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DOROT:

The McGill Undergraduate Journal of Jewish Studies

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The McGill Undergraduate Journal of Jewish Studies

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

I have learned from and greatly enjoyed the insights that these five young student-scholars provide into the vibrant research going on in the many fields of Jewish StudiesÑ from politics and sociology to literature and history. I am confident that you will enjoy t

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

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

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

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

Though initially drafted in 1947, before the establishment of the state of Israel, this ÒStatusQuo AgreementÓ letter signified the influence that would be maintained by the religious authorities and their rabbinic court systems regarding matters of personal status, Shabbat, education, andkashrut⁴ The agreement stated that Shabbat should be the clar, state-wide day of rest. This clause meant that, in accordance with halakhaall state-run institutions would be closed on this day. Additionally, autonomy over a state -supported religious education system was granted to Orthodox parties, and the government guaranteed that all state institutions would uphold the Jewish dietary laws of kashrut⁵ With regard to personal status, Ben Gurion vowed to Òprevent the

character.¹⁵ According to religious Zionists, who ground their understanding in halakhaJudaism is both a religion and a nationality. ¹⁶ Meanwhile, secular Israelis focus their attention on immigration and settlement building and have historically defined Jewishness more liberally. They understand Judaism to be a declaration of culture, ethnici ty, religiosity, and nationalism. The Status Quo AgreementÕsegulations regarding personal status (ishut) of citizens in Israel compared to the revised Law of Return depict the tension inherent in the differences between halackicand civil definitions of Jewishness!¹७

Though automatic citizenship in Israel defines Judaism relatively liberally under the Law of Return, the institutions of marriage, divorce, conversion, burial, and other matters regarding personal status in Israel have been Òconsigned to religious law.Ó¹8 This has effectively resulted in two separate understandings of who is a Jew in Israel.¹¹ However, it is evident in certain cases of enhanced public pressure that the application of religious law can be mitigated through the Supreme Court, which does exercise authority above the rabbinic court.²⁰

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¹⁵ LiebmanandDon-Yehiya, ÒTheÔStatuQuo,Õ**Ġ**1.

¹⁶ Arian, Politics

Civil -Religious Tension in the Political Arena

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

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

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²¹ Cohen, OChangeis the Orthodox Camp Ó83.

²² Charles S. LiebmarReligion, Democracy anlaraeli Society Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 80.

²³ Arian, Politics in Israel, 349.

²⁴ Shimshoni Israeli Democracy 36.

²⁵ Liebman, Religion 20.

²⁶ Israel First Knesset. ÒThe Debate on a Constitutions कि लो। or the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, 19948 to the Presented. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: 2008), 96.

The Ministry of Religions was created in order to protect the affairs of each major religious group within Israel, guaranteeing the commitments made by leading secular parties to the religious parties.²⁷ The democratic system set up by the provisional government of the Yishuvis highly criticized for having given orthodox in stitutions political space to Òimpose matters of religious interest on the nonreligious citizen.Ó²⁸

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Ben GurionÕsleading labour party often made concessions to meet the desires of the religious parties.³⁴

include the 1952 Law of Citizenship, which granted citizenship to every Jew, his or her spouse, children and grandchildren, as well as the 1953 law, which established the authority of rabbinical courts with regard to matters of marriage and divorce. 38 IsraelÕs Ògates were open to all riahal (ethnic) JewsÉthe Law of

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if only by nationality. 47 According to halakha,

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

The Shalit case made a significant impact on policy regarding the Law of Return. After strong reconsideration, in order to compensate Israeli secular nationalists like Shalit who suffered under the restrictions of the rabbinic court, the Law of Return was amended in 1970 Òto grant automatic citizenship rights to Gentile spouses, to the children of mixed marriages, even to the adult descendants of mixed marriages. However, the Rabbinate Òcontinued to reserve to itself the purely religious questions of marriages and divorce. Ó⁵⁷ This created many challenges for non-halakhicJews granted citizenship in Israel, as

⁵² Sachar A History of Israel, 607.

⁵³ Arian, Politics in Israel, 354.

⁵⁴ Shindler, A History of Modern Israel, 87.

⁵⁵ Arian, Politics in Israel, 354.

