

# **Dorot: The McGill Undergraduate Journal of Jewish Studies**



**Volume 14 – 2015**

# **D O R O T :**

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## Preface:

It gives me pride and pleasure to introduce the new issue of *Dorot*, the undergraduate journal of McGill's Department of Jewish Studies.

The five essays presented in this issue bear witness to how talented and curious our undergrads are and offer a taste of the wide range of fascinating issues Jewish Studies scholars are tackling these days--from the ideal of masculinity in rabbinic literature to the challenges faced by Soviet-Jewish immigrants in North America. They also provide a glimpse into the many disciplines and methods that make up Jewish Studies--from history and Yiddish to Jewish thought and literature.

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Jewish tradition in the wake of reading Spinoza (who demonstrates with mathematical stringency that God and Nature are one and the same) and after reflecting on the Holocaust (how can God allow such evil?). This modern-

## Introduction:

Matthew Miller

Editor-in-Chief

“One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; and the earth abideth for ever” (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

It is an honour and a privilege to present to the reader the 2015 edition of *Dorot*, the Undergraduate Journal of the Jewish Studies Students' Association of McGill.

The editing process of this journal afforded me, as well as my editorial staff, the opportunity to see how learned and insightful students from our department truly are. Their insights extend into various areas of the field of Jewish studies, using different perspectives in order to illuminate the lives and works of important Jewish figures and universal concepts. The essays contained herein provide the reader with an opportunity to both engage seriously with the state of the field of Jewish Studies at the undergraduate level, as well as the ability to learn a great deal from budding scholars.

The very title of the journal, *Dorot*, which means ‘generations’ in Hebrew, speaks volumes about the content of this edition. Each author, in their own way, tackles the difficult problem or conundrum of how one generation passes on its legacy to the next or the struggles and strife contained within one generation. Every essay provides a unique answer to these issues.

Aden Benarroch, in his [Rav Kook and Secular Zionism](#), tackles the generations-question by analyzing R. Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook's approach to secular Zionism through his letters



! and halachic writings. R. Kook's struggle with and reluctant acceptance of secular Zionists brings the question of "modernism versus traditionalism" to the forefront. How can an Orthodox rabbi, one who holds onto the traditions of the generations of yesteryears, come to terms with the new generation that rejects his cherished beliefs? By reading Benarroch's essay, one can begin to sketch an answer to this question.

Zero to Hero: Shifting Ideals in Jewish Masculinity Through History, by Joanna-Rose Schachter, addresses the issue of generations through a thorough analysis of Jewish conceptions of masculinity throughout the generations, as well as the manners in which scholars in our generation have divergent views on how to understand the aforementioned history. Each generation of Jews analyzed key concepts of Judaism in relation to masculinity in various interesting ways. This shifting conception had tremendous implications in the spheres of religion and politics.

Matthew Miller looks at two particular figures, one literary (A er) and the other contemporary (Allan Nadler) and seeks to explore their relation to their generation and well as previous generations. These figures both broke free from the holds of religious strictures and made the move toward heresy. Each in their own way paved a path toward freedom, struggling with their connection to the past and their direction toward the future.

Lily Chapnik, through a careful study of the writings of the Yiddish literary giants, discusses these authors' stance toward tradition, the sacred beliefs and practices of former generations. Although each of these authors had left the practice of traditional Judaism behind, they found their own unique ways to relate to the vastness of Jewish tradition and selectively passed on key features of this religion to future generations. This engagement with Judaism was presented in a pristine literary form, paralleling and competing with European literature.

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! generation passeth away, and another generation cometh”, its effect can still take its toll. May many more generations continue to engage seriously with Jewish Studies as these students have.

