewish.

It was not that prior to my teens people were celebrating Bar Mitzvahs and fiddling on the roof around me, and I was too dim-witted to notice. On the contrary, nothing overtly Jewish was happening around me. Our family celebrated Christmas and ate pork. We didn't look Jewish I thought, we wore no funny clothes.

There was my ski-jump nose of course, but I had too narrow an experience of ethnic groups to recognise my features as Semitic. There were other clues too, fragments I can piece together now I know to look for them.

At the time I didn't realise I was Jewish because neither of my parents or anyone else around me mentioned it. My father maintained a conspiracy of silence which lasted until his death at the age of eighty eight.

* * *

Outside it is freezing. The wind slices the sky, bangs against the back door of the old house and seeks out the cracks in the timbered walls. Inside, a fire blazes in the old Metters stove. A pot of chicken soup simmers on one edge. My mother stands at the stove, turning the potato latkes which are my favourite food. She calls them potato pancakes. I watch the latkes sizzle in the hot fat and slowly turn brown. Surreptitiously, I nibble the crisp edges of one which has just been cooked and which my mother has placed on a warming plate near the pot of soup. "Jana, don't be so impatient. It is nearly lunchtime." She smiles at me and I sprinkle the pancake with salt and begin to eat. I am eight years old and at school but now it is school holidays. Lunchtimes on holidays are special.
The phone rings, causing us to start. It has not been installed for very long, this magical device which sits so imposingly on the wall. “Watch the pancakes for me,” says my mother, moving the pan to the side and going to answer the phone. She listens quietly, then looks puzzled. “Yes,” I hear her say. “This is the home of Mr Sax.” There is a pause. “His first name? It is Irwin.” Another pause. “Ervin? Yes, that is his name in Czechoslovakia. Why do you want to know?” The pause is longer this time. “I see. A letter. From Israel. You think Ervin should come in to see you. I think this afternoon it could be arranged. Two o’clock at the Road Board Office. I will tell him. Thank you.”

I do not know what Israel is and have only a vague idea about the Road Board but they sound important. I make excuses not to play with my best friend who lives next door. All afternoon I help my mother in the small shop which is at the front of the house, waiting for my father to come home.

When he returns, my father is silent. The only evidence of his appointment is an envelope. “It is a letter from Bruno,” he tells my mother. He tells me nothing.

At night, I lie awake in my small bedroom listening to the sound of their voices rising and dipping like waves at the beach. They talk in rapid Czech and I cannot make meaning from their words. All I follow is the tone of the conversation. My father’s voice is defensive, defiant, firm. My mother pleads, placates, soothes. I catch a mention of my name and fall asleep.

In the morning, there are four black and white photos on the kitchen table. It is years before I recognize that they represent a victory for my mother. I finger them gingerly, reverently. One is of a man in front of a large building. Now, with adult eyes, I can see that it looks like a six storey office block and is unfinished. A temporary ramp leads to the entrance and scaffolding is still attached to one end of the building. Modern Israel is emerging. Then, I ignore the building, focusing on the man in the foreground who wears a white shirt, black pants and what seems to be a white apron.

This, my mother tells me, is my uncle Bruno. He is my father’s brother and a doctor. The photo is of his hospital in Tel Aviv in Israel. Another of the photos is of Bruno at his desk. I take in the information. Even then I delight in the sound of words. Uncle, Tel Aviv. I have a distant memory of the word ‘uncle’. Tel Aviv is a new word. So too is ‘Bruno’. I try them out. I am too young to notice that there is a phone on Bruno’s desk. Bruno has a phone. We have a phone. No-one makes a connection.

The other two photographs are of my cousin, Ruti. In one photo, Ruti is a baby,
lying on her stomach on a rug. In the other, she is a child of two or three, a pretty child with curly hair and a big smile. She has a lollypop to her lips. I am delighted, captivated.

For the next few years, a smiling child holding a lollypop becomes my concept of 'Israel'.

***

When I am much older, my mother tells me that for two or three years prior to the arrival of Bruno's letter, his three brothers and his sister didn't know where we were. My father never wrote. The last place we were known to have lived was Katanning and finally, in desperation, Bruno wrote to the Katanning Road Board to ask if we still lived in the area or if anyone knew where we had gone.

***

It is not surprising that I have an unusual concept of the terms like 'Israel' and 'family'. Family was the three of us. We did not have Jewish names like Moshe, Golde and Miriam. We were Ervin, Marta and Jana. Not that we got to keep even those names in Australia. Anglicised, we became Irwin, Martha and Jane. Apart from the three of us, 'family' arrived in letters and parcels in the mail. The contents of these communications were always cryptic. Occasional letters from Eva. A photo of Jarka and Sol, dressed in warm coats and hats, standing by a bare tree in Toronto. A book of children's verse written in Czech from Viktor in Prague. The prettiest pink nightie I had ever seen and some newspapers from Walter and Shari in Los Angeles.

A family dispersed.

***

The nightie arrives when I am in high school. I start to become interested in my background, my origins. I resent being an only child, questioning why I have no siblings. My father turns it into a joke. "We had you and thought that was enough to inflict on the world," he quips. I am not pacified but know not to question my father further. I fear one of his silent rages and their consequent pressure on my mother. She hints at a miscarriage, reticently, as she is uncomfortable talking about sexual matters. I have teenage children of my own when I meet Bruno, now a gynaecologist, who tells me of my own difficult birth and their concerns for my
mother who was thirty six when I was born. This is old for a first time mother in 1948. My paternal grandmother had probably had ten of her thirteen children by the time she was in her mid thirties.

I continue to go to the Methodist Church I have been attending for years. My mother originally sent me to Sunday School because that was what Australian families did in the fifties. I attend an active and lively youth group. Most of the group are there because of the social contacts; to get a girlfriend or boyfriend. I sense I am different because I enjoy the religious experience. I enjoy seeking. I also enjoy belonging.

"Mum, was I baptised when I was a baby?" I ask. "Yes, I think so." She is preoccupied, evasive. "Where are the papers?" I pester. "All my friends have papers. I need to show them at church or I'll have to get baptised again." "You were baptised at the hospital in Jihlava," my mother replies, "and I don't know if there were any papers. We don't have any. It might be easier if you are baptised here anyway."

My mother often joins me at church services. My father doesn't come. Not yet. Now, as a teenager, I want to be baptised. It is important for me to belong somewhere, to be part of a larger family.

***

Our photos are not arranged neatly in photo albums, with each photo having a neat inscription as I find in friends' homes. Some are placed haphazardly in old albums, photo corners keeping memories precariously in place. Others are stored loosely in an old box. I flick through them, trying to make sense of them. My mother talks more openly now that I am older. I look at a photo of a young girl and a young boy. They are squatting, playing with some ducklings. There is a larger photo, a close up, of the girl. I wear my hair as I did at that age with its customary central bow. "Oh look, here are a couple of photos of me. Who am I playing with?" I continue to rummage. "Here's another one." A different dress but the same bow. I peer at the photo. "Where was this taken?" The buildings are old and wooden and there appears to be a bath outside on some cement blocks. "And who is the woman?"

My mother is silent. For a while she says nothing. When she speaks, she does so quietly. "That is Grandma Sax, your grandmother." "But she died before I was born," I say. My tone is accusing, angry. Something is wrong. I have been told that my
four grandparents died before I was born. Now it seems I have a grandmother after all, or did have, and no-one has told me. My mother is silent again. I look at her face and my rage dies. Whatever she has to tell me is difficult. I encourage her to talk; and for once I keep quiet and listen. And so I hear the story of Judith, my half-sister and for the first time, some of the story of my family.

I hear how both sets of grandparents lived in villages in Czechoslovakia; my mother's family near Brno and my father's family on the border with Slovakia. Both families were Jewish and my parents were brought up as practicing Jews, a practice they later gave up. In their twenties, my mother and my father married. My mother married a young lawyer named Karel and my father married Gaby. Judith, the girl in the photo, the girl I thought was me, was their daughter.

My mother tells me that just prior to World War II because of anti-Jewish feeling, anyone who could leave the country was encouraged to do so. An escape route was planned through to Palestine. My mother went with Karel. My father and Gaby wanted to go too but agonised over Judith. The boat trip they were about to undertake was illicit and dangerous and people were advised not to take children. The old and the young would surely be safe in Czechoslovakia. Judith was left with Grandma Sax.

After the war and without Gaby whom he had divorced, my father returned to Novy Hrozenkov. Of the eleven children, their spouses and children who had been living before the war, only Eva and her family and my father and his three brothers remained. Judith and Grandma Sax were no longer in the village. There were reports of them being sent away, to a concentration camp. Nothing was confirmed. They searched, my mother said. Firstly my father; and then when they married, my mother helped him. They only left for Australia after they had exhausted all leads and all possibilities.

"Why doesn't he ever speak about it?" I ask. My mother shrugs her shoulders. He feels badly about it," is all she says.

I must feel badly about it too. I don't even mention my Jewish background to anyone until I am nineteen and can't talk about it openly until much later.

* * *

It is again Bruno who fills in some of the gaps when he visits us in Perth. He tells me, as my parents did not, how my father found the names of Johanna and Judith Sax on the list of those killed in the concentration camps when he and his brothers
he speaks here. The

cheer him wonderful some things g have you
"You made mentioned it, I know how of." "It is it again. he is more

iniquity and others upon

It feels like

wonderful time ˈs extended become an you want to "and catch
It is again Bruno who fills in some of the gaps when he visits us in Perth. He tells me, as my parents did not, how my father found the names of Johanna and Judith Sax on the list of those killed in the concentration camps when he and his brothers...
visited Beth Hatefutsoth, the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv. I realize as he speaks that I have been harbouring the hope that I have a sister alive, somewhere. The feeble hope splutters and dies. As it must have died in my father.