⁵⁶ Sachar A History of Israel, 607.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

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

Currently, the Orthodox RabbinateÕs interpretation of who is a Jew is politically binding for all Jewish citizens, secular or religious, as they have a monopoly over Jewish marriage and divorce within the state. ⁵⁸ In the past, not only did the Rabbinate control marriage, divorce, and burial within the state, but they also had a monopoly over conversion within the state, which was limited strictly to the Orthodox stream. The 1998 Conversion Law, espoused by the Neeman Commission, attempted to resolve the lack of clarity regarding the acceptability of Reform and Conservative conversion in Israel. It was decided

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

Defining Jewishness: Civil and Religious Tension in

be drawn up by the husbandÓ and Òa woman who remarries without benefit of a get(religious divorce) is guilty of adultery.Ó ⁷⁰ These extreme laws have been an additional source of hardship and tension regarding cases of agunahand mamzerim

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

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

⁷⁰ J. David Bleich, Contemporary Halakhic Problems (New York: Ktav, 1977),146.

⁷¹ Ibid., 150.

⁷² Sachar A History of Israel, 609.

⁷³ Bleich, Halakhic Problems 159.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 167-168.

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

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

The widespread problem of defining Jewishness and the consequent challenges that have faced many Israelis has resulted in the need for civil marriage in Israel. The civil rights movement in Israel has seen a decline in instate marriages sanc2 (es)me I e cChief Raeeier,

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Antisemite Sketches Joan Meyer

Jean Paul SartreÕSortrait of the Antisemite(1945) offers an astute analysis of anti-

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Semitism remains the same seventyyears after he wrote

population commuted from the surrounding affluent, mostly Jewish area outside of Detroit, Michigan. Since their parents were mostly doctors, attorneys, and businesspeople, these Jewish commuter students seemingly confirmed the misconception that OJewishO is synonymous with a rich, white American. My fellow Jewish students and I made the same cognitive error Sartre outlines: Olf he does not like them people [Jews] say it is because his experience has taught him that they [Jews] are bad [É] Thus his opinion seems to be the result of external causes [É] the percentage of Jews who are bankers, industrialists, doctors, lawyers. 67 We admitted that there was a certain albeit limited truth to the belief that Jews control everything N not in society as a whole, of course, but in this case it was true that Jewish parents controlled our school board. Yes, the food at lunch was better than at breakfast or dinner and yes, buses ran only during the hours commuter students stayed on campus. Granted, this was the result of these parents, many of whom were Jewish, advocating for the resources they paid for to be rightly allocated to their children. Our parents would have done the same had they been aware of our needs as residential students, but hey simply lived too far away to know the logistics of our daily lives. Residential students, including myself, resented commuter students for the preferential treatment they seemingly received. Many gentile students conflated this preferential treatment with the commuter studentsÖ Jewishness. That this mass misconception lead to a culture of anti-Semitism in the dormitories and, unchecked by teachers or the

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⁸⁷ Sarte, OPortraiof the Antisemite, On Existentialism from Dostoevskyto Sartre, 329.

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

One event rid me of my illusions about anti -Semites. Our class had a substitute teacher and she allowed us to play a game called ÒcelebrityÓ after we had finished our lesson. The rules, similar to charades, state hat each player writes down a celebrityÕs name. In the following rounds, pairs draw a slip of paper from a hat and work together to guess the person based first on a word and an action. This game was intended to be innocent fun. However, three separate individuals placed the name ÒHitlerÓ into the hat, one of whom I had considered my friend. I vehemently protested, stating that Hitler was an infamous historical figure, by no means a celebrity like everyone elseÕs choice of actors, musicians, writers, and artists. Furthermore, it was offensive and incredibly insensitive to Jewish students to include t TJ ET Q q 0.24 0 0 0.24 198.3041 r te and

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

My experience with this game of charades was a textbook demonstration of SartreÕs assertion that Ò[i]f he has become an anitsemite, it is because one cannot be antisemetic

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

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

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

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

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ÒYou Are Our Savior, CarolineÓ: Messianism in Neil GaimanÕs Coraline Sophie Panzer

As a child, I tended to resist reading books that adults recommended to me. Fiercely stubborn in my attempts to be independent, I loved reading, but only books I was allowed to pick out for myself. For example, I started reading the Harry Potter series in middle school, long after most of my friends had started, because it was only at the point when all the adults in my life finally stopped trying to nudge me towards them (I have since worn out my paperback versions of the books). I underwent a similar experience with Neil GaimanŌs Coraline.Gaiman commented in an Òabout the bookO feature for HarperCollins that CoralineÒwas a story, I learned when people began to read it, that children experienced as an adventure but which gave adults nightmares. ItŌs the tsangest book IŌve written, it took the longest time to write, and itŌs the book IOm proudest of.O² After I graduated elementary school, escaped the English teachers trying to convince me to read the slim volume, and when trailers for the movie started to appear in 2009, I finally sat down with it, finishing it in one sitting.