# Rav Kook and Secular Zionism

## Aden Benarroch

The struggle to establish a Jewish home in Palestine was an undertaking adopted by Jews from many different religious backgrounds. Both Orthodox and secular Jews recognized the need for a Jewish homeland. The specific ideologies behind this need, however, often caused major disagreements between religious and secular Zionists. Within religious Zionism, a compelling discussion emerged as to how to relate to secular Zionists. One of the most unique approaches to this issue was developed by R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook. Kook was born in Latvia in 1865.<sup>D</sup>

Kook later moved to Palestine and became the Chief Rabbi of Jaffa in 1904.<sup><</sup> After leaving Palestine during World War I, Kook returned in 1919 and was appointed Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem.<sup>=</sup>

! rulings. These rulings were important in showing the tolerance and cooperation with secular Zionists that Kook infused into his unique Zionist ideology.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, secular Zionism was the dominant Zionist ideology amongst European settlers in Palestine. They wished to create a Jewish homeland that was not grounded in Jewish law or tradition. There were Orthodox Jews who were also involved in creating a Jewish homeland, and they developed two main ideologies regarding how they should interact with secular Zionists.

The first ideology was a rejection of secular Zionism as a movement and a refusal to cooperate with them in building a Jewish homeland. This was for two main reasons. The first was due to the perception that secular Zionists were working to hasten the redemption. Some Orthodox Jews believed that the redemption was to be caused only through divine will and miraculous means.<sup>5</sup> It was, therefore, a sin to make any attempts to hasten the redemption.<sup>@</sup> Second, they believed that Jewish law forbade cooperating with secular Jews since they were transgressors.<sup>A</sup> The Jewish homeland could therefore not be built through cooperation with Jews who did not follow Jewish law.

The second ideology developed by Orthodox Jews with regards to secular Zionism was formed by R. Yitzchak Reines in the early 1900s. Reines formed a more moderate religious Zionist party called Mizrachi. This party believed that cooperation with secular Zionists was necessary in order to save diasporic Jews from anti-Semitism.<sup>B</sup> Zionism, according to this view,

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<sup>5</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 12.

! was not related to the redemption per se, rather it was a means to an end that would create a safe haven for Jews.<sup>c</sup>

Kook adopted an approach to secular Zionism that deviated from both of the aforementioned approaches. There was a precedent set by Mizrahi toward cooperation with secular Zionists but Kook pushed the boundaries of the amount of cooperation suggested by the Mizrahi. He argued that Orthodox Jews should both fully cooperate with secular Zionists in order to build a Jewish homeland, and that they should embrace secular Zionism as being an essential element in the Messianic redemption, a notion that was absent from the Mizrahi's approach.

Before examining Kook's ideology toward secular Zionists, it is first important to understand Kook's basic views of secular Jews on an individual level. Kook, prior to arriving in Palestine,

! were distancing themselves from Jewish tradition because they were making “unintentional mistakes.”<sup>D<</sup> Milstein’s children still had a “desire for universal righteousness and the pursuit of justice.”<sup>D=</sup> Kook thus articulated a basic ideology regarding secular Jews on a personal level. He believed that although Milstein’s children were becoming secular and embracing ideologies and practices associated with non-Jewish culture, they were doing so in order to further morality and create a society based on justice.

The opinion articulated by Kook in his letter to Milstein clearly shows that Kook wished to embrace secular Jews on an individual basis and it was an early indication of the stance Kook would later take with regards to secular Jews on a communal level. His letter to Milstein revealed his tolerance for Milstein’s children and secular Jews in general. Kook’s tolerance towards secular Jews on an individual level eventually translated into his principles of tolerance towards the secular Zionist movement. In the years after moving to Palestine, Kook displayed an

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! grounded in Scripture that supported his philosophy on the place of secular Zionism in building a Jewish state.

