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*The Posen Library of*  
Jewish Culture  
and Civilization

Deborah Dash Moore, *Editor in Chief*

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**VOLUME 9: CATASTROPHE AND REBIRTH,  
1939–1973**

Samuel D. Kassow and David G. Roskies, *Editors*

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# Introduction to Volume 9

*Samuel D. Kassow and David G. Roskies*

The period covered by this volume, 1939 to 1973, is one of the most tragic and dramatic in Jewish history. It saw the Holocaust, the rise of the Jewish state, the end of Eastern Europe and the Arab world as Jewish centers, the radical transformation of French Jewry from a largely Ashkenazi to a predominantly North African community, and the emergence of an American Jewry that enjoyed unprecedented acceptance, rapid social mobility, and a new leadership role on the world Jewish stage. This anthology endeavors to encompass the entirety of Jewish experience in those fateful years and to view it through the multiple lenses of chronology, geography, language, and genre.

Anthologies have long revealed how different Jewish communities responded creatively to cultural challenges and the anxieties of self-definition. From the Bible and Talmud to the prayer book and Passover Haggadah, from the modern *The Book of Legends/Sefer Ha-Aggadah* to *The Jewish Catalog: A Do-It-Yourself Kit*, anthologies have played a critical role in Jewish culture. They introduced new ideas, undermined old paradigms, and facilitated diversity and dissent.<sup>1</sup> In a period far shorter than a thousand years, world Jewry was transformed spatially, demographically, linguistically, politically—in every way imaginable. Anthologies are our first window into these sweeping changes.

Within the Jewish anthological library, *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization*, based on principles of inclusivity, equality, and polyphony, occupies a unique place. Our mandate was to be all-inclusive, to cast our net as wide as possible, to embrace all forms and modes of Jewish self-expression, everywhere.

The way an anthology makes sense of the past determines in large measure how it sees the future. The biblical book of Proverbs (see Volume 1) is a collection of ancient wisdom literature, the province of the priestly class, who found the perfect venue to teach future generations about wisdom, virtue, and the world order. The ancient mystics had a completely different way of anthologizing their visions of the end time and the world to come. Their genre of choice was pseudepigrapha, ascribing authorship to spiritual personalities long since dead (Volumes 2 and 3). The greatest such compendium was the thirteenth-century Zohar, starring Shimon bar Yoḥai, a rabbi of the second century,

and his entourage (Volume 4). Then came the invention of printing; eventually no Jewish home would be complete without such essential anthologies as the weekday and festival prayer books, the Passover Haggadah, and various compendia of aggadic material from the Talmud, like the Hebrew *‘Eyn Ya‘akov* (1516) and the Yiddish *Mayse-bukh* (1602) (Volume 5). Most popular were biographical legends of the rabbis, their wives, and their livestock, updated to include the foundational figures of medieval Jewry, like Maimonides and Judah the Pietist.

The Posen Library is a twenty-first-century link in that unbroken chain of Jewish creativity. To renew this link, to underscore the importance of anthologies in fostering Jewish self-understanding and debate in changing times and shifting landscapes, and to stimulate critical thinking about the anthology as a genre, each chapter of the present volume begins with a selection of anthologies. To our mind, an anthology is worth a thousand books.

By telling its story anthologically and by choosing a particular order of telling, this volume captures the tragedy and drama of this extraordinary time period in a completely new way. The years from 1939 to 1945 are accorded their own timeline. This is based on a new understanding of the war years, of how Jews the world over were able to marshal artistic, spiritual, political, pedagogical—indeed, civilizational—resources during the greatest catastrophe that Jews as a people and as individuals have ever faced. Because the war years are presented here as a thing apart, the reader will discover cultural synapses never before recorded.

The selections in this anthology encourage readers to eavesdrop on many conversations that took place across the Jewish world or, conversely, to ask why certain conversations did not happen. Sometimes new ideas, songs, poems, or stories found ready resonance throughout the Jewish world, but often they remained local and obscure. Sometimes communities interacted with each other in totally unexpected ways. The Soviet Jewry movement, for example, drew its energy not only from Soviet Jews but also from an awakening of Holocaust memory—and guilt—in American Jewry.