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

92 Neil Gaiman, Coraline

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story, Òone of the most frightening books ever writtenÓ according to The New York Times Book Reviewhich delighted chil dren and terrified adults. 93

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

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⁹³ Ibid., ii.

Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology. ⁹⁶ These tales have been criticized for being too violent and horrific for children or any other audience, for that matter. ÒSome feel that they [GrimmsÕ fairy tales] are [É] much too violent to be of spiritual value Ñ notwithstanding the bibleÕs own faithful accounts of cannibalism in besieged cities, royal adultery, and murder, not to mention mockery and crucifixion. Ó⁹⁷

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

⁹⁶ RonaldG. Murphy, TheOwl, the Raven and the Dove: The Religious Meaning of the Grimm Os Magic Fairy Tales (New York: Oxford University, 2000) 5.

parents, armed only with her wits, the guidance of a black cat, and a stone with a hole in it. In a profoundly anti -feminist review of the movie from christiananswers.net, which Gaiman deemed to be the Òfunniest Coraline review everÓ on Twitter, Michael Karounos accuses both the book and the movie of Òspiritual emptinessÓ for demonizing female domesticity and promoting ÒabusiveÓ behavior of women towards mer^{9,8} It remains unclear whether Karounos would criticize other fairy tales that share these motifs of evil maternal figures and forbidden fruit, like Hansel and Greel, in a similar manner.

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

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

⁹⁸ Michael Karounos ÒMovieReview: Coraline ÓChristian Answers.

upon the children by the serpent/witch: Hansel will be fattened for killing, Gretel will be forced to do hard labor and then she too will be killed.Ó ⁹⁹ Similar to the witch in Hansel and Gretel, the Other Mother constantl y feeds Coraline delicious food in order to prime the girl for her own consumption. Coraline and the siblings are both redeemed by their wits Ñ Coraline tricks the Other Mother into opening the door that leads her back home and Gretel fools the witch into opening the oven so she can push her in. Both stories also emphasize the importance of familial love. Coraline is motivated to defeat the Other Mother by her love for her parents. In Hansel and Gretel, ÒThe childrenÕs love for one another and their mutual fidelity as an escape from their situation echoes medieval Christian tradition.Ó ¹⁰⁰

figure with his disguise. In Hansel and Gretethe witch lures the children into her home in order to trap and eat them. Similarly, the Other Mother lur es Coraline into the Other World with delicious food, beautiful clothes, and interesting, attentive neighbors, doing all she can to tempt Coraline into forsaking her life in

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her parents and stay with the Other Mother. The Other Mr. Bobo asks Coraline, ÒAnd what if you do everything you swore you would? What then? NothingÕs changed. YouÕll go home. YouÕll be bored. YouÕll be ignored. No one will listen to you, not really listen to you. YouÕre too clever and too quiet for them to understand. They donÕt even get your name right.�07 CoralineÕs parents also contribute to this sense of alienation by being too busy with work to play with her. They do not really care what she does as longas she does not bother them or Òmake a mess.�09 Her motherÕs refusal to buy her a pair of bright green gloves emphasizes her crushing CoralineÕs desire to stand out, indicative of CoralineÕs special status in the book:

Coraline saw some Day-Glo green gloves she liked a lot. Her mother refused to buy them for her, preferring instead to buy white socks, navy blue school underpants, four gray blouses, and a dark gray skirt.

ÒBut Mum, everybodyat schoolÕs got gray blouses and everything. NobodyÕsot green gloves. I could be the only one.Ó⁹⁹

At the end of the book, Miss Spink marvels privately at Coraline, OWhat an extraordinary child, O not once, but twice. 110 This reinforces the fact that Coraline has a special quality or status. The fact that this extraordinariness is a kind of messianism is referenced by Mr. Bobo after Coraline sends the Other

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ÒÔThe mice tell me all is good,Õ he said. ÔThey say thout ayre our savior, Caroline.Ó¹¹¹ This notion of being a savior is reminiscent of messianism.