Kook often compared his basic ideology regarding secular Jews



! mentioned that if the Messiah would come through these natural means, on the donkey, it would mean that the Jewish people would be in an era characterized by materialism.<sup>21</sup>

Influenced by the Talmudic rabbis' interpretation, Kook believed that the generation of secular Jews in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were the generation that would be responsible for the coming of the Messiah on a donkey.<sup>22</sup> Though they had sunk to a low level of spirituality, Kook believed that secular Jews were still going to play an important part in the coming of the Messiah and that they were part of God's plan. They were the "material foundations of the spiritual redemption."<sup>23</sup> As such, they had to be embraced rather than rejected. This insight significantly influenced Kook's basic ideology regarding the place of secular Jews in the creation of a Jewish homeland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Kook put this ideology into practice in a letter to R. Y.D. Wilovsky in 1913. Kook indicated that Wilovsky had expressed "bewilderment over [his] befriending everyone, even the transgressors of Israel."<sup>24</sup> Kook was clearly addressing a

! is.<sup><@</sup> The only time the notion of *segula* ceases to be operative is when a Jew reaches the point of being a “hater of Israel.”<sup><A</sup>

The members of the secular Zionist community, however, had not, in Kook’s view, reached the point of hating the Jewish people. On the contrary, Kook recognized that although secular Zionists did not believe that the Jewish homeland needed to be infused with Jewish law and tradition, they still “deeply love[d] the community of Israel and [had] a passion for the land of Israel.”<sup><B</sup> Kook believed that secular Jews were special because, even though they did not follow Jewish religious law, they maintained their love for the people and the land of Israel. For Kook, this was an essential component of the secular Zionist ideology. He saw secular Zionists as part of the generation that would precede the coming of the Messiah by natural means. They were “good inside and bad on the outside.”<sup><C</sup> The popularity, strength, and will to create a Jewish homeland, while remaining secular, indicated that the secular Zionists were the “donkey of Messiah.”<sup>=E</sup>

Kook’s views of secular Zionists should not be read as a complete approval of their way of life. He still believed e(ve) 0.2 ((df)-0.5 (e) 0.2 80 0 50 0 0 Tm /TT87988 304.) -46.9 (of) -0.5 ( ) -46.9 (t) (

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! injustice.=< Kook did not provide a blanket acceptance of secular Zionism. The approach of secular Zionists to creating a Jewish home was still decidedly flawed, since their ideologies were influenced by secular philosophies.

Despite the differences between his religious beliefs and secular Zionism's basic secular ideology



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! groups in Palestine. Through his *halachic* rulings, Kook showed sensitivity toward the relation between secular and religious Zionists. His rulings remained consistent with the philosophies that he presented in his letters. They maintained that cooperation between religious and secular Zionists

! that secular Zionists were forgetting religious education in their schools.<sup>?E</sup> He warned that religious education should always be the primary form of learning in the Jewish community. He conceded, however, that secular education teaches “the struggle for existence.”<sup>?D</sup> Kook knew that in Palestine, as well as in the diaspora, “life [had] become burdensome.”<sup>?<</sup> There were therefore people who “allowed themselves to add the secular to the holy in their children’s education.”<sup>?=</sup> Kook argued that while this addition may have been necessary, it should not have led to a “general falsification” of religious education.<sup>?></sup>

Kook’s opinions on education in Palestine at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflect clear parallels to his overall ideology promoting

studies.<sup>7B</sup> Although the school never grew into a large institution due to lack of funding, Kook demonstrated his commitment to integrating both secular and religious aspects into his vision of a Jewish homeland.<sup>7C</sup> Secular education along with Jewish religion had the ability to create a strong and stable Jewish homeland.

One of Kook's most significant *halachic* rulings that demonstrated his will to embrace cooperation between secular and religious Zionists pertained to the laws of the Sabbatical year in Palestine. In the Torah, there is a commandment that states:

You may sow your field for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce, but in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard.<sup>7E</sup>

This verse presented a problem for a Jewish state in Palestine because Jews were required by religious law to not plant anything every seventh year. Naturally, not growing any produce every seventh year created a problem in the modern world as it could have caused the financial downfall of the agriculturally-based economy of Palestine.<sup>7D</sup> Many religious Jews, such as Wilovsky, were firm proponents of the strict observance of the Sabbatical year regardless of the financial costs.<sup>7<</sup>

Kook, on the other hand, ruled that there was a way to both observe the Sabbatical year and allow for Jewish farmers to grow crops during the year, ensuring the financial success of Jewish farmers in Palestine. In order to satisfy both secular and religious Zionists, Kook ruled that crops could be grown in the Sabbatical year through a sale of land in Palestine to non-

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>59</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>60</sup> Lev. 25: 3-4.  
<sup>61</sup> Mirsky, 72.  
<sup>62</sup> Feldman, 64.