***

After my mother dies aged seventy seven, my father is depressed. I try to cheer him up on the phone, telling him of all the good things he has done and how wonderful his grandchildren are. He refuses to be encouraged. "Jana, I have done some things I regret," he says. I take a risk. "I know about Judith," tell him. "How long have you known?" "For a long time." He is quiet on the other end of the phone. "You made a decision based on what information you had," I say. Now he has mentioned it, I want him to talk more, to finally bring it out in the open. "You weren't to know how it would turn out. What you did is nothing you should be ashamed of." "It is nothing to be proud of," he says sadly and hangs up. He never refers to it again.

Forgiveness. Guilt. I believe in one, my father in the other. Maybe he is more Jewish than I realise.

"The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and the fourth generation."

I am only the first generation; or the second depending on how I count. It feels like the third or the fourth. Maybe I am more Jewish than I realise.

***

On her return from Israel, my middle child is ecstatic. She has had a wonderful time with Bruno and Chagit, their children, all the grandchildren and Chagit's extended family. "Do you know," she says excitedly, "that I could live in Israel and become an Israeli citizen. I had a Jewish grandmother." "Yes Kathe, I know. Do you want to go and live there?" "No. But it is nice knowing I can. Come," she says, "and catch up on the family. Come and have a look at my photos."
Mother
(Excerpts from a biography of Judah Waten)

The Watens arrived at the port of Fremantle in late February 1914 — Nehama, her husband Solomon, Judah, not yet three, and daughter Mena, still a babe in arms. Like many Jewish families before them, they had come steerage on the German mail steamer, Friedrich der Grosse, which carried travellers and emigrants from England, Germany, Italy and the Middle East. Together with other Russian Jewish families, the Watens had travelled from Palestine to meet the ship at Port Said. According to the form demanded of each ship’s Master by Australia’s Immigration Restriction Act, the ‘Vatins’, as their name was heard and recorded on arrival, were of Russian nationality and of the ‘white’ race. ....

***

Behind every story is another story. Behind the story of Judah Waten as I start to tell it is the compelling story of his mother, Nehama, whose presence is felt wherever I turn for my beginning. It was a story Waten himself would tell in fiction, memoirs, interviews and conversations throughout his public life as a writer. Played out across the grand stage of world history and in the constrained space of a single family, its contours can be traced in all the large and small details of Judah Waten’s own life. This is the story I want to tell first. It will be a history too, the story of a generation and a people as well as of an individual, a history that becomes part of Australian history. ....

***

The moment of history which marked this generation for life was the outbreak of anti-Jewish pogroms in 1881, the ‘formative trauma’ for Jewish nationalism. In this
newly-politicised world, questions of Jewish identity, Jewish relations to modern society, Jewish survival no less, suddenly became immediate, personal, urgent. Was Judaism a part of life, or the whole of it? Were you a Jew first, or a worker, a socialist, a Russian? "Who are you? Identify yourself — if you can." ¹

This was the world into which Nehama Press and Solomon Waten were born. They grew to their maturity in the more optimistic, but no less traumatic epoch of early Zionism. The dream of Zion had, for the vast majority of Jews, remained a powerful cultural and religious attachment, enacted daily.² Jews were not just a minority, but a ‘minority in exile’. This ‘obsessive presentness of Palestine’ maintained Jewish identity as more than merely religious. The return to Zion, however, was traditionally a matter for the Messiah, not for human intervention. Before the 1880s only a trickle of religious Jews had gone to the Holy Land to live and die there.

The development of the ideas and programs that would be called Zionism depended upon the spread of the modern secular notions of liberalism and nationalism. Enlightenment and assimilation had created specifically modern dilemmas for Jews, in the search for a cultural identity and history not articulated primarily in religious terms. The rising secular Hebrew and Yiddish literatures supported this sense of a modern Jewish cultural identity. However the pogroms were critical. Liberals and radicals alike were forced to reassess the prospects of assimilation, often to abandon them for notions of Jewish nationality and self-determination.

Zionism was ‘discovered’ as an answer to anti-Semitism. In a world of nations, as the Jewish intelligentsia began to see it, the Jews were anomalous everywhere, east or west, assimilated or ghettoised. They were still a nation spiritually although they lacked the essential attribute of nationhood, a homeland; yet because they were a distinct nation, they could never be absorbed into other nations. "The tragic fate of our history is that we can neither die nor live."³ This deterritorialisation, it was argued, was what produced anti-Semitism. As a unique Jewish problem, it required a unique Jewish solution, ‘auto-emanzipation’ in a Jewish national territory.

Zionism's founding ideas were profoundly secular, and the religious establishment was profoundly opposed. As the Rabbi in Waten's *Distant Land* puts it, "They start with the Holy Land and finish up Bolsheviks". The majority of Russian Jews would continue to stay where they were or, if they could, migrate to the Golden Kingdom of the west, but by end-of-century the idea of Palestine had an ideological, emotional and practical dynamic that would affect the lives of all, wherever they would end their travelling.

***

By 1916 Nehama was the mother of three children — Judah, almost five, Mena, just three, and the new-born Fanny. In Perth she was surrounded by examples of the migrant success story. But it is unlikely she felt any more reconciled to the new land. Her world was shrinking rather than expanding. Within a year of her arrival she had been seriously ill and her husband's business had failed. The outbreak of war had served only to emphasise their isolation as 'foreigners'. And although she had acted as a midwife on a number of occasions within the Jewish community, she had learnt that midwifery was scarcely recognised as a profession by Australian doctors. They were condescending towards her or so she believed, perhaps with reason for she had arrived in Australia in the middle of a struggle by male doctors to establish their professional authority in the new field of obstetrics at the expense of female midwives.

Nehama did not speak English and her qualifications were not recognised; there was little scope for her skills or ideals. From being at the heart of a brave new movement in human history, she found herself with scarcely a field of action beyond the home. The equality of women counted for less here than it had among her fellow pioneers in Palestine. The celebrated freedom and democracy of Australia expressed themselves most strangely in the celebration of war and Empire. It boiled down to the same old thing after all — 'If you don't have money you're nothing' — and in her own household there was now less money than ever before. That meant greater difficulty in ensuring that her children were educated, truly educated in literature, music, ideas, which was why she had risked migration in the first place. Her aspirations remained as high-minded as they had always been, but they would become increasingly narrowed into this focus on 'culture and learning' for her

children. As they narrowed, her relationships with her children were intensified into strange forms.

* * *

Her husband was on his way down in the world. By 1919 the family were living in Midland Junction, Solomon having lost his shop in Perth. "Mother could be pardoned for thinking we lived on the very edge of the world."5 He became a bottle-o, with a horse and cart which could be had for a loan of £10. This was where many of the poorest Jewish immigrants began on their way to establishing themselves, building up capital from small initial loans. For the educated, smart-dressing Solomon, by humiliating contrast, it was the point at which he had arrived after five years in the Golden Kingdom. He had come to this, not left it behind.

Mother smiled ironically at his appearance and the strong smell of horses and bottles that now clung to him. His waxed red moustache drooped and bits of chaff often stuck in his short-cropped, light-brown hair. It was terribly hard now for Father to look well-groomed and dignified.6

* * *

Home life was intense, unsettled, eccentric. In one word, Judah's own, it was "disturbed".7 To his sister Mena it resembled nothing so much as the Jewish families in Aleichem's stories — muddled, unpredictable, theatrical. This was the tragicomic note that Judah too would find for his stories of childhood:

Our house always looked as if we had just moved in or were about to move out. An impermanent and impatient spirit dwelt within our walls; Father called it living on one leg like a bird. Wherever we lived there were some cases partly unpacked, rolls of linoleum stood in a corner, only some of the windows had curtains. There were never sufficient wardrobes, so that clothes hung on hooks behind doors. And all the time Mother's things accumulated.... Untidy heaps of tattered books, newspapers, and journals from the old country mouldered in corners of the house, while under the bed in tin trunks she kept her dearest possessions. In those trunks there were bundles of old letters, two

6. 'On a Bottle-Cart', Alien Son, 68.
heavily underlined books on nursing, an old Hebrew Bible, three silver spoons given her by an aunt with whom she had once lived, a diploma on yellow parchment, and her collection of favourite books.\(^8\)

What did it mean to Judah to live in this household in this place? The home was a strange island, governed by different languages and different laws, surrounded by the everyday world of the school and the street. Except that it was not strange at all but as close as the mother tongue, inside Judah's body and mind. The house was a place of intense intimacy and conflict, of drama and serious talk, of misrule and rebellion as well as strict precepts. As the eldest and only son, Judah was indulged; but equally, as the eldest and only son, he was at the centre of conflict in the home. Because of his mother's isolation it was a home dominated by her presence and the fierceness of her expectations, focused above all on her son. This was the source of a conflictual relationship which could never be resolved, a burden of indebtedness which could never be repaid. It would fuse into a complex knot the memories of family, mother, Jewishness, and the act of writing.