Another general messianic quality Gaiman bestows on Coraline is the nature of her quest \tilde{N} she literally saves the souls of three other children, in addition to her parents, from an evil figure. When Coraline demands her parents back, the Other Mother traps Coraline in a room behind a mirror as punishment for her supposed insolence. In this room, Coraline meets three ghost children who have been forgotten there. When she explains to them that she is looking for her real parents, one of the children pleads, \tilde{O} Peradventure [\tilde{E}] if you could win your mamma and your papa back from the beldam, you could also win free our souls \tilde{O}^{12} The concept of a messianic figure being respon

ÒSo thatÕs why youÕre going back to her world then?Ó said the cat. ÒBecause your father once saved you from wasps?Ó ÒDonÕt be silly,Ó said Coraline. ÒlÕm going back floeth u (a3 /TT9 1 (ic) 0.2 (e(hen?) 0.u (Ó s) 0.2 0.2 ()(ac) 0.2a3 /TT9 1 (y) -0.2 (a69 0.9)

give people tools. Mind tools that they can use to deal with real problems.Ó¹²⁴ In writing a modern fairy tale/horror story with Biblical roots and an empowered female lead character, Gaiman taps into the original appeal of these kinds of stories. Summed up in the epigraph that preludes the novel: ÒFairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.�5

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Yiddish -Language Schools in Soviet Russia

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Yiddish -Language Schools in Soviet Russia Rhiannon TurgelEthier

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

Through an analysis of the institutional goals of the Soviet-Yiddish schools, the curriculum they followed, and the Jewish experience between the October Revolution and the mid -1930s, this paper will try to determine the schoolsÕ degree of success in terms of strengthening JewsÕ ties to the Soviet Union. This will be achieved through the study of different sources from scholarly books, government reports, newspaper articles, and testimonies.

Government reports are difficult to use because of their discrepancies and biases. Government records at the time were twisted in order to make the Soviet Union look better. Additionally, the government did not collect statistics on a regular

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

Context: A Brief History of Making Jews Russian

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

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¹²⁶ NicholasV. Riasanovsky NicholasI, Ó Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholassarof-Russia

¹²⁷ Michael Stanislawski Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 59.

son Alexander III, who ruled as the emperor of Russia from 1881 to 1894!³⁴
Unlike hi s father, Alexander III was not liberal. He believed in the Russian national identity and spent his reign trying to turn his subjects into so -called true Russians. His Òpolitical ideal was a nation containing only one nationality, one language, one religion, and one form of administration; and he did his utmost to prepare for the realization of this ideal by imposing the Russian language [É] by persecuting the Jews, and by destroying the remnants of German, Polish, and Swedish institutions in the outlying p rovinces.Ó³⁵

Alexander III oppressed the Jews and put an end to the new class of Russian Jewish intelligentsia that had emerged three decades earlier. He persecuted them through Òrural expulsions, wholesale expulsions from Moscow and St. Petersburg, exclusions from civil service positions, quota limitations in secondary and higher education and repeal of residence licenses outside the Pale. Ó³6 With these draconian reforms, the Jewish people of the Pale of Settlement were reduced to their status as an oppresæd minority. By the turn of the twentieth century, the founding of the first Yiddish secular school in 1898 in the province of Minsk signaled a shift in fate for Russian Jews. 137

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

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

Soviet atheist values.¹⁵⁴ Around 1 931, the Soviet Yiddish-language schools underwent a reform. After the reform, the schoolsÕ main goal was still to produce communist children, but also to teach students to become industry workers. ¹⁵⁵ The importance of the creation of workers was one of the main reasons why the schools placed a strong emphasis on science and technology. The Soviet Yiddish language schools made use of the polytechnical principle of education. This type of learning environment called for the combination of education with indust rial production. ¹⁵⁶The government believed that students should learn about the fundamentals of agricultural and industrial production through the study of theory and its application. Through this type of education, the Soviet Union hoped that children woul d easily reach an informed decision on what they

An additional change by the government was to divide the school year into three sections. The first section ran from September 1 to June 1 and was characterized as regular school time. The second section ran from June 1 to July 1, during which the school curriculum operated outside of the classroom, in open air. The last section of the school year ran from July 1 to September 1 and was simply full va cation.¹⁵⁸

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

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

Although the government wanted to promote OYiddishization, OYIddishizati

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 $^{^{160}\,}Halevy, Jewish Schools Under Czarismand Communism 183.$

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 184.

¹⁶² ShternshisSovietand Kosher, 69.

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

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

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¹⁶⁷ Halevy, JewishSchoolsUnder

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

After 1931, the school system officially abandoned progressivism. ¹⁷⁰The new aim of the Soviet Yiddish -language schools was to produce trained workers who would become good communists. This meant that students needed both a political and technical education. ¹⁷¹There was a change in theschoolsÕ curriculum, in which focus shifted from social science to more explicit forms of political propaganda. ¹⁷²Soviet Yiddish

These leading questions meant for students to read the stories with a procommunist point of view. ¹⁸²

There was a clear change in the Soviet UnionÖs view on education before and after 1931. However, it is unknown exactly why this change happened. One can assume that if there were changes made, it was because the government must have been unsatisfied with the results that they were getting before.