This comprehensive anthology will challenge readers to see how Jews, as communities and as individuals, redefined themselves in the face of destruction and national rebirth in a turbulent period marked by the interplay of danger and opportunity. How did they try to replace what was lost? How did the new Jewish state affect them? How did Jews adapt to the challenges of the postwar world: linguistic shifts, the Cold War, unparalleled prosperity, the move away from old immigrant enclaves, and the betrayal of a communist left in which so many Jews had believed?

A process of redefinition and adaptation embraced novel ideas of space and time, gender, and nation. Unprecedented ways of confronting displacement became more prominent. One prime example is novels and poems about extended families, translating collective identity into personal histories. This anthology challenges readers to rethink some mistaken stereotypes: that there was little great literature produced in the ghettos of World War II, that serious interest in the Holocaust began only decades after the war, that Yiddish culture vanished after the war. It also reveals the remarkable and quite rapid transformation of Israeli culture as it struggled to resolve many critical issues, such as mass immigration and the quest for distinctive national forms of music and art. Finally, there will be surprises. Who, in 1953, for instance, would have predicted the national awakening of Soviet Jewry?

During these years, diverse Jewish communities faced their own individual challenges, but two previously unimagined issues confronted world Jewry and every individual Jew: the meaning and memory of the Holocaust and the safety of the Jewish state. No matter where Jews lived or what their politics were, no matter what languages they spoke, those two key issues, more than any other, demanded some kind of response.

In his 1943 anthology *Memoirs of My People through a Thousand Years*, Leo W. Schwarz, a master of this genre, declared that to get his readers to feel the “hot burning heart of the Jewish people,” personal anecdotes, individual stories, and flashes of humor were just as significant as massive histories or intellectual tomes. Schwarz’s point is well taken. While this Volume 9 of The Posen Library includes a wide selection of scholarly writing and essays, it also contains gripping individual stories, collections of humor, and life writing. And like Schwarz, the editors of this anthology believe that, despite all the obvious caveats, one can nonetheless speak about a “Jewish people.”

Of course, what makes a book or work of art Jewish continues to provoke endless discussion.<sup>2</sup> Is there such a thing as Jewish culture? Some scholars say yes, others no. Ruth R. Wisse has examined the “Jewish canon,” Geoffrey Hartman the “Jewish imagination,” and Barukh Kurzweil and Dov Sadan have made the assumption of an integral Jewish culture the touchstone of their literary criticism. In contrast, the eminent Israeli literary critic Dan Miron has asserted that “one of the inherent and most significant characteristics of Jewish history in modern times is that it produced not one Jewish culture but many variants of *possible* Jewish cultures or sub-cultures” (emphasis added).

As readers wrestle with the questions posed by Miron, Wisse, and others, they may well find that this anthology will stimulate insights and discussion and help them reach their own conclusions. In doing so, they will have to consider the role of language, the presence or absence of Jewish content, the self-definition of the author or artist, the role of shared memories, and the impact of many different non-Jewish cultures.

Furthermore, the disproportionate Jewish presence in certain genres and certain fields—photography, film, and musicals, for instance—also demands attention, even in the absence of explicitly Jewish content. Photography attracted many Jews because they could get a start in it with little money and faced fewer social hurdles. But it also accommodated, as few other arts did, the leftist passions of second-generation American Jews who brought with them their love of the camera and their fascination with the rhythms and unconscious choreography of the urban scene. The urban photography of Helen Levitt, Rebecca Lepkoff, and Weegee (Arthur Fellig) captured images of city life that were not in and of themselves “Jewish” but that reflected a particular perspective on the drama of the streets and the sidewalks that many of these children of Yiddish-speaking immigrants intuitively grasped.

No one will deny that an Agnon story written in Hebrew about a Jewish shtetl is “Jewish.” But what about Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story* or Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma*? Again, neither addresses explicitly Jewish themes. Yet they are included here not only because they highlight the Jewish impact on the quintessentially American genre of the Broadway musical but also because they address issues of human dignity and the dangers of group conflict that have had a particular resonance for Jews. In short, the selections of this anthology span a continuum whose very

ambiguity encompasses a critical aspect of the modern Jewish experience. To try to define what is Jewish is itself very Jewish.