Judah soon had a reputation among other Jewish families as a rebel, a *dafke*. He was precocious, with little sense of restraint, never likely to be contained within the bounds of family or Jewish community life from which, in any case, he was isolated by the family's isolation. His Bar Mitzvah, in 1924, was a critical moment, for having gone through the preparations he refused at the last minute to attend the synagogue. Although they were not religious, for Solomon and Nehama the Bar Mitzvah was still an essential rite of passage into Jewish identity. For Judah to refuse was unthinkable, incontrovertible evidence for Nehama of the betrayals of this soulless new land. It took a violent argument to force him to attend the ceremony, the kind of argument you don't have twice.

It had been Nehama's insistence that had brought them to Australia. There was a terrible irony in the fact that she was now the one who could not be at peace there, who could find no way into the new country. The isolation of migrant women, especially those with children in the home, is a common experience. But for Nehama, her refusal to open herself to her new surroundings was a matter of principle. She would not compromise. She would deal with the new society only when a higher principle — the education of her children — made it imperative. Nehama was trapped by the very strength of her own unbending character.

8. 'Mother', Alien Son, 170.
Solomon, by contrast, for all his humiliating lack of success, was saved by his 'weakness', his lack of determination, which was also his capacity to bend, to take pleasure in what was to hand, to 'push gloom aside'.

In *The Unbending* Judah wrote of Hannah Kochansky “engaged in a battle for her son’s soul”. The home was the site of an irreconcilable clash between two personalities, two conflicting principles. Nehama was stern and often distant. Her children were to prepare for their useful lives as adults as soon as they could talk and listen. The mother was the figure, for Judah, of moral authority, the figure from whom precepts, injunctions and imperatives would issue. Solomon, by contrast, like the father in *The Unbending*, “represented a kind of freedom” (56). He is characterised in Judah’s memories by his inability to stand up to Nehama, indeed by his childlikeness. He was an unreliable ally. And yet to the children he represented a space of pleasure, irresponsibility, joy. Judah shared his father’s volubility and amiability, his optimism and openness — he could lose himself in his father. But this too could be a source of conflict. Under the gaze of the Mother these attractive traits could appear merely frivolous, even shameful. Judah’s pleasures were often guilty pleasures.

His ‘alien’ Jewish upbringing might also be understood in cultural terms as a kind of feminisation, not in the usual (derogatory) sense but rather that the forms of masculine identity made available to him were not those which were predominant in the immediate society. Jewish traditions of education and acculturation, Jewish rites of masculine domestic and communal integration, created a source of difference between Judah and his Australian contemporaries however fractured these traditions were within the Waten household. His mother’s determined isolation no doubt intensified their effects, as well as Judah’s resistance to them. Perhaps this was at its most intense during the conscription debates of 1916 and 1917, a formative moment in Judah’s imagination, when notions of patriotism, nationality and masculinity were powerfully fused.

***

The household was full of drama, even tragedy. But it was also a theatre of comedy, full of life, full of talk. Both in Perth and Midland Junction, the children remember the house always filled with people, “Jewish bottle-ohs, hawkers, travellers in

For their own reasons, both parents collected new arrivals, other Jewish and Russian immigrants, to make a community, to swap stories of past and present fortunes, to share hopes and fears for the future, to eat and sing and read aloud.

It was a household full of stories. The Yiddish writers — Aleichem, Peretz, Sforim — were household names, and they brought something different into Judah's imagination besides the stern idealism of Nehama's literary mentors. For with the comic, poignant Yiddish stories he could experience literature as storytelling first and foremost, as pleasure rather than precept. "Literature meant laughter". Judah recalled hearing Aleichem read aloud from books and feuilletons, from New York Yiddish newspapers which circulated in the community. If the news was stale when the papers turned up, the stories and serials were still fresh. They were read and re-read. And as the stories were performed aloud by Mr Leiovich or Chaim Frankel, their humour and irony were experienced with the immediacy of the theatre. They were lived. And they helped make sense of the present, not only the past, for "the heroes of Yiddish fiction were invariably little men, poor but proud men always struggling".

The Waten children spoke English among themselves and Yiddish with their parents. The parents spoke Yiddish and occasionally Russian to each other. Judah's first language was Yiddish, his mother tongue in a specific but strong sense of the term. But arriving in Australia before the age of three was critical in his acquisition of English, for this is an optimum moment of language learning when complex grammatical structures are rapidly being brought together. English would overtake the trajectory of Yiddish once he began to have contact with other children and adults beyond the home. By the time he entered Midland Junction State School, he already spoke English fluently although certain sounds remained idiosyncratic. He could not remember when he didn't speak English.

This early acquisition of English had profound consequences for Waten's sense of his own personal identity, his cultural alignments and his politics in later life. English was scarcely a foreign language to him but rather the language, alongside Yiddish, that he was learning as he was learning to speak. It was the language of the

---

11. 'To a Country Town', 16
street and school, and one of the languages of home. By the age of five or six it was
the one language he wrote and read, the primary language of his self-awareness.

Unlike his parents he did not face the task of forging a second self in a new
language. Any sense of cultural difference which emerges when Waten speaks of his
childhood is external rather than internal. What is internalised is rather his
belonging to two cultures. There is no traumatic sense of division from the inside,
within his own self, either in the remembering adult or the remembered child. The
massive environmental advantage of English meant that it would inevitably become
dominant at the expense of Yiddish. Yiddish would remain only as the language of
childhood, mother and home, and thus enter into that complex of emotions which
became connected to writing itself — “when [Mother] heard me chattering in the
new language, or Father breaking his tongue over strange words, she became
alarmed as if both of us had made our peace with enemies and were about to desert
our faith”.13 Yiddish and its culture were not so much rejected as gathered into a
developing ‘Australian’ self, for Yiddish had its own domain which conflicted only
rarely with the domains of English, despite the double-consciousness such children
carried within themselves. Nevertheless the anxieties of cultural difference did leave
their mark, for they were indeed unavoidable. In Waten’s own case this can be
glimpsed in the recurrence, in the Alien Son stories especially, of scenes of acute self-
consciousness. Self-consciousness is consciousness of difference.

***

The years to the end of 1925 had made Judah into an ‘alien son’. He shared the
alienness of his parents, officially and in the street, yet as he grew into the new life
he was also increasingly alien to them. The very aspirations his mother had for him,
for education and achievement in the new land, would almost inevitably draw him
away from her. She felt betrayed by his assimilation but it was in no small part a
natural outcome of her own beliefs, her own politics and educational ideals. She had
taught him independence and rebellion, but his independence would also be
formed against her.

The burden of her expectations was a heavy if not impossible one. It could
scarcely do other than produce a sense of guilt in the child for having betrayed or
disappointed her, not least because she had sacrificed her own life for the child's

well-being. And perhaps it could scarcely do other than produce a spirit of rebellion or desire to escape, at least in the unsettled circumstances of the Watens' lives. The spirit of restlessness still dwelt within their walls.

There was another migration. Solomon stayed behind for a short time to tidy up their affairs, while Nehama and the three children travelled by the steamer, Esperance Bay, to Melbourne at the end of 1925, to the largest Jewish, largest Yiddish-speaking centre in Australia. It is a journey Judah recreates in one of his earliest stories, in which he contrasts Mother and the more orthodox Mrs Hankin who insists that the old traditions would be kept up. But the two women represent equally impossible options. 'Tomorrow morning we would land and go on for ever our different ways — Mother to beat her wings against an enclosing wall and Mrs Hankin to go on relentlessly upholding the old ways in the new land'.

While for Judah the world was opening up with a kind of revolutionary speed, for Nehama the walls were closing in. "Her vision was too much obscured by passionate dreams of the past for her to see any hope in the present, in the new land". The journey east probably felt more like a flight from failure than a bold new step into the future. They were still poor Jews, homeless in a strange land. If anything, they were worse off than before, more insecure. It would be more than ever a struggle to have the children properly educated. "For as long as I remembered," Judah wrote, "she had always looked as if she expected nothing but sorrow and hardship from life".

14. 'Mother', 185; final quote from 'To a Country Town', 2.
REYDI Glezer was on her way home from the market. For two full hours and more, she had meandered about the stalls, hunted for a bargain pair of slippers, haggled over the price of fish, meat and fruit, weaved her way between the manchester, haberdashery, frock-sellers and woollen-ware stalls, touched if only to touch, felt if only to feel, and, whenever the impulse resurfaced, huffed down her nose at the workmanship that was so far a cry from the painstakingly stitched, knitted, embroidered and individually finished tablecloths, napkins, pillow-cases, lace ware, dresses, cardigans and blouses that, in her day, had been made to please, to truly adorn, to last.