Around the same time as the curriculum reform there was a change in the governmentÕs goal for the Soviet Union as a whole. The first fiveyear plan and the governmentÕs desire to industrialize quickly led to this large-scale change in goal, which required trained manpower. This explains the afo rementioned 1931 proclamation in which the new main goal of Soviet Yiddish -language schools was to teach students to operate machinery. It addition to primary and secondary schools for native Yiddish speakers, Ukraine had an extensive system of Yiddish -language industrial technical and professional schools in the early

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The Jewish Experience

How did the Soviet Yiddish -language schools actually impact Jewish students as well as the larger Jewish community? Did the schools successfully make the Soviet UnionÕs Jewry more Russian and more communist? These questions can be difficult to answer because most reports and literature on the subject are not entirely relia(ec) 0.2 T 2 (j) 0.1 (ec) 0I 0.2 (ub) (j) 0.1 rt are nodirely.2 1933,TJ E

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

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

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¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 54.

 $^{{}^{189}\,\}grave{O}Communism Among Jewish Children in Russia, \acute{Q}TA (New York, NY), \,Nov.\,5, 1924.$

culture. ¹⁹³ In his analysis, Dardak claims that the Soviet education system promoted the quality of languages by instructing children in their mother tongue. He also criticizes the Jewish schools of Poland for making their pupils study in Polish, which he sees as compulsory ÒPolonization. ⁶⁴ Ironically, he sees the Soviet Yiddish schools as inclusive and does not seem to make a link between the school system and its goal of Russification. Articles like that of Dardak can be used to demonstrate that whet

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

These positive experiences and memories of the Soviet Yiddish schools do not mean that the institutions were successful in their Russification mission.

According to a 1924 report, a Yiddish Communist writer had conducted a campaign to find out if Jewish pioneers were truly communists in their homes.

The writer was upset to discover they were not truly communist; he Òfinds among the children an appalling ignorance of Communism and an absolute indifference to what it stands for .Ó⁹⁷

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

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

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Reduced to Symbol: The Role of Women inTwentieth Century Yiddish Literature

Lauren Kranc

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

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

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symbolize unfulfilled promise. Drawing on Satan in Gora Ds Rechele as a parallel, this paper will illustrate how Asch Ds Uncle Mose llows Masha to embody the twentieth century Yiddish literary traditional view of women as weak and powerless.

Rechele is a product of horror, brought up in superstition and fear during the seventeenth century messianic era following the Chmielnicki Massacres, thus lacking agency and moral grounding. Lacking a formal education or proper home and paranoid because of her cruel upbringing, Rechele Ònever learns how to distinguish between right and wrong,Ó and she is therefore Òsusceptible to [...] the promise of redemption that begins to penetrate the town of GorayÓ in the form of false messianism.¹⁹⁹

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

In the twentieth century American world of Uncle Mosesthe Jewish community is impoverished, and Masha sacrifices herself to Uncle Moses in order to provide wealth and happiness for her family. Masha, in many ways, is a complete reversal of RecheleÕs character. She is a strongilled, fierce, loving girl who even as a child Ò[feels] sure [...] she [can] get the money her father need[s]Ó from Uncle Moses, KuzminÕs ÒParaoh,Ó.e. the head of the community and controller of wealth. 202At the beginning of the text, Masha demonstrates female agency and self-awarenesswhen confidently standing up to Uncle Moses in order to defend her father. Moses is initially drawn to Masha because her childish name-calling is the Òfirst time someone [...] dare[s] to upbraid him,Ó and even as a child, she possesses an Òindependent spiritÓ that can Òaddress him as

²⁰² SholemAsch, Uncle Moses: A Novel (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920), 13, 50.

affianced to Uncle Moses. ع⁴However, as she ages, she Ò[begins] to feel that she [will] have to pay for all this good fortune. Ó ²¹⁵Even before MosesÕ marriage proposal, Masha considers Òherself a sacrifice to the welfare of her parents, her sisters, her relatives and all the townsfolk, Ó realizing that she will have to suffer through a relationship with Uncle Moses to keep her family proud and comfortable. ²¹⁶