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! Jews.<sup>65</sup> Kook's ruling was based on the fact that the Biblical law of the Sabbatical year only fully applies when all Jews are living in the Land of Israel.<sup>66</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, most Jews were still living in the Diaspora. This meant that the Sabbatical law was a rabbinic rather than Biblical law, providing room for leniency.<sup>67</sup> Kook ruled that this leniency allowed for the sale of Jewish owned land to non-Jews on a temporary basis in order to free Jews from the prohibition of planting during the Sabbatical year.

There were a number of reasons Kook was willing to provide leniency in allowing the sale of land during the Sabbatical year. These reasons primarily relate to Kook's commitment to the economic and religious success of Jewish life in Palestine. The first reason for Kook's ruling was that he recognized that the Sabbatical year would severely harm the economic success of Jewish farmers. In an ideal situation, Kook believed that the Sabbatical year needed to be observed but in reality this was implausible. In 1910, Kook wrote *Shabbat Ha'aretz*, a work that described in detail his halachic view on the Sabbatical year.<sup>68</sup> He argued that "the basis of the *yishuv* is commercial agriculture, and preventing commerce would destroy all its livelihood."<sup>69</sup> Agriculture was the central form of income for the *yishuv* and so Kook ruled that "it is downright



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! also to defend the legitimacy of the role religious Zionism and Jewish religious law could play in building a Jewish homeland. Kook was worried that if religious Zionists imposed religious rules that were overly rigid, secular Zionists would completely reject the notion that religious Zionists could ever have a say in the law of the land. He was worried that stringent laws would create a large divide and a “widespread rejection of Torah observance.”<sup>c</sup> Forbidding planting during the Sabbatical year would prove to secular Zionists that “by listening to the rabbis, the land will be laid waste, the fields and vineyards will become desolate, and all commercial ties... will be broken.”

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Zero to Hero:

## Shifting Ideals in Jewish Masculinity Through History

Joanna-Rose Schachter

The question of what it means to be biologically male is straightforward in most societies.<sup>75</sup> However, determining the cultural constructions of “manhood” is not quite as simple, and conceptions of masculinity are varied and dependent upon culture.<sup>76</sup> Just as female gender roles have changed over time, so too have conceptions of what it means to be a man. Christian-European ideals of masculinity, for a long time rooted in chivalry, underwent major changes in the nationalist build-up to World War I. European men, caught up in fierce competition and patriotism, found themselves demonstrating perceived superiority through a newfound focus on sports and a return to the Greek ideal of the perfect male form.

Since Christian-European views of what constitutes the perfect man have evolved, it is unlikely that Jewish conceptions of masculinity have remained static, particularly given Judaism’s own nationalist movements and such pivotal events as the creation of the State of Israel. While the traditional rabbinic, if not somewhat stereotypical, ideal among Jews is that of the studious, pious, and subdued male, in a similar vein as European nationalism, Jewish nationalism also enacted changes upon the ideal of the Jewish man.<sup>77</sup> Michael Satlow, Stephen Moore, and Andreas Gotzmann deliver similar but differing views on what a traditional Jewish

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<sup>75</sup> Michael L. Satlow, “‘Try to Be a Man’: The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 19.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Tamar Mayer, ed., *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000) 301.