One of the first anthologies presented in this volume, *Payn un gvure (Suffering and Heroism)*, appeared in 1940 in Nazi-occupied Warsaw; the last, *The Jewish Catalog*, was published in the United States in 1973. The first, edited by Eliyohu Gutkowski and Antek Zuckerman, reflected wartime dystopia; the second, individual opportunities that Jews encountered in a changing America. These serve as bookends to a selection of anthologies that underscore the enormous range of Jewish experiences in these years, from catastrophe to renewal. The first anthology stressed the Jewish collective and its history; the last, the wide range of choices available to Jews as individuals.

Great differences separate the two anthologies. But they also share two things. First, they were meant to be *Jewish* anthologies, culling the vast Jewish bookshelf, mining a rich cultural legacy to help meet the challenges of the present. And second, just as the *Catalog* rejected “prefabricated” Judaism, so too did Gutkowski and Zuckerman represent a secular Zionism that had turned its back on the “prefabricated tradition” of Jewish orthodoxy.

Volume 9 of The Posen Library will also help readers navigate the profound linguistic shifts that marked Jewish culture in these years. English and Hebrew, and to a lesser degree French and Spanish, became the major languages of the Jewish world. Jewish culture in Arabic, German, and Polish declined, while, toward the end of this period, Russian slowly began to reemerge. The Ladino-speaking heartland of Salonika and the Balkans was decimated.

The great transnational Yiddish-speaking diaspora that had ranged from Warsaw to New York, from Cape Town to Buenos Aires—Yiddishland—lived on after the Holocaust, but on borrowed time and in vastly changed circumstances. The vast demographic reservoir of Jewish Eastern Europe that had replenished and nurtured Yiddishland was gone. Intense prewar debates between diaspora nationalists and Zionists, between Yiddishists and Hebraists, largely disappeared. More Jews had spoken Yiddish for a longer time than any other language in Jewish history. This was now over.

Yet paradoxically these years witnessed a second golden age of Yiddish culture.<sup>3</sup> Powerful poetry, incisive reportage, moving diaries, ghetto songs—all highlight the ongoing vitality of Yiddish culture under Nazi occupation. After the war, Yiddish writers and poets wrote some of their finest works. Yiddish was the language of the displaced persons camps and of communal Holocaust memory. Until the 1960s it was *the* major language of serious Holocaust scholarship, a fact that remained largely unknown to outsiders. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, Mark Turkow launched the series *Dos poylishe yidntum*, one of the most extraordinary publishing projects in modern Jewish history, a 175-book collection of memoirs, fiction, history, and poetry dedicated to preserving the memory of Polish Jewry. Yiddish schools endured, especially in Canada and Latin America. In Israel, the poet Abraham Sutzkever published the finest Yiddish literary journal in the world, *Di goldene keyt* (The Golden Chain). Yes, Yiddish definitely lived on. But few believed that it had a future. From a living Jewish language, it became, to an increasing extent, *loshn-hakdoyshim*, the language of the martyrs.

The destruction of the Yiddish-speaking heartland of Eastern Europe, at a time when very few Jews spoke Hebrew, meant that much Jewish culture in this period would be created in non-Jewish



languages. Indeed, the creation in other languages of a Jewish idiom that is not merely comical ranks among the greatest achievements of this period. This anthology includes many examples of this new Jewish idiom (or to use David Roskies's term, *Jewspeak*), from the stories and novels of Bernard Malamud and Patrick Modiano to the poetry of Allen Ginsberg.

Novelist Saul Bellow alluded to this elusive but important Jewish literature in non-Jewish languages in his 1963 anthology *Great Jewish Short Stories*, when he recalled a lighthearted but significant argument he had had with the Israeli novelist S. Y. Agnon. Agnon warned him that only writings in Hebrew were "safe." But Bellow parried that one could also write in Russian or English and still be a Jewish writer. And what exactly was Jewish anyway, Bellow asked? Neither writer convinced the other. Both would win the Nobel Prize in Literature, a sure sign that Jewish writers were gaining legitimacy and respect.