The weekly market visit, she knew, was getting beyond her, but, Doctor Rubin’s cautionings notwithstanding, as long as her legs did her bidding in carrying her the two miles each way, she would continue, however often she had to pause to dispel the pressure that periodically mounted in her chest or to retrieve her breath. At seventy-eight, what had to be would be; and if it was, it was because it had to be. She might bargain over slippers, mince, a lettuce or a fillet of perch, that much she would do; but if occasion arose that she should have to bargain for one more hour or day or week of being, the price for such gain being an amnestied four-walled confinement from there on, then let the final curtain be rung down the sooner. Living was not living if all it meant was to go on breathing, sleeping, eating, merely being. Living was not living if living was simply the waiting for the end of living. Living, even now, was not living if, even once a week, she could not go to the market, or share a meal made from the food brought home, or touch another, or talk with that other, or listen, confide, reminisce or reflect, or to succour if called upon to succour, or be succoured if in need of succouring herself. The end came to all at an appointed time, but never more fittingly than when all that was given one to do had been done, when all that was given one to say had indeed been said.
Today being Friday, Freydi Glezer would share just such a meal, and talk, and listen, confide, reminisce, reflect and succour, and be succoured in her turn, her shadow under the kitchen light touching, as it did every week, Yeshaya Halprin who will again have come at seven, bringing her a handful of mixed flowers from his garden which, as always, she will have centred in a vase on the table between them. Yeshaya, for his part, in nearly every way a stalk, where Freydi herself was a heavy-hipped pear, would have set out soon after six from his Garton Street weatherboard. Slowed by arthritis of the knees, he would have negotiated, with whatever relief painkillers could bring, the six blocks distancing him from her second-floor Rathdowne Street flat; and, on reaching it, would have pressed the security button downstairs and, to her “Hello, is that you, Yeshaya?” would have replied, “I am whoever you want me to be, as long as it is me.”

Precisely for that sharing, Freydi Glezer visited the market every week. For that sharing, too, she suffered herself having to pause more often along the way, sometimes leaning against a tree, a fence or a car with her string-bag by her feet, sometimes recovering on a park or footpath bench, the while raising her brow to whatever winds best dissipated the perspiration brought there by her exertions. The weather she liked least was the kind that, muslined—wth frost and sharply canined, goosepimpled her flesh and cramped her joints; but, today, though deep into May and hence into autumn, the air was mistless, bright and balmy, the elms, sycamores and maples stood unruffled in their thinned-out, austere and near-denuded state, while the grass about her, densely strewn with curled, crushed and shrivelling leaves, was piecemeal prising back its underlying rich-green plushness from its patchily ringwormed summer desiccation. The greater burden that weighed upon her owed nothing, therefore, either to overheated closeness or to inclement oppressiveness. Even her bag, filled to capacity from her outing, contributed but modest part to her labours and laborious pace, and then neither more nor less than one might expect from a human motor that, like any motor, whether of motor-scooter or tank, must, as Dr Rubin once said, grow rusty with time. At her age, what could she expect? What Dr Rubin did not talk of—for, sympathetic as he was, what could he so much as begin to know of them?—were the long and seldom-leavened ghost-and-shadow-battered nights that made her say to Yeshaya every Friday, “There are times, Yeshaya, when I would pay to any man a fortune, let him be doctor, prophet, bricklayer, electrician or locksmith, if only he could tear out memory and let me sleep one, just one—that’s all—just one dreamless night through.”

“The camps?” Yeshaya would say, as he did every time, his Yiddish honed with a Lowiczer roundedness as he cut into the fish fillets, tomato and onion rings she
would have prepared as forshpeise.

And she would answer with a nod, “The camps.”

She would become more reflective, picking with slow motion at her own plate.

“My dreams, they begin always with the camps. With Father and my Rachmiel pushed and beaten to their camp, and me, baby Chaskele, Mother, and sisters Sarah and Miriam to ours, where... where we...”

At which point she would pause and sway as if in private prayer.

“Yeshaia,” she would say then, “when you see a child, an infant... Surely, when born, so small, so weak, such a kitten, but what a joy to its mother, its father, and a celebration to all around, surely it is not meant that this gift should one day finish at the end of a rope, or a gun, or be farnichtet from gas or fire, dysentery, typhus, hunger or pneumonia. It can’t be. What do you say, Yeshaia?...”

She already knew what Yeshaia Halprin would say. He had already said it often enough.

“As long as other such children will in time grow to pull the rope, or fire the gun, turn on the gas, or feed the fire, then...”

“And so, children that once we were, so have gone our lives, and our years. All because of some Austrian crazy back there; and even he someone’s child...”

“Yes,” Yeshaia Halprin would reply, biting bread. “If not for Europe, if not for... We were born into the world too early... Or perhaps too late...”

Having rested, Freydi Glezer picked up her bag. She might need to pause a further five hundred metres ahead, but, for the present, she felt able again to walk on.

Yeshaia’s reflection would leave them both suspended in private meditation as they continued eating. In that wordless hiatus, they would hear perhaps the crying of Tracy Robinson’s newborn one floor below, stopped in mid-wailing by a nipple thrust between its lips; they might hear, too, fifteen-year-old Jamelle Forrester across the hallway preparing for her violin examinations now just two weeks away; or hear the clapping of an audience on a televised young talent show turned on full loud; or, perhaps, their own silence might be matched by a complementary surrounding silence, save for the wheels of the local bus squealing to a stop just outside. Then, the fish eaten, she would rise with her customary “A plate of noodle soup lightens all loads”, and take the soiled fish bone-scattered plates to the sink, where, on glancing through the flimsy curtains, she might well see young Salvatore Bonnaci at his desk behind his window poring over his texts on his way to an accountant’s career, or, along the driveway, the Kouros boy with his latest girl, or
her locksmith-neighbour Alex Wishmore teaching his lip-licking Willy mastery of a bicycle.

The very best noodle soup, however — which she took for granted was the best — would not lighten Halprin's load.

As if that silent interregnum had been but a blinking, Yeshaia Halprin resumed, "For me, I was born too early, and in the wrong place. If I, like my David, had been born here with what people they call a silver spoon in the mouth, ach, how different would everything have been. No war, no fighting over there for even a crust of bread, and no headaches here day in day out in the shop over a Mrs Gurewicz saying, 'This banana is too soft', or a Mrs Feierman, 'This banana is too hard' Who knows what I might not have done there, back in der Heym? When I think sometimes back to the children at the Lowiczzer gymnasium or the articles I wrote for the newspapers on this and that! Here, with my head on David's shoulders, ach he could have been at the university, he could maybe have been a lecturer, professor... Economics... Philosophy... Politics... And not moving papers all day from this tray, to that tray, with a 'Yes, sir! No, sir! Very good, sir!' to every two-grosz clerk at his work pushing another paper under his nose with a, 'Will you deal with this, Davy boy?'

He would pause long enough to bring another spoon of soup to his mouth and, when some part of it spilled down his chin, would wipe it away with the palm of a hand.

"How Bina would turn in her grave to see what's become of the apple of her eye," he would continue. "What's become of both of us, all of us... Of David... And forgive me for saying it, your Julia... And me...You... And of so much of our generation that remained after history, like a slaughterer slaughtered the best, as it always, always, always, slaughters the best. Is it a wonder that our babies, when they are born, they cry like they know already they are, like us, gypsies, outcasts, exiles in the world!"

And whenever his talk, with only occasional variation, returned to this, she would remember again her own Rachmiel and Chaskele left long and far behind in hoar-frost and sludge, and remember, too, doe-like Gershon Glezer, who, himself widowed, boarded the Van Loon in Hamburg one step behind her, he being yet another in a drift of harried souls deserting a cursed Europe, culminating, soon after their marriage on Australian soil, in his accident at the factory where he worked as dyer — these leading her to say to Yeshaia each time, "That's how it's always been, and that's how it is. You with your Lowicz, me with my Warsaw, you with your camp, me with mine, you twelve hours a day in your shop, me behind the sewing machine at the Mileckis', and children to put through school. Not for you, not for
me was there ever time for better, was there ever time for living. We had no chance.”

Yehaia would tilt the last of his soup into his spoon. His balding head would shine wanly under the kitchen globe while every line and fold of his bowed and deeply creviced old man’s face would be lost to deep dark shadow.

“For ourselves, no,” he would say. “But your Julia? My David? Did we really let them down so badly?”

“Their generation is not ours, I’ve said it before, I say it again,” she would reply, finishing her own soup and rising once more, this time for the meat, potatoes and greens she would have prepared. “Julia?... She told me long ago that she lives in Australia and lives in the present. Warsaw, for her, is not some place on earth but altogether on another planet; and, of my past, our past, she wants nothing. Not Hitler, not the camps, not our hand-wringerings, our head-beatings, our wailings... And not only her, but also others, so many, so many of our young. Who then is left here to talk to?”

“Me to you, you to me,” Yehaia would then offer from behind the table. “As for my David... Place him in front of the television and he’s in Eden.”

“It hurts, but what can we do?” Freydi would go on. “Things are not what they were.”

“And what is, is leaving us behind,” Yehaia would add.

And Freydi at the stove would agree. “What is, is leaving us behind. It is true, things are not what they were.”

Having negotiated another street block, Freydi was again compelled to pause. She was near home but the final stretch was each week becoming more of a travail. Her neighbour Mrs Wiley’s boy, Neil, on term vacation from photography school, had offered to drive her to the market and bring her back. She knew she would have been wiser to accept, if only to seize on opportunity this once, but, with old habits dying hard, she had wanted no favours. She had long lived without favours, and, taking on the legacy of self-reliance left her by her Gershon, she turned them down even when offered. So long as her legs still carried her, so long as her heart pumped on, so long as her lungs drew breath, so long would she continue, asking nothing of anyone. That day when she might yield to favours was in any case nearing unimpeded with its own quiet certainty, and then not far beyond, that other later day when jest would turn to surest imminence — Yehaia’s “Who knows if next Friday I will still be around to come?” which he would say each week on leaving, as also her own ritual comeback, “Or I to greet you?” Until then, however, whatever be the maalach hamavet’s designs, she would confront full-face the light to be had each
day, she would continue to tread asphalt, cobble and grass, she would challenge, she would risk, she would risk all, as the saying went, in her going forth, in her coming back, and in her lying down.