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! unquestionably masculine (and, by definition, heterosexual) activity.<sup>85</sup> Moore offers a similar take on these same rabbinic ideals. He explains that mastery of others or of oneself is the defining masculine trait conveyed in most Greco-Roman texts.<sup>86</sup> Moore goes on to explore 4

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However, there is evidence that Jewish men in late antiquity wanted to be remembered for the same things as their non-Jewish contemporaries: namely money, piety, and office.<sup>91</sup>

Satlow contends that, for the most part, rabbinic constructions of manhood were then neither



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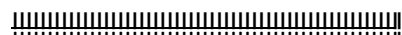
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! permitted to do so.<sup>100</sup> Gotzmann says that in contrast with the current and often discussed ideas of a Jewish “soft masculinity,” which is rooted in the anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jewish man as being not truly male, the Jewish man of this time

! the sixteenth century, there existed a common belief that Jewish men were deficient in comparison to Christians and possessed female characteristics.<sup>107</sup> Yet, some non-Jews considered Jewish populations to be well prepared and well suited to civil society, and significant numbers of Western Europeans believed that Jews enjoyed an exemplary family life due to faithful, devoted husbands and obedient children.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, toward the end of the nineteenth century, as anti-Semitism spread in Europe, the stereotype of the effeminate Jewish man became the focus of anti-Semitism.<sup>109</sup> Lerner quotes Gilman and other scholars who have explored the impact of these developments on Jewish men's self-identities, and calls to attention the self-hatred with which some men reacted to the pressures of exclusive nationalism and anti-Semitism.<sup>110</sup> An alternative response occurred among Zionists and other proponents of a new *Muscle Jew*, in the early twentieth century.<sup>111</sup> New Jewish heroes, such as the Jewish bodybuilder Siegmund Breitbart, and increasingly popular movements, like gymnastics and physical culture, spread "images of healthy, strapping Jewish men and a regenerated, muscular Jewry".<sup>112</sup>

Katz suggests that three major developments helped shape twentieth century Jewish masculinity, even outside of Europe and/or Israel: the development of Zionism as a nationalist



<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

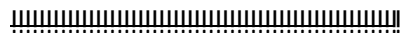
<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.



! ideology in the nineteenth century, the Holocaust, and the Six-Day War.<sup>113</sup> Violence is a central theme in these developments, and Katz suggests that hypermasculinity may have been a response to historical victimization, especially that experienced during the Holocaust.<sup>114</sup> He quotes Boyarin’s research, which argues that the westernization process for European Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one in which the idea of the *mensch* was abandoned for that of the *New Jew*, the *Muscle Jew*, which developed at about the same time as the Aryan ideal of the muscular Christian.<sup>115</sup>

While for thousands of years rabbinic tradition praised humility before adversity, in the nineteenth century, more and more Jewish men wished to become “real” men as defined in physical terms by Gentiles.<sup>116</sup> Katz also suggests that Israel is important to Jews in the United States and around the world, as it played a role in how these men saw themselves.<sup>117</sup> After Israel’s victory in the Six Day War in 1967, Jewish men around the world were “remasculinized” by proxy and switched from being the victim to the victor.<sup>118</sup> He admits that some writers like Selzer believe that militaristic enthusiasm was a sign of insecurity more than anything and a rejection of the “true self,” since true Jewish identity is rooted in Eastern and



<sup>113</sup> Harry Brod and Rabbi Shawn I. Zevit, eds. *Brother Keepers: New Perspectives on Jewish Masculinity* (Harriman, TN: Men’s Studies Press, LLC, 2010) 58.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

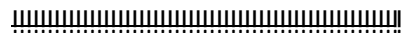
<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

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! of bravery”, and as the bar of bravery rose, so did the bar of masculinity that mirrored it.<sup>134</sup> Men who proved their courage on the battlefield and who were willing to give their life for the nation became legends in Israel, and over the years more than 20 000 Israeli soldiers have died.<sup>135</sup> In Zionism, as in other nationalisms, myth and memory have been crucial to the construction of the nation.<sup>136</sup> Posters representing the masculine *New Jew* who was there to help his people, defend the land, and build on it, became a blueprint for the construction of Israeli men, perpetuating the tie between nation and male and masculinity and nationalism (one such poster proclaims “While one hand works the other holds a weapon”).<sup>137</sup> In the Jewish case, especially after statehood, masculinity has been construction in opposition to the *Ghetto Jew*.<sup>138</sup> The *New Jew’s* gender identity as well as the arena for perfecting his manliness has been constructed by Zionism; however, Mayer asserts that Jewish-Israeli nationalism and gender identity will change again now that the Israeli military needs men less as elite fighters.<sup>139</sup>