In the course of this journey through the geographic centers of the Jewish world, readers will also encounter different forms of Jewish space: real, imagined, and remembered. In addition to Yiddishland, the anthology takes readers into the shtetls of Eastern Europe, the mellahs or Jewish sections of North African cities, the ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe, the displaced persons camps of Germany and Austria, the *ma'abarot* or transit camps in Israel, and the old Jewish neighborhoods of New York, Paris, Salonika, and Baghdad.

New Jewish spaces also reflected far-reaching economic changes that especially affected communities in North America and Western Europe. In the postwar years, prosperity replaced economic depression, and millions of Jews in the Americas, Western Europe, Latin America, Australia, and South Africa moved into the middle class. At the same time, formerly prosperous communities, such as the many once well-to-do Jews of Aleppo and Baghdad, found themselves struggling to gain a new foothold in Israel.

In the United States, Jews moved to the suburbs and created new institutions—Jewish community centers and synagogues—that reflected a transition from immigrant ethnicity to a more comfortable Americanism expressed through outward religious observance and vicarious Zionism. In these postwar years, synagogue architecture and new Jewish community centers became a salient form of American Jewish expression and self-confidence even as they reflected the changing needs of Jews on the suburban frontier. One striking example was the new Congregation B'nai Israel in Millburn, New Jersey, where Percival Goodman joined forces with Robert Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb, and Herbert Ferber to bring together architecture, design, and sculpture in a new affirmation of faith in an American Jewish future.

Jewish geography now included, for the first time, sovereign space: places like Jerusalem, Masada, Tel Aviv, the kibbutz, and the Negev acquired a new resonance as symbols of the Jewish past, of Jewish heroism, of a pioneering future, of an exciting and lively all-Jewish city. This sovereign space included innovative memorials to the war dead, the Israel Museum, built to symbolize the continuity of Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, and Yad Vashem, to remember the victims of the Holocaust, as well as the Knesset, the symbol of Jewish statehood.

By the early 1960s, another form of Jewish space slowly began to emerge: a “Europe” with its own distinct Jewish identity, neither American nor Israeli, committed to a Jewish future that transcended past betrayals and disappointments. In a 1971 symposium, one participant wrote that, for the first time, “one could think of European Judaism as one entity, and . . . consider that all the Jewries of Europe could be united by a new idea and by a new creation.”<sup>4</sup> That search for a new European Jewish identity also rekindled a determination to retrieve and protect the legacy of German Jewry, such as the founding of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, London, and Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, in the postwar era, apart from the Holocaust, Jews worldwide would share no one “usable past.” While the retrieval of the lost legacy of German Jewry became an important priority for certain historians and religious thinkers, especially in the United Kingdom and Europe, many American Jews would turn toward an idealized image of an East European Jewish past, whereas Israel would craft a vision of the Jewish past based on a Zionist narrative of a parlous diaspora existence ultimately redeemed by a return to the homeland.

In the wake of the destruction of East European Jewry and the uprooting of Arab Jewry to Europe and Israel, older terms such as *Ashkenaz* and *Levant* acquired new meanings. On one level, they connoted lost worlds that still somehow lived on, cultural universes that spanned national boundaries and drew energy from a paradoxical interplay of Jewish inwardness and ongoing engagement with the non-Jewish world. In this volume, scholars, authors, and philosophers respond to the destruction of European Jewry with evocative descriptions of the spiritual, social, and linguistic moorings of an Ashkenaz whose legacy demanded remembrance and study. In the United States, this evocation of collective memory and covenantal space encouraged a recasting of the idea of place in American Jewish identity, the growing fascination with the Lower East Side being a prime example.

In a similar gesture, others reacted to the demise of Arab Jewish culture by proudly turning what had been a pejorative term, *the Levant*, into a badge of honor. Levantine identity—poised between East and West, between Arabic, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, and English—was marked by hybridity and the fluidity of cultural boundaries. To embrace it constituted an act of both self-assertion and resistance. It reflected pride in one’s heritage and resistance to the attempts of European Jews in Israel to demonstrate their superiority and to impose cultural hegemony. Other Jews uprooted from the Arab lands describe a complicated search for identity as they navigate the shifting valence of “French,” “Arab,” and “Jewish,” and experience serial disappointments in abstract humanism, European liberalism, and an Arab nationalism that promised but failed to include Arabic-speaking Jews.