For the present, however, she had to rest and, leaning against the low stone fence of the Cargnellis' house at the Pigdon-Rathdowne Street corner, she looked up and down the length of those streets which had become, over forty-five years of living there, so ingrainedly familiar in their every configuration, shading, whispering and smell that, were she to close her eyes, they would have fallen not one mote short in their wall-by-wall, fence-by-fence, brick-by-brick vividness. From where she stood, every direction tapered away with long receding tiers of motley coloured cottages, terraces and apartment-blocks, and workshops, garages, offices and shops, with the commission-flats rising high beyond, all together attenuating to hazy convergences where cars, vans, trucks and people disappeared from view, even as, from those scarcely perceptible sources, others emerged to take on body, mobility and sound before passing by her in a seemingly orchestrated smooth, familiar, comforting flow.

Where Pigdon Street was, by every measure, ordinary, Rathdowne Street was broad. So were its pavements, house-fronts, the pub diagonally opposite, and the nature-strip between the lanes. There was space to be had here, there was light, and colour in abundance, and contour, solidity, and constant motion, all of these, immediate as they were, constituting a long and sustained continuum that linked the first of her days in Australia with her steadily approaching last. That continuum had seen battered lives — hers, Gershon's, the Tenenbaums', Levicks', Bialobrodas' — reconstituted to wholeness of sorts. In its flow, she had nurtured dear and succouring give-and-be-given friendships with the Sosnowskis, Klepfiszes and Benkshafts over who knew how many Sunday dinners, bar-mitzvahs, engagements, weddings they had shared, and eager encounters, at its height, at the local Kadimah for a Yiddish lecture by Yitzhak Kahn, say, or a Leivick play with spell-binding Waislitz and Holzer in the lead, or a commemoration, a recital, or Mirele Efros on film. And moving on, for the greater part little ruffled and kind, that continuum became at times blackly perfidious, taking with it Gershon to his grave, Julia to a commune in Queensland, and then, Ryfka Tenenbaum and Mietek Levick, Sonya Bialobroda and Mera Benkshaft, to their final berths in Fawkner or in Springvale, and others still — Malka Sosnowski, for instance, and Moshe Maladietz, and Sholem Klepfisz — to Montefiore; there having been few among them, she now reflected, who had not themselves, in their own separate ways, been left far behind: the Levicks by their Leon's marriage to a Siobhan O'Brien, or the Benkshafts' Sarah...
George Seddon, Swan Song: Reflections on Perth and Western Australia 1956-1995 (CSAL, 1995) — $24.95

Amanda Nettelbeck (ed.), Provisional Maps: Critical Essays on David Malouf (CSAL, 1994) — $18.00

Dennis Haskell (ed.), Tilting at Matilda (Fremantle Arts Centre Press in association with CSAL, 1994) — $16.95

Ian Saunders, Open Texts, Partial Maps: A Literary Theory Handbook (CSAL, 1993) — $13.00

Bruce Bennett, Dennis Haskell (eds.), Myths, Heroes and Anti-Heroes: The Literature of the Asia-Pacific Region (CSAL, 1993) — $19.00

FOR FULL BOOK LIST AND ORDERS CONTACT:

CSAL
The Department of English
The University of Western Australia
NEDLANDS WA 6907
FAX: 09 380 1030 email westerly@uniwa.uwa.edu.au

the frayed jeans, jacket and battered sneakers of another, carrying a handful of videos back to the shop; as she saw, too, the Michies' apprentice plumber Terry bringing out an armful of stubbies from the pub, nearly colliding with Jennie Park who, all of fourteen, rouged, short-skirted and in high heels, was just then lighting a cigarette in its doorway; and, in the family's front garden, saw the Theodoros' six- and eight-year-old Theos and Con tumbling about in puppy-like play, and Alex
Bruce Bennett, Susan Miller (eds.), A Sense of Exile: Essays in the Literature of the Asia-Pacific Region (CSAL, 1988); translated as Rasa Terbuang: Esei Kesusasteraan Rantau Asia Pasifik (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1991) — $12.95

Bruce Bennett, Alur Janaki Ram (eds.), Encounters: Selected Indian and Australian Short Stories (Pointer Publishers Jaipur in association with CSAL, 1988) — $15.00


Mudrooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson) Dalwurra the Black Bittern, ed. with Introduction by Veronica Brady (CSAL, 1988) — $10.95

Bruce Bennett, John Hay (eds.), European Relations: Essays for Helen Watson-Williams (CSAL, 1985) — $13.95

Bruce Bennett, Sussum Holmes, Perceiving Other Worlds (University of Singapore Press in association with CSAL, 1991) — $15.00


Van Ikin (ed.), Glass Reptile Breakout and other Australian Speculative Stories (CSAL, 1990) — $14.95

R.S. White, Furphy’s Shakespeare (CSAL, 1989) — $9.95

Dennis Haskell, Hilary Fraser (eds.), Wordhord: A Critical Selection of Contemporary Western Australian Poetry (Fremantle Arts Centre Press in association with CSAL, 1989) — $19.95

Froi de, van Ikin (ed.), Class Reptile Breakout and other Australian Speculative Stories (CSAL, 1990) — $14.95

...
become Saraya in some Himalayan ashram, or by the Tenenbaum's high-living but work-shy Charlie forced by bankruptcy to liquidate the family's one-time flourishing Tenen Hosieries, so invested in the establishing with flair, blood and sweat.

"Yes, Yeshaia," she murmured, her ears alone hearing what she said, "Things are not what they were, and we have long ago, long long ago, begun to be left behind."

Free now of the heaviness in her chest, she picked up her bag.

"And yes, it hurts, it hurts," she went on, "but what can we do?"

She set off again. Richardson Street was but one block away, and her own home just three numbers on.

Along the way, a breeze sweeping the length of Rathdowne Street prickedled her brow and needled her cheeks, and made her nostrils twitch with the acerbity of compost carried with it from nearby. The longest shadows already reached across the nature-strip. Where the houses on the opposite side still shone bright and alive, those on her own had taken on a muted late-day leadenness, while, between them, home-bound traffic hummed past in a steady, continuous and purposeful flow. In this ambience of spreading dusk, she saw here an old man whiling away time at his gate, there a pair of Greek or Italian widows in black walking to some clearer purpose, and she saw the one-time council gardener Frank Bellett who worked now as gasometer-reader, the youngish but balding priest from St John's visiting a parishioner, and Dorrie Leverage, the other side of eighty, coming out from the hairdresser's, her mounded white hair shot through with purple.

But as she continued to look about her — to look about as if both for a first and for a last time, the novelty of newness mingled with a presentiment of imminent abandonment — Freydi was taken by an intimation, which, as she walked on, sharpened, set and hardened to certainty. The first perception she had of it came with fast-pedalling red-headed Darren, the chemist's delivery-boy, waving a hand at her on cycling by with a perky free-spirited "Hi, Mrs G, how's tricks?" It gained securer purchase as she saw, across the road, the upholsterer Herbie Coburn's fifth-former Melissa, out of the dress, blazer, shoes and stockings of one uniform and in the frayed jeans, jacket and battered sneakers of another, carrying a handful of videos back to the shop; as she saw, too, the Michies' apprentice plumber Terry bringing out an armful of stubbies from the pub, nearly colliding with Jennie Park who, all of fourteen, rouged, short-skirted and in high heels, was just then lighting a cigarette in its doorway; and, in the family's front garden, saw the Theodoros' six and eight year-old Theos and Con tumbling about in puppy-like play, and Alex
Kouros, arm in arm with his girl, and Sofia the antique-dealer Bellini’s heart-stoppingly black-eyed daughter coming out with milk and bread from the grocer’s, the florist Sandra Poulton’s twin twelve-year-olds Cinnamon and Jessica buffeting one another outside their shop with some shared joke, and T-shirted greasy-smereared Freddie Wetherall, at last a fully-fledged engineer, taken up with the tangles of wiring under the bonnet of his Ford. These were the ones she knew, while there were others, too, others whose names she did not know: boys from five to fifteen turning cartwheels, wrestling or playing cricket on the nature-strip, clusters of girls talking about whatever girls talked about these days, toddlers on tricycles inside their gates, and university students coming home, and apprentices and clerks, orderlies and waitresses, nurses and usherettes, and others still who, at that much-shadowed, mellow, twilight hour, embraced whatever light and space and freedom the street still had to offer.

On crossing Richardson Street, she thought again of Yeshaia, who, like herself, was each morning quietly thankful for waking to another day. In another hour or two, he would come and, as always, they would talk of der Heym, of the camps, of the Mileckis, Benkshtas and Sosnowskis, of her Gershon and his Bina, of his David and her Julia, of what had been against what might have been, and of how they — how it hurt! — were being left behind, with there being nothing they could do.

There were minor variations from week to week, but this was the basic scenario, the script having been oft rehearsed and replayed in a long-running performance.

But now, buoyed by that ascendant intimation, Freydi set upon another variation.

“No, Yeshaia,” she murmured, pursing her lips then, seeking words for it and looking more within than without. “Listen. Do you remember the song about the ten green bottles they would teach us at English night-school? ‘Ten green bottles standing on a wall, ten green bottles... And if one green bottle should accidentally fall...’ One by one, one by one, those bottles fell. So it is with us, Yeshaia. Where once there were hundreds, many hundreds of our kind here, Yiddelech from der alte Heym, come through the camps, the forests, Siberia, in hiding, we are now only two, you, me, and, of us, soon there’ll be only one here, and when the last of us falls, Yeshaia, do what you will, then there’ll be no green bottles standing on the wall.”