According to Nye, who reviewed research by Davidson, Neil Davison’s study chiefly concerns the way the image of an ‘effeminate’ male ghetto Jew was deployed in contemporary anti-Semitic stereotypes and how it also figured in the discourses of Zionist and philo-Semitic writers. However, he wants to undermine the notion that writers who have wrestled with the ideological program of Zionism have simply adopted for Jewish men the aggressive and



<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 294.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 295.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 299, 301.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 301.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

! domineering masculinity of their gentile oppressors by considering how these same writers have appreciated the influence on Jewish masculinity of Jewish history and culture, which informed even secular and assimilated Jews.<sup>140</sup> Kaplan also reviewed Davison, and finds that he explores the ‘feminized Jew’ and how this figure haunts attempts to construct Jewish masculinities that depart from this stereotype.<sup>141</sup> Davison traces the shifts in stereotypes and actualities of Jewish manhood. Davison thus usefully connects these gender troubles to the political context of emergent Zionism.<sup>142</sup> Continuing in this vein he notes that, “[b]ecause the muscle-Jew appears to suggest an idealized virility similar to that which became the basis of fascist masculinity, Zionism is often fixed as an imitation of European colonialism”.<sup>143</sup> And further that, “Nordau and Herzl [two fathers of Zionism] alike meant the new Jew to resemble an imperialist patriarch to whom violence is the tool of a racially predisposed right to conquer







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! become more aligned with European ideals through events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and through Zionism, similar to the transformation that Europe underwent through nationalism. However, Katz asserts that while Jews have born the brunt of much violence through history, and Jews have a right to defend themselves as do all people, there exists the responsibility not to disguise aggressio, and a legacy of rage as self-defense.<sup>157</sup> He concludes then that there are as many men as ever dedicated to social justice and to nonviolent social change.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Brod and Zevit 73.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

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Satlow, Michael L., "‘Try to Be a Man’: The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity." *The*

*Harvard Theological Review* 89 (January 1996): 19-40.

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! eternally for joining their ranks more than profiling them systematically. One profile, however, presented piecemeal<sup>160</sup>



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! century's greatest rabbis, Rabbi Abraham Isaiah Karelitz (azon Ish) to become a secular Yiddish poet. This poet showed a particular liking towards Nadler, perhaps initially due to the latter's possession of an automobile (for he was also a practicing rabbi at the time). Because of this, he was given the task of driving Grade from place to place, eventually getting the privilege to pick him up from the airport when he arrived. It was not difficult for Nadler to develop the relationship, for, unlike Twersky, Grade took a personal interest in all of those in his seminar, with a particular interest in the young Rabbi Nadler "whose red mane and beard [were] shot through with silver"<sup>165</sup>.

Grade opened up Nadler's eyes to who he really was. He constantly poked fun at Nadler's *frumkeit* (religiosity), trying to get him to break from his religious behaviorism. He, jokingly remarked to Nadler, with his twisted smile and a hint of prophecy: "*du bist nit keyn frumer yid* ("you are not a religious Jew") and insisted on calling him the *royter rov* ("Red Rabbi"), on account of his fiery beard and the latent fire that was burning deep within the recesses of his soul. Despite all of his coaxing and cajoling, Grade could not get this young rabbi to take up a relationship with a gentile or eat a McDonalds Big Mac (even after Grade insistence that it was 100% kosher). He opened up his eyes to the world of Jewish secular poetry, both his own and that of the Hebrew poet, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, as well as peaked his interest in Benedict Spinoza's philosophy, watering the seeds of his heresy.



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ribald mind”<sup>172</sup>?