Why are geography and history so important in this volume? During the years of the Holocaust, geography literally meant the difference between life and death, while after the war, Jews in different parts of the world fashioned diverse cultures even as they shared common concerns. In the postwar Jewish world, the pace of cultural cross-fertilization was quite uneven, greater in scholarship than in fiction, in religious thought than in poetry or life writing. But this volume aims to make a pan-Jewish conversation across all genres possible for the first time and in real time.

This anthology traces the development of these parallel Jewish cultures and encourages readers to notice similarities, explore differences, and discover why seeds planted in one particular time and place sometimes sprouted years later in totally surprising ways. For example, for decades much of the extraordinary cultural creativity of the ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe was largely ignored outside the narrow circles of Yiddishland, resurfacing only many years later. Elie Wiesel's memoir of Auschwitz attracted little notice when it was published in Yiddish in 1956. But two years later, its French version, with less Jewish anger and a more universal pathos, became a publishing sensation.

As genres traveled in time and space, they morphed in unpredictable ways. Popular song played a critical role in shaping a common Israeli identity; behind the Iron Curtain, folk songs remained one of the few forms of allowed Jewish expression. But this genre was less important in the United States or Europe. And as Ziva Amishai Meisels has pointed out, Jewish art rooted in Jewish folk motifs and historical themes really developed in only two places: Israel and Russia.

Some genres traveled through the Jewish world with relative ease. Gershom Scholem's pathbreaking scholarship on Jewish mysticism, Jacob Katz's fresh historical insights into the decline of Jewish traditional society in Europe, and Yehezkel Kaufmann's thesis of the salience of monotheism in Jewish survival all found wide and receptive audiences in translation. Post-Holocaust theology, Hannah Arendt's controversial assertions about the banality of evil and genocide, and the philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel's explorations of the layers of religious experience and his call for a God-centered theology did not remain confined to time and place. Philosopher Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, first published in German in 1923, was widely read in English translations, reaching new audiences. Scholar Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* became an instant classic and is studied to this day. Poets in Yiddish and Hebrew, however, had to wait for many decades before they found an audience outside their original languages through translation. Playwrights fared even worse. Hanoch Levin, Israel's greatest political satirist, whose plays were routinely heckled, condemned, and censored, was virtually unknown to non-Hebrew-speaking audiences during his extraordinarily productive but all-too-brief career.

This anthology includes a generous sampling of Jewish humor, a genre that hardly traveled at all. Humor is an invaluable historical artifact, full of cultural and psychological insights. But we let the reader judge whether jokes told in the Warsaw ghetto, Israel, or even the United States are funny outside their particular time and place.

Well into the 1960s, Yiddish was still the language that most easily crossed borders and continents; the new Hebrew culture, though, found little echo outside of Israel. As late as 1960, the leading American Jewish journal, *Commentary*, rejected an article about the great Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon, who would go on to win a Nobel Prize in Literature, because the editorial board considered him too obscure. In 1963, the American Jewish Congress actually sponsored a symposium on why Israeli and American Jewish writers knew so little about each other's literatures.

Yet shared concerns and interests across the Jewish world were on the rise. The 1961 trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann, a leading Nazi organizer of the mass murder of Jews, provoked more interest in the Holocaust and its survivors; Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* sent shock waves

throughout the Jewish world. Israel's Six-Day War in 1967 forced Jews everywhere to confront the existential significance of a Jewish state as well as the relative indifference of many of their non-Jewish friends.

The year 1968 proved another major turning point. The worldwide social and cultural turmoil of the 1960s—antiwar protests, student unrest, the civil rights movement, feminism—had a deep impact, especially on young Jews in Europe and North America whose Jewish identities were challenged as never before by new sensibilities and generational revolt. Most readers might not regard Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" as a "Jewish song," but its new voice, provocative and confrontational, evoked the defiance and disorientation that an entire generation was feeling. In the United States, Jews responded in unexpected ways: through a Jewish feminism, the *havurah* movement, a rethinking of alliances between Jews and blacks, and a reappraisal of Jewish liberalism. In the Soviet Union, the double impact of the Six-Day War and the collapse of any hopes of internal reform that followed the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia signaled the first stirrings of revolt and defiance within the third-largest Jewish community in the world.