She reached her apartment block where, with palm on chest, she paused against the fence beside the driveway in preparation for the ascent to her flat. Just an arm’s reach away sat young and sunny Tracy Robinson, her neighbour from the flat below, made joyously sunnier, and prettier too, by recent motherhood, cradling her much-swaddled baby in an arm and tracing, with a forefinger, the smooth, even brow,
cheeks, nose and chin of her dozing six-week-old.

"We're waiting for Daddy, little blossom, aren't we?" she said, addressing her infant even while more clearly directing herself to Freydi. "And when he comes, we'll go inside and Daddy will bathe baby Cassie while Mummy will make dinner and..."

Behind her, up and down the driveway, Willy Wishmore, all of seven and with hair cut in a fringe around his brow and above his ears, was mastering his bicycle, this time without his father; Salvatore Bonnaci, taking a break from his books, was just then disappearing through the far entrance with the family's washing taken from the hoist; while, turning the corner, gazelle-like Jamilla Forrester from across the hallway was also just then coming home, carrying her school-bag in one hand and violin case in the other.

Bending forward to gain full view of the newborn child, Freydi said, "A blessing on her little kepele" in a heavy English that not even forty years of Australian climate had yet triumphed in wearing soft.

The newly-maternal Tracy Robinson gave a faint but distinct giggle of pleasure. Maintaining her position, Freydi lightly stroked the blankets about the child's pixie chin. She swayed, like a dandelion touched by a grasshopper's breath.

"Yeshaia," she went on, but in a dialogue that owed nothing to sound but all to an inner hearer, "it is not the young who are moving away, but us, like the bottles, us, one by one, and we cannot expect, not you your David, and not me my Julia, to carry our past, our history, our baggage when we are gone. They carry enough already, like everybody, from the minute they begin to breathe. And what can we do, Yeshaia?"

She smiled at the fledgeling mother, wanting, wanting so much to touch her too.

"One thing, Yeshaia," she rehearsed what she would later find opening to say. "One. To believe, to trust that maybe — maybe this time — with each new kepele that is born, the world it is given another chance like, in the very beginning, to be good, and safe, and a paradise for people again."

Jamilla Forrester had just then drawn alongside her and, with a demure "Good evening" accompanying a bowing of her head, turned up the path.

Freydi Glezer, reaching out a hand, called after her.

"Jamillalle! One question! You have the examination soon?" she said.

At fifteen, silken in her every movement and self-possessed, she was a young woman already in every way. In response, she smiled so givingly as to bring deep dimples dancing alongside her lips.

"D-Day is Monday," she replied perkily. "I hope you can put up with my
“Psha!” said Freydi. “Mit a gift like yours, everybody they should hear you, the whole world, because... because it is your world, and it will be this little baby’s world, and the world it needs your music, music that it comes from here” — she rapped her breast — “like it never come before.”

Raising her violin-holding hand in a light farewelling gesture, Jamilla turned into her entrance, young Willy on his bicycle riding up the driveway past her just then.

“Thank you,” she said, “I will remember that.”

She disappeared from view. A door opened, closed, and Jamilla was inside. At the same time, Tracy rose from her fence seat and turned her baby towards the street as a car was drawing alongside the kerb.

“Look, Cassie, here’s Daddy. Aren’t you glad? I know he is,” she said, animated to a breezy sprightliness which had her take one quick step, a second, a third towards the car where she nestled in the arc of her husband Steven’s enfolding arm. Freydi, standing at the head of the driveway, watched, nodded, said, “A blessing on all your heads, on every one,” and turned towards her flat, following the way Jamilla had taken.

Before her, fringe-haired short-pantsed Willy, clearly happy with the success he was having with his bicycle; was just pedalling back as she approached her entrance.

From some time-sequestered crypt, there arose a memory of a school-girl, herself riding a bicycle alongside the Vistula. Approaching from the opposite direction was a tall, broad-shouldered, long-bearded, jovial man, a much-venerated family friend who was always talked of as Uncle Beinish. As they drew near, he smiled — like the moon, she remembered having thought at the time — and raised a hand that was as smooth and white, in fact, as the moon itself. “Freydele sheins,” he said. “How you ride! If your bicycle was a chariot with wings... Ach, how then might you fly, fly to Paradise itself, where the sun is always shining, the flowers are always in flower, and every song is happy and meant specially for you and for all the children of the world.” Tickling her then under her chin, he had made her laugh, and she had laughed again when he pressed a coin into her palm, saying, “Here, mein sheinheit, wings I can’t give you, but an ice-cream, a chocolate, a little bit of sunshine down here — here, take this.”

She had never seen Uncle Beinish again. She only knew that, in pursuing his own paradise on earth, he believed it lay to the east and so had smuggled across the Russian border, with no message, letter or news of him ever coming back.

Pulling her string-bag higher along her arm, Freydi opened her purse and
beckoned Willy to come near.

Willy’s eyes beneath his fringe widened as he fastened his attention on the industry of her hands and set down his bicycle.

“You ride well,” she said, “and one day, maybe, you will fly. And fly you should fly mit wings they are your own...”

She passed her fingers through his falling hair and looked into his expectant face, taken by surprise by a crop of freckles across his nose she had never seen there before.

“All children they should fly,” she said. “While for me, for us, what was, was.”

She held out a dollar coin to Willy.

“But for now,” she added, “take this. For an ice-cream, maybe, or some lollies. Or maybe hold it so you can catch in it always the light of the sun.”

Freydi then turned towards the staircase, in one hand her laden bag, the other pressed against her chest.

Whatever be the consequences as she ascended the steps, heightened purpose now drove her. With Yeshaia coming soon, she still had dinner to prepare and a table to set. Other Fridays, those preparations were as ritual as the meal itself with the ritualised talk that saw it through from first spoon to last.

But today she looked forward, grew impatient for his arrival. Even now — she pictured him those blocks away — he was himself preparing to leave, washing, shaving, smoothing down the few hairs left on his transparent scalp, the life-tossed man who had once borne up like steel under the rock of quarries going through the last touches in getting ready to come, as he did every Friday, to succour and find succour before the last two diminished to one, before one became none, but — how bright the image even in the late-day dimness of her landing — but not without the possibility that each new birth and blossoming talent might open out to a newly auspicious human dawn, might be endowed with immaculately pristine, free and untrammelled wings, and be given to ascend, find accomplishment, and abiding gladness, in ever-sunlit flight, untouched till all had been duly said and all had been duly done.

“Come, Yeshaia,” Freydi murmured as she unlocked her door, “I have so much, so much tonight to say to you.”
REVIEWs


It is now half a century since the Holocaust. It has taken that long for survivors and witnesses to be able to tell their own stories. In Australia alone there has been a sudden burgeoning of memoirs by authors who have spent most of the post-War years as residents of this country. A parallel blossoming is evident elsewhere in the world, particularly in England and America, suggesting that there can be writing after the Holocaust but that sufficient time has had to elapse before such writing has been possible. In the meantime, some fifty years later, the publishing world seems to have lost interest in the subject or thinks the public has, or else believes there are already too many books on this subject to warrant further publication. In any case, several of the books reviewed below were initially privately published; as for Biderman’s memoir, it was only taken up by Random after it was awarded the 1996 Banjo prize for non-fiction.

A book like Abraham Biderman’s suggests that it is all too possible to over-theorise or over-academicise the Holocaust, and that beneath the German stratagem of efficiency and rationalism and so on, which a commentator like Zygmunt Bauman wishes especially to emphasise (See Bauman’s Modernity and the Holocaust, (Polity, 1989)), the personal experience of the Holocaust was for many people one of unspeakable brutality and stark irrationality. It is understandable that someone like Bauman might wish to spare the German nation the dubious prestige of having attained to unique standards for human barbarism in World War Two by arguing that, in the right circumstances, all humans would be equally liable, that regardless of nationality we are all equally wired for perpetrating acts of inexpressible bastardy, and that Germany and Germans have no special monopoly on barbarism. However, I suggest it is the voice of a witness like the non-academic Biderman which needs to be carefully listened to for its valuable empirical input.

Abraham Biderman’s The World of
My Past is the dark memoir of a man whose writing suggests that any over-theorised account of the Holocaust is likely to leave something out. The list of brutalities perpetrated is as important to our memory as the more speculative search for reasons and understanding. It is not that Biderman advocates an outpouring of personal bitterness and vindictiveness; far from it since his memoir is remarkably philosophical and restrained. At one level it is a story of personal bravery and fear, of kindness and brutality, of generosity and of downright evil, though more of the latter than the former in each case. At another level Biderman possesses an understanding of the many diverse factors — religious, historical, social, racial, human, etc — which were implicated in the program of Nazi genocide. There is little outright condemnation of particular God-forsaken individuals, like for instance a certain Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski who was head of the Jewish police in the Lodz ghetto, but rather an understanding that individual Jews facing annihilation were forced to make bitter choices for themselves and their families and that in the case of Rumkowski, he made "a fatal, and unforgivable mistake" in accepting survival on Nazi terms. A man like Rumkowski is shown to be weak, an opportunist, but nothing like the savage German camp organisers and overseers in Auschwitz who, far from being sickened by inflicting human agony (which is part of Bauman’s thesis), clearly revelled in the opportunity for outrage. However, Biderman also criticises himself as a young man in the ghetto, his own crude moral unawareness which he contrasts with his father’s understanding that life offered on terms which went against one’s own principles was not worth living.