Undoubtedly, the answer to both of these questions is a resounding *yes* and *no*. Nadler became the man he is today as a result of all these factors and more. He, sticking true to the etymological origin of the word “heretic” chose his path and knows where he stands. He knows that because of his views and actions he is and was denounced as an !"#"\$%&' , a title he accepts with pride (but with an acknowledgment that his decisions in life have real consequences). That which began as mere seeds of heresy sprouted and grew and became the Rabbi Dr. Allan Nadler of today.



<sup>172</sup> Allan Nadler, *Rationalism, Romanticism, Rabbis and Rebbes* (New York: YIVO, 1992), IV.

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**Battling Tradition:**

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! wrestle with this question, and come out with very different answers. Mendele is highly reproachful of Jewish religiosity, as he exhibits a sarcastic, satirical tone towards it within his writing. Sholom Aleichem is more ambivalent, with examples within his work of what appears to be both support and critical commentary upon the role of Jewish religious custom in day-to-day life. Peretz, who is considered the most modern of the three in his sensibilities, is the most accepting of Jewish tradition, as it is shown in a mostly positive light in his work, especially via

! He's provided until now and He won't stop now" (Abramovitch 1996, 306). This utter dependence on invisible celestial forces is soon shown to be contrary to the Tuneyadevkans' best interests, when it becomes apparent that this worldview is preventing them from striving for a better life. For example, the townspeople seem to have no perspective concerning their own poverty, as "the inhabitants of Tuneyadevka are content with what they have and not choosy about their garments or their food...[even though] their Sabbath caftans are ripped or torn...[and] a bit of soup and bread, if it's available, is a meal" (Abramovitch 1996, 306-7). Mendele therefore makes the satirizing comment, through his disdainful characterization of the townspeople, that they are far too dependent on the invisible construct of God for their basic human needs, and that their excessive faith is a negative influence on their development as meaningful members of society.

Mendele's main character, Benjamin, is also made a mockery of through his over-dependence on tradition, especially concerning his insistence on utilizing ritual symbols that are rendered meaningless in the context in which he employs their use. This caricature is introduced as soon as the story begins, as Benjamin is introduced by the narrator as "a Jew, an unarmed Jew on foot, with but a knapsack on his back and a prayer shawl bag beneath his arm", who is jokingly characterized to have "ventured into climes beyond the ken of the most famous British explorers" (Abramovitch 1996, 302). This description displays a humorous contradiction





! was the case in traditional *shtetl* society, would have been seen as a highly emasculating experience in Mendele's emancipated world.

Mendele continues his polemic against these supposedly destructive traditional gender roles with his characterization of the relationship between Benjamin's travel mate, Sendrel, and his aggressive wife. Sendrel's character is completely dominated by fear of his wife, as within their relationship "his wife wore the pants and let him know it, and his fate at her hands was a bitter one" (Abramovitch 1996, 321), involving corporeal punishments and degradation, including being forced to perform all the housework that is usually delegated to the female of the house. Sendrel is described as "the butt of every joke" and "meek as a brindled cow" (Abramovitch 1996, 320), displaying that both his personal autonomy and self esteem are sacrificed by his ascribing to the traditional gender roles that force him into subservience. He is even referred to as "Dame Sendrel", and is described as "wearing a calico dress and having a kerchief on [his] head" (Abramovitch 1996, 323) on the day that he and Benjamin set out for their journey, which serves to completely strip Sendrel of his manhood and replace it with femininity. Mendele's cartoonish and somewhat repulsive characterizations of both Sendrel and his wife, and the toxicity of their relationship within the context of Jewish religious gender roles, is a prime example of his campaign against traditional Jewish life, which he did not see as a realistic or productive means for Jews to grow and express themselves within the modern world.

If Mendele's relationship to Jewish tradition within his literature can be considered polemic, the appropriate label for Sholem Aleichem's attitude towards Jewish ritual observance in his work is of ambivalence. In his serialized collection of short stories entitled "Tevye the Dairyman", he creates characters with many diverse relationships to Jewish observance, and does not seem to form a single final judgment in regards to the benefit or the detriment of the role of

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! religious tradition towards the collective Jewish interest. The main character, Tevye himself, is a pious man, and one of his key characteristics is his affinity for quoting Scripture to support his arguments in conversation. Although he often annoys whoever happens to be his conversation partner with these Biblical tidbits, prompting such responses as “spare us your Bible!”