Fiction and poetry occupy a prominent place in this anthology; this period proved a watershed in Jewish writing, especially in Israel and the United States. For decades, Hebrew literature had played a double role, as a literature that sought equal status among other national literatures and as a surrogate for the entire Zionist project. With the establishment of the State of Israel, Hebrew writers stood at a crossroads. A state could take over many of the functions that had been the burden of Hebrew writers. The previously dominant collective "we" of an older generation of Hebrew writers, who captured the exalted and somber mood of the ferocious struggle for independence, was joined by a quieter "I" of younger writers, who wrote in softer registers and who sought out a realm of private choices and individual sensibilities.

During these years, American Jewish writing came into its own when Jews stopped being regarded as immigrant or provincial writers and joined the American mainstream. Indeed, Jewish critics and writers not only joined that mainstream but also helped to define it, as the "Jew," the emblematic outsider, became the consummate insider endowed with a superior understanding of the complexities of modern life.

Writing on Franz Kafka in 1968, the literary critic Robert Alter argued: "He could envision the ultimate ambiguities of human life in general with a hyperlucidity because he had experienced them in poignant particularity as a Jew. Out of the stuff of a Jewish experience which he himself thought of as marginal, he was able to create fiction at once universal and hauntingly Jewish" (anthologized here).

In a changing society where old elites no longer policed who belonged and who didn't, what had been marginal became a new normal. Jewish writers created characters—Shirley Abramowitz's "loudest voice," Augie March's brash, self-assured Chicago street talk, Portnoy's shocking sexual ruminations, and Herzog's unending stream of letters—who moved to the center of an American literature that included Jewish writers as never before.

Women writers also achieved growing prominence in these years, as did, in the 1960s, an urgent recognition of issues of gender. Many of the voices in this anthology are those of Jewish women:

poets, essayists, novelists, and witnesses. The memoirs of Puah Rakovsky (1942) offer a rare and frank glimpse into the problems faced by independent young women in traditional Jewish society as well as a pointed critique of pervasive sexism in Zionist Palestine. Hebrew-language writing by women reflected a multifaceted literary exploration of the inner world of women, of their efforts to adapt to, or rebel against, a male-dominated society. In postwar America, Jewish feminism found its voice.

In a period of destruction and rebirth, and of the forced uprooting of entire Jewish communities, it was life writing and reportage that conveyed both the immediacy of individual experience and of the myriad ways that Jews as individuals understood and acted out their Jewish identity, remembered their own Jewish stories, and embraced or rejected their Jewishness. It was during this period, therefore, that this genre became especially salient. Life writing and reportage did not have to be consistent or coherent. It could be fragmented, contradictory, inchoate, privileging subjective feelings. The very language in which it was written—Yiddish, Hebrew, French, Arabic—often signaled how these authors defined themselves and the kind of audience they hoped to reach. Life writing appeared in different forms, such as diaries that recorded feelings in real time or memoirs that ordered lived experience through retrospective narrative. And life writing, more than any other genre, highlights one of the most important themes of the modern Jewish experience: the memory of place and the bonds of family. In life writing, uprooted and scattered Jews recall their roots and take refuge in family ties that often spanned many continents.

As a genre, life writing is especially important in times and places marked by danger and uncertainty, such as Nazi-occupied Europe or in an Israel facing constant conflict. Behind the Iron Curtain, Jewish writers found fewer barriers to publication when they wrote in this genre, and they seized opportunities to insert themes that eluded the censor's attention. Reportage, a genre connected to the rise of the mass press, was especially important in the ghettos and in Israel, as it explained, decoded, and described the microcosms of communities experiencing massive displacement and disorientation.

Life writing and reportage conveyed a whole gamut of emotions and experience. This anthology takes the reader into the ghettos of Eastern Europe, into solitary hiding places, and even into the gas chambers of Birkenau. Holocaust survivors like Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel wrote memoirs that a generation later would make Auschwitz the major symbol of the Holocaust. Jews uprooted from Arab lands described their ironic sense of displacement in a Jewish state. Native-born Israelis disclosed their ambivalent feelings toward Holocaust survivors. Young Israeli soldiers, raised in the secular leftist ideals of the kibbutzim of the 1940s and 1950s, reflected on their never-ending war with the Arabs and their conflicted feelings about uprooted Palestinians. The children of Yiddish-speaking immigrants to the United States and Britain narrated their journey from ethnic slums to literary fame.