In both seventeenth century Goray and twentieth century New York, a powerful male figure appears to be in control of an entire Jewish communityÕs well-being and good fortune at the expense of a young girlÕs bodily agency and freedom. However, while Rechele is helpless and listless, Masha is cognizant of her sacrifice on her communityÕs behalf. While his difference in awareness and agency showcases the divergent sociehistorical settings and roles of women in the texts, Masha and Rechele are both ultimately subject to the will of powerful men and community influence in very similar ways. Uncle Moses is the ÒNew PharaohÓ to whom ÒKuzmin [is] a faithful slave,Ó as the entire European village is reduced to a factory in America after it emigrates from Poland. ²¹⁷ Similarly, Reb Gedaliya becomes GorayÕs spiritual and political leader in the chaos of false

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does not resist Uncle MosesÕ fondling, allowing him to claim ownership over her both emotionally and physically. ²²³ MashaÕs impending marriage, which deprives her of her youth and happiness, is Òa shroud of gloom and silence over her refined, maidenly being,Ó which makes her feel Òpositive that she [is] to die [...] in a few weeks.Ġ²⁴ Uncle MosesÕ dominance and control over her is like Òan

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Despite her unwillingness and unhappiness in marrying Moses, Masha sees herself as a sacrifice for the greater good of her community, thus diminishing her value as an individual and as a female. Uncle Moses acknowledges that MashaÕs Òwillingness, her free consent [Éwil] be absentÓ from their marriage, ironically reverting to a place where her agency matters to him, after years spent believing that Òshe [will] idolize him [...] if he shower[s] her with favors.Ó²³⁰ Due to her parentsÕ fear of Òthe vision of poverty that [rises] before [them],Ó Masha marries Moses against her desire in order to provide for

²²⁷ Ibid., 146.

²²⁸ Ibid., 147.

²²⁹ Ibid., 162.

²³⁰ Ibid., 70, 158.

her family. 231 Masha understands then that Oshe ha[s] been brought up with a rope around her neck N that she [was] sold when a child, for the benefit of her parents and the whole family [...] that she no longer ha[s] any right to happiness. G³² She understands her duty to sacrifice herself for the wealth and prosperity of her family, so despite her Oscorn and disgust, O Masha goes through with her marriage. ²³³

MashaÖs affair with 3m, MosesÕ righthand man, and her illegitimate child by him is less of a rebellion than it is a further enslavement of herself, as she is Ògiven into [SamÕs] hands as part of Uncle Moses' legac∳3. ÓThus, her child is also Oa result of her serfdom, of the pressure that [has] been exerted upon her [...] the product of an error, of her weakness. O³⁵ Despite sacrificing herself through marriage to ensure her family Os good fortune, she hates herself and resents her family for being Oenslaved in the shop of Uncle Moses [É] that ha[s] passed into Sam's power, Ó slaves to capitalist society and the American dream? Masha herself is Obut an employee of Uncle Moses likewise a slave of the firm OMoses Melnick and Company. O Similarly, Rechele lives in fear, at first in the power of her Granny, then Reb Gedaliya, until she eventually is Oin the power of demons, O who take over her body until her eventual death. 238 Satan in Gora Os medieval setting allows for a pre-modern, superstitious version of the same

²³¹ Ibid., 162.

²³² Ibid., 173.

²³³ Ibid., 174.

²³⁴ Ibid., 215.

²³⁵ Ibid., 226.

²³⁶ Ibid., 215.

²³⁷ Ibid., 219.

²³⁸ Singer, Satanin Goray, 68.

narrative, in which the female protagonist is overtaken and used for the sake of what is thought to be the prosperity of the community. MashaÕs forced slavery to capitalist America embodied by Uncle Moses at the hands of her family until she is co

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

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

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²⁴⁰Iris IndelsonShein,ÒTh&chandmask&ilence,andmameloshn,ÓIn geveb, August2015,2.

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

Lauren Kranc is a third year McGill student who majors in English Literature and double minors in Jewish Studies and Gender, Sexuality, Feminist, and Social Justice Studies. She is currently on exchange at Carles University in Prague but is looking forward to returning to Montreal in September for her final year of undergrad. This year she served as the Promotions Editor of Scrivener Creative

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Editor Profiles

Caroline Bedard is in her final (U3) year at McGill, studying in the Honours

History program and minoring in Jewish Studies. After graduating this June, she
will enjoy a relaxing summer vacation before beginning the Master of Studies

(MSt) program in British and European History, 1500 -present at the University of
Oxford. Although Caroline will very much miss her McGill friends, she is excited
to see what England has in store for her!

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

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

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