And as a prisoner in a string of concentration camps subsequent to the Lodz ghetto, the author does nothing to gloss over his own fear and cowardice which makes him no better than the rest. It is partly the author’s self-effacement together with his calm retrospective search for understanding in this account that makes for this sense of wisdom; for although the young Biderman played a crucial part in assisting his parents to survive up until Auschwitz, there is not the slightest hint in his book of self-congratulation, of any demonstration which reflects on the author’s own real quick-wittedness, his intelligence, his own capacity to cope or survive. Instead he repeatedly points to chance, and to his father’s unflinching
probity, the older man's refusal to compromise in matters of moral and ethical importance, and also to his mother's entreaty to her son to always remember. Abraham Biderman, now in his late middle-age and writing as a survivor in Australia, is bemused to recognise that his father was, at the time he entered the ovens of Auschwitz with his mother, a man merely in his forties, a far younger man than the author is now himself and yet a man of moral impeccability. In other words, this is a book which is as much about human values of honesty and truth as it is about apportioning political blame.

Biderman does not doubt that the Germans (and not just the Nazis) have a lot to answer for, and it is interesting to compare his conclusions with Daniel Goldhagen's claims in Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (Little, Brown and Co., 1996). Biderman rejects the usual excuse that no-one knew what was happening since, time and again, he provides instances in which German workers, bus and train drivers, etc., came into direct contact with the inmates of the camps but obviously preferred just not to think. And not only Germans but Christianity itself is called into question — not just the reluctance of the Church to get involved but

Biderman argues that anti-Jewish sentiment was a staple of the Sunday Christian sermon throughout the European world, and that Easter in particular was always a favoured time for Christian Jew-hunting. The Christian Church more than anything else, Biderman claims, kept antisemitism alive in Europe over the centuries. Some of the documents contained in Biderman's book can still make one's hair curl. For instance, so felt Catholic Archbishop Kameltko of Slovakia in 1942 (sic) when he was asked to try to intercede against the expulsion of Jews from Slovakia to Poland:

This is no mere expulsion. There, you will not die of hunger and pestilence; there, they will slaughter you all, old and young, women and children, in one day. This is your punishment for the death of our Redeemer. There is only one hope for you: to convert to our religion.

This example of Christian humanism Biderman adduces from a variety of documents, the same humanism audible to the prisoners in the hymns and carols sung by the whole Nazi fraternity in the death camps on Christian holidays. But not just the Germans either. Biderman includes copies of documents that
reviews

were forwarded to Franklin S. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden regarding the wholesale slaughter of men, women and children, documents that were ignored. Roosevelt, for instance, felt that a request to allow twenty thousand Jewish children who were certain to die to enter the USA from Europe at the height of the savagery did not even warrant a reply.

What is required of the Christian Church in the 1990s, Biderman says, is that it must face up to its historical complicity and negligence in these matters, and that it at last be prepared to come clean about its own apathy and wrong-headedness with an unconditional public admission and apology. Not the kind of half-hearted, semi-jocular apology that T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and others used to excuse their own antisemitism (a matter incisively discussed by Anthony Julius in T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form (Cambridge University Press, 1995)), but a sober recognition of what Christian doctrine, couched in aggressively anti-Judaic formations over the centuries, inevitably helped lead to in the twentieth. Only in such circumstances, Biderman suggests, might there exist a real opportunity for antisemitism in the world to be finally laid to rest — a sentiment, it should be noted, applauded by the Reverend Professor Robert A. Anderson in his sensitive Foreword to Biderman’s book.

Mark Verstandig too had to publish his Holocaust memoir I Rest My Case privately, “another non-triumph for Australian mainstream publishing”, as Max Teichman recently put it (Eureka Street, April, 1996). Verstandig’s prose is lucid but factually tough and he is unafraid of complex detail. One feels it was this toughness of mind and emotion which saw him through the war as he and his wife evaded capture or death time and again by the skin of their teeth. His story reflects the author’s mental acuity and sharp judgment, his remarkable power of memory for recalling the minutest detail. If there is a fault here, it is that we are not privy to an authorial introspective mind, even in moments in his story when he faces imminent death. It is interesting that probably because Mark Verstandig never suffered the same degree of gross indignity as Abraham Biderman who experienced the Lodz ghetto plus four concentration camps in succession including Auschwitz, his conclusions regarding German complicity in the Nazi atrocity are considerably milder and more cautious than Biderman’s; Verstandig will give ordinary Germans the benefit of whatever doubt,
whereas Biderman flatly refuses to do so. *I Rest My Case* is full of interesting factual information apart from the author's private story. At times the account can become too factual, too enmeshed in a barrage of small detail vividly remembered across half a century regardless of its intrinsic interest for the contemporary reader, though the possible long-term historical value of this small detail must also be recognised.

"Stakhonovite", as Leo Cooper explains, was the Russian word used to describe a good worker for the socialist cause, and this word was applied to the author during the years he spent in Russia as a young man when the Germans overran Poland. Leo Cooper was not so much involved in the war as proximate to it, and always in danger of his Jewish identity counting against him among the various authorities. His parents and family whom he left behind in Poland were less fortunate than himself and did not survive. The importance of an account like Leo Cooper's, apart from its readerly value, is that it adds another voice and another witness to the confused and confusing versions of the events that occurred in Galicia under the Nazi regime, and the way that countries like Poland and the Ukraine were deeply infected by the rampant antisemitism which so characterised the place and period. Some of the most interesting issues in the book concern the author's comments on Russia and Russians, for instance the reverential attitude with which Stalin was held by a majority of Russians, which if true might throw light on some of Yeltsin's domestic difficulties remaining today.

Leo Cooper's account of his Russian sojourn during the war years working as a fitter and turner is engaging and well-written, betokening an intelligence turned to good use many years later in Australia when, at an age when others are thinking of retirement, the author read for a Ph.D. in philosophy, fulfilling an old prophecy of his father. My only disappointment with the book is that the account stops as the author is about to re-enter Poland at the end of the war, and picks up again, though somewhat unsatisfactorily, for a brief finale many years later when the author makes a return trip from his adopted Australia to retrace his own steps as a young man. But this was wholly the result of a publisher's insistence which reduced the book quite drastically to about half of its original size, a less than imaginative achievement, one feels, on this publisher's part.

Ron Shapiro

Andrew Reimer's book, written for the ordinary reader who might not know very much about trends in literary history or of recent changes of thinking within the universities, ought to be the last word on the Demidenko affair. It is the work of an established academic whose habit of mind is to use caution when approaching a topic as thorny as this one. The book's intentions are admirable: a cautious weighing up of the evidence, a balancing of the claims and counter-claims for and against *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, an attempt to apply the fruits of Reimer's lifetime of thoughtful deliberation on the subject of literature to the recent public brawling and to the difficult question of artistic freedom and responsibility.

I say the book *ought* to be the last word on the Demidenko debate, given its aura of calm reasonableness, its preparedness to consider all sides, to look into every possible nook and cranny, at great, perhaps even excessive, length. Yet for all of this, which certainly deserves credit, I do not find Reimer's libertarianism entirely satisfactory. On some major points I am sure he is right: this is in essence a reiteration of the ancient argument between Plato and Aristotle; it is necessary to consider a whole range of complex variables when talking about 'literature' as something distinct from 'discourse'; and it is necessary to make sure one is not mistaking one's target when picking on a single book or author, and so on.

Yet despite Reimer's reasonable and his professional critical acumen, it seems to me that he misses something important in his close reading of the Demidenko novel. The major force of his argument is predicated on his understanding of the novel as reflecting its author's sincere, if confused, struggle to come to terms with her own mixed emotions. The method of her novel, he explains, depends on a postmodernist sort of ironic scepticism such that it is up to the reader to understand what the contemporary author no longer needs to make explicit, though towards the end of his book where he focuses on the author in her own person, Reimer admits that this is an author whose strange shenanigans might require psychiatric explanation. The question which arises from all of this is whether, in fact, the narrator(s?) in *The Hand that Signed the Paper* are really as ironically detached as Reimer's explication allows.
If Reimer is right in his insistence on the narrator's detachment, her refusal to take sides, or even to get particularly involved — the traits belonging to the postmodern mode — then his view of the novel as representing "a troubled attempt to deal with complex, often divided sympathies and also to acknowledge the ambiguity of human actions", etc, must automatically follow. Interestingly however, I detect a moment of hesitation later on in Reimer's account which I suspect is more than just his magnanimity (which is what it appears to be): "Helen Darville, her novel and the deceptions she practiced may well represent the malaise of contemporary youth, the lack of moral sensitivity her critics detected in her, and even perhaps a morbid fascination with violence unrelieved by pity or compassion." (my italics) For if it is true that there exists a morbid fascination with violence in this novel, then the greater part of Reimer's argument that hers is a technique predicated on ironic scepticism immediately falls apart. And I find it odd that this is an aspect of the novel — one might even see it as the novel's subtext — which his book fails to address.