### *1939–1945*

The years from 1939 to 1945, years of catastrophe, underscore an organizing principle of this anthology: geography and language mattered. Texts composed in the lands under Nazi occupation

or influence differed dramatically from those written in the “free zone.” In Eastern Europe, more than elsewhere, Jews wrote not just as individuals but also as part of a national collective. To a large degree, this reflects the impact of prewar cultural traditions: a highly developed sense of common Jewish identity and an intense ideological engagement. These texts, mostly in Yiddish, underscored such themes as resistance, the moral state of the Jewish people, Jewish attitudes to European culture and Enlightenment traditions in the wake of the Holocaust, the future of the Jewish people after the Holocaust, and finally, religion. Little could match the sheer urgency and intensity of what came out of the ghettos.

Much of the life writing from the ghettos reflected an ongoing tension between knowledge and false hope, the witnessing of destruction and the delusion that perhaps survival might still be possible. In these unique societies—each ghetto being quite different—slang and street songs replaced newspapers; language changed at warp speed. Spontaneously assembled knots of neighbors and passersby listened to songs about murdered spouses and orphaned children, about Judenrat corruption and the struggle to survive, about rich and poor, about the privileged and the dying, about deportations and about hopes for a better future. The writers of diaries and reportage had to find the right words to make the ghetto experience legible, to describe what eluded description, and to decode a world that defied easy understanding. The act of writing was an assertion of one’s humanity and served a moral mission; indeed it could, to quote Gustawa Jarecka, a contributor to the secret Ringelblum archive, “cast a stone under history’s wheel.” Diarists saw their diaries as their most important reason for staying alive. While some diaries were mainly personal, others possessed a collective focus, aimed at documenting ghetto life. This was also true of ghetto photographers and artists like Esther Lurie and Zvi Kadushin in the Kovno ghetto or Mendel Grossman and Henryk Ross in Łódź.

While Jewish writing in the ghettos and camps certainly included calls for resistance and spiritual defiance, it also touched on less heroic topics: anger at other Jews, betrayal, corruption, the destruction of the family, the terrified waiting for the next blow. During the Holocaust, *when* the Jews realized that the Germans intended to kill them was a crucial moment that separated what came before from what came after. Leyb Goldin wrote his naturalistic “Chronicle of a Single Day” for Warsaw’s Oyneg Shabes archive in the summer of 1941, when Jews could only guess their future. And Simkhe-Bunem Shayevitsh wrote “Lekh-Lekho” when he still had a daughter to talk to, before the Germans murdered his wife and two children. Ghetto writing, however, and especially its poetry, also marked the remorseless descent toward the abyss.

The diaries and writings of Western European Jews, along with letters, underscore some major differences between Holocaust-era writing in Eastern and Western Europe. Most of the writers from Eastern Europe saw themselves first and foremost as Jews. While some Jews may have written in Polish, and while many certainly loved Polish culture, most did not consider themselves Poles. But in Western Europe, Jewish writers often felt much more integrated and saw no contradiction between being French or Dutch *and* Jewish. All the more brutal, therefore, was the shock of betrayal as French Jewish writers pondered the stark contrast between how they saw themselves and how their origins determined their fate.



Writings such as Paul Ghez's *Six mois sous la botte* (*Six Months under the Boot*) described the fraught experiences of a Tunisian Jewish community leader during the relatively short six-month German occupation, from November 1942 to May 1943. He included the brutality of the labor camps and the collaboration between Arabs and the local French population in their persecution of the Jews.

Outside the world of Yiddish, a major question was not whether to accept European culture—that was a given—but to show how much Jews had helped make it. Across the Atlantic, German Jewish exiles tried to come to terms with the disaster in Europe by explaining the wider historical context for fascism and antisemitism. Antisemitism, they argued, was not just a Jewish problem but a serious threat to any stable democracy.

Another German émigré, Hannah Arendt, asked why legal emancipation made the Jews more rather than less vulnerable. Quoting Franz Kafka in her essay “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” Arendt stressed that “only within the framework of a