! significance when it comes to the issue of solving many problems that exist in the real world. In the final chapter of the series, however, the practice of Jewish tradition is again seen as a favourable attribute. When Tevye and the rest of the Jews in his neighborhood are expelled from their area of the Pale of Settlement, Tevye's religion is seen as a great comfort to him in this time of crisis and change. As he is about to leave his town of Boiberik for the last time, he asserts to the reader that "I'm still Tevye...I'm just a plain everyday Jew" (Rabinovitch 1996, 117), confirming to himself and to his audience that his Jewish identity will always follow him loyally, no matter what the future may hold. Sholem Aleichem therefore ascribes both positive and unfavourable aspects to the observance of Jewish tradition as examined through the characterization of Tevye, with no overarching judgment as to its benefit or lack thereof.

Tevye's daughter Chava chooses to leave her Jewish background behind entirely in order to marry her non-Jewish sweetheart. Although one would expect that such a dramatic act should shed some light on Sholem Aleichem's opinions concerning the merits, or lack thereof, of preserving Jewish tradition, the reader is still left unsure of the literary status that religious observance holds in the work by the end of Chava's literary characterization. On one hand, Chava's conversion to Christianity is portrayed as having a devastating effect upon her family – they were forced to pretend she was dead, as per Jewish law, and "pretend there never was any

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! rabbi, his constant need for proof has abated. He becomes a disciple of the rebbe himself, and “when another disciple tells how the rabbi of Nemirov ascends to heaven at the time of Penitential prayers, the Litvak does not laugh. He only adds quietly, ‘If not higher’” (Peretz 1990, 180-1). This is a clear example of the Litvak surrendering his need for empiricism in favour of blind faith, as he does not know what is above heaven, but he is placing his trust in the perceived holiness of the Chasidic rebbe.

The three Classical Yiddish writers, from Mendele to Sholem Aleichem to Peretz, consecutively grew more comfortable with celebrating the legacy of Jewish tradition as a legitimate and desirable means of expressing one’s cultural identity, as expressed through characterizations within their works. As Ruth Wisse notes in her introduction to ‘The I. L. Peretz Reader’, “Peretz was among the first to recognize in the ideals of the early Hasidic masters...models of spiritual dependence that the Jews of his time were otherwise lacking” (Wisse 1990, xxi). Perhaps this is part of the reason why, in comparison to Peretz’s work, Mendele literary tone against observant Jewry appears to be disparaging, while Sholem Aleichem’s attitude seems uncommitted towards the issue – neither of them had found religious role models on which to base their notions of Jewish expression like Peretz. If they had found a similar influence, it is possible that their relationships towards religious expressions of Judaism could have appeared quite differently within their literary creations.

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## Memoir Analysis:

### Gary Shteyngart's *Little Failure*

Rayna Lew

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contrast is one of the classic dichotomies in immigrant stories, as children tend to better adapt to their surroundings than their older, more well-established parents. Within this dynamic, there are two conflicts within the mem





! on the surface, this story is unlike *Little Failure*, if the reader delves a little bit deeper they will find that the child in *Roman Berman, Massage Therapist* talks about how “before Stalin, [his] great-grandmother lit the candles and made an apple cake every Friday night.”<sup>199</sup> Although this was a tradition that had died off, the young boys' mother still baked the apple cake and brought it to present at their dinner at the Kornblum's, the wealthy American family they were seeking help from. There was still some connection to and some ambition to be a part of the community, for more than just the monetary gain it may have brought them. That being said, the cake w



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%' (!345' 71!F 3Q!\*' 3/2(!' ,: !70,/7/0: 4\*' !3: !5' (!\*' 3/2(!5' 35!3!/P(!0(5(\*5(O!9,5' ,/!

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