I suspect that it is Reimer's very reasonableness that does not allow him to see what is occurring, as it were, below the surface of the novel, something that is the very opposite of reasonableness, and a far cry from the sort of authorial and narratorial detachment of which he so strongly approves. The trouble is that it is quite a lot harder to demonstrate the existence of "morbid fascination" than it is to speak about scepticism and authorial detachment (though Anthony Julius in his recent T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form (Cambridge University Press, 1995) is prepared to argue that where a writer leaves open the possibility of an antisemitic reading, and where this is done wittingly by the writer and in full knowledge of likely consequences, the writer should be obliged to wear whatever charge of antisemitism might result). Because of space and difficulty I do not propose attempting to justify the charge of "morbid fascination" here; in fact, others have mentioned it already in passing, pointing to the disturbing narratorial zest in the various descriptions of military uniforms and paraphernalia throughout the story; or else in the much quoted smoking chimneys of a death camp which is made to serve as a picturesque backdrop to an episode of dalliance between two of the novel's...
protagonists; or else more generally in the multiple descriptions of human brutality.

For me, and I suspect for many other readers who are not as fair-minded as Andrew Reimer, there is far more to this imagery than ironic scepticism. In recent literary theory, the revolutionary concept of ‘defamiliarisation’ has taken the place in academic circles of the moral and ethical in art, encouraging virtually any kind of frisson in the interests of artistic effect. And what could be more defamiliarising and artistically effective than the scene of romantic dalliance against a background of smoking chimneys symbolising Jewish genocide?

In other words, I suspect that artistic representation is always likely to outreach whatever can be reasonably said about it, which is why art is art and not criticism or theory. Andrew Reimer’s reasonableness is able to demonstrate many of the complexities in the Demidenko novel which are amenable to reason. But other things are not. Part of the process of reading involves, as someone once admirably put it, reading with the (male? female?) genitals as much as with the brain. Reading the Demidenko novel with the genitals, I suggest, produces an alternative complexion to the novel that is less benign than Reimer’s. Beneath the surface of rational ironic scepticism many readers have seen a quite different level of bestiality and blood-lust and militarism which, in a profoundly perverse way, is sexually exciting, certainly ‘fascinating’. This was Adorno’s objection to any aestheticisation of the Holocaust even in commemorative art well-intentioned toward the Jews: “The so-called artistic representation of naked bodily pain ... of victims felled by rifle butts, contains, however remote, the potentiality of wringing pleasure from it.” How much more probable in ‘art’ not so clearly disposed? Personally, I suspect this to be the real subtext of The Hand that Signed the Paper beneath the surface disguise of ‘acceptable’ postmodern modishness.

What I find quite unacceptable in Reimer’s book are his accusations of totalitarianism directed against those who opposed The Hand. Reimer shifts ground more than he probably realises. Those pages containing this strong accusation in the first half of the book are quite different in tone from the more circumspect attempt to come to terms with the whole disturbing phenomenon in the second half. In the circular logic of ‘free speech’ the man who accuses another of
totalitarianism is likely to be committing precisely the same crime. The lesson to be learnt from Reimer’s well-intentioned book is that there are real limits to the rationalisation of literary works, particularly those like The Hand which seem inherently to resist rationalisation. And that many of those who objected so strenuously to Demidenko-Darville’s infamous, though arguably talented, book might well lack Andrew Reimer’s own suave analytical skills and yet see what he failed to see.

In any case, and regardless of the niceties of literary textual analysis, there are certain danger areas in human history and experience where fools rush in, and the Holocaust is one of them. From all accounts Helen D. knew exactly what she was doing and the kind of savaging she could expect from publishing this book and I believe, as a consequence, she deserved what she got. Personally, I cannot go along with Andrew Reimer’s conviction that art and artists must be placed so far ahead of life, that we all must suffer our Helen Demidenkos without a peep; this to me seems a hopelessly Romantic or idealistic notion of ART and fortunately one which will never stick with those of us Reimer regards as the philistines.

Ron Shapiro
YOSL BERGNER was born in Vienna in 1920, migrated to Australia in 1937, then to Israel (where he now lives) in 1950. His social realist paintings of the post-war period are in major art collections in Australia and overseas. He is the son of Melech Ravitch, the famous Yiddish poet who envisaged a Jewish state in the Kimberleys. MURIEL BERMAN is currently researching her family history. An earlier version of this work on the Jewish community in colonial Coolgardie was presented to the Australian Jewish Historical Society in Perth. LILY BRETT is an Australian Jewish writer who now lives in New York. She has published poetry collections, short fiction and novels. ROBERTA BUFFI is a PhD student at UWA. DAVID CARTER teaches literature and cultural studies at Griffith University. He is writing a biography of Judah Waten and has recently edited a Waten collection for UQP’s Australian Authors Series (forthcoming 1997). BERNARD COHEN is the author of Tourism (Picador). He is currently resident at the Literature Board’s Nancy Kessing Studio, Paris, where he is writing a novel related to postwar Jewish immigration to Australia. ALAN COLLINS’ first book was Troubles (1983), a collection of short stories. His first novel, The Boys from Bondi (1987), was the first work in a trilogy. The others are Going Home and Joshua. All his writing has a strong Jewish theme. Collins lives in Melbourne. EVA COLLINS is a freelance writer and poet who emigrated from Poland in 1958. She likes to capture fleeting moments on film and paper and lives in Melbourne. SARAH DOWSE is a well known Australian writer of fiction and essays. Her most recent works are Sapphires (1994) and Digging (1996). GEORGE DREYFUS is a composer. He was born in Wuppertal in 1928 and escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 to settle in Melbourne. Dreyfus has composed music for film and television, four operas, two symphonies, much chamber music and music for children to perform. In 1992 he was awarded an Order of Australia for services to composition. RON ELISHA is a general practitioner in Melbourne who is also a features writer, a screenwriter and a children’s story writer. JAN EPSTEIN reviews and writes on film. She is currently preparing the entry ‘Jewish Representation in Australian Films’ for The Oxford Companion to Australian Film. ANDREA GolDSMITH is a Melbourne-born Jew and a fifth-generation Australian through three of her grandparents. She has published three novels: Gracious Living (1989), Modern Interiors (1991) and Facing the Music (1994). Her fourth novel, Truth, will appear in 1997. SHIRLEY HARRISON has won prizes for her short stories and poems, a number of which
have been published. **Nora Krouk** was born in China of a Jewish mother and Polish father. She arrived at her Jewish identity to share the grief of survivors. She is widely published. **Serge Liberman** was born in Russia in 1942 and came to Melbourne in 1951, where he works as a medical practitioner. He has written four collections of stories; won the Alan Marshall Award for fiction on three occasions and the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Ethnic Writing. He is the compiler of *A Bibliography of Australian Judaica*, and is currently Editor of the *Melbourne Chronicle*, literary editor of the *Australian Jewish News*, and on the Editorial committees of the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* and of *Gesher: the Journal of Christians and Jews*. **Yve Louis** has worked as a script and copy writer, a short story writer and children’s playwright. Her poetry appears regularly in Australian literary magazines. **Morris Lurie’s** next work, *Welcome to Tangier*, 20 linked stories, will be from Penguin, January 1997. **Victor and Andrew Majzner** are Melbourne based Jewish artists whose work is strongly influenced by both their Jewish and Australian identities. **Mal Morgan’s** fifth collection of poetry *Throwaway Moon/New & Selected Poems* was published by Hyland House in 1995. He convened the *La Mama Poetica* poetry readings in Carlton, Victoria from 1985-1991, and directed the *Montsalvat National Poetry Festivals* in Eltham, Victoria from 1991-1993. **Phyllis Perlstone** is a Sydney born poet. The excerpt appearing here is from a larger work that is being prepared for publication. **Dorothy Porter** has published several books of poetry, including two verse novels. Her most recent collection is *Crete* (1996) which was short-listed for the 1996 WBC Awards. **Raphael Rish** taught engineering in the University of Tasmania; has had work published in *Togatus*, *Ribald* and *The Journal of Solids and Structures*, and has retired to Perth. **Ron Shapiro** teaches in the English Department, UWA. **Alex Skovron** was born in Poland, settled briefly in Israel, and migrated to Australia in 1958. His two collections to date are *The Rearrangement* (1988) and *Sleeve Notes* (1992); a third book, *Infinite City*, is forthcoming. **Jane Trigg** is an English teacher in Busselton, W.A. and her family’s blank Czech. **Vivienne Ulman** lives in Melbourne. Several of her stories have appeared in the Artemis Crime Series. **Terri-Ann White** writes fiction and currently teaches writing in the Department of English, UWA. This story serves as an introduction to her second book. **Arnold Zable’s** book *Jewels and Ashes*, (1991) received five Australian literary awards and is now in its fourth Australian print run. He is the author of numerous articles, essays and short stories, and has worked as a freelance writer, editor, and translator. **Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo** is a Melbourne writer.
CATTLE GRID / sight unseen

grant hobson

PERTH INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART
JAN 8TH - FEB 2ND, 1997
STORIES
Bernard Cohen
Ron Elisha
Serge Liberman
Morris Lurie
Jane Trigg
Vivienne Ulman
and others

POETRY
Lily Brett
Alan Collins
Yve Louis
Dorothy Porter
Raphael Rish
and others

ARTICLES & OTHER PROSE
David Carter
Mother (Excerpts from a biography of Judah Waten)
Sara Dowse
Significant Sojourns: Reflections on America and Australia
George Dreyfus
How Come a Good Little Jewish Boy from Camberwell Writes Not One But Two Operas for Germany?
Andrea Goldsmith
Talmudic Excursions
Terri-ann White
Finding Theodore and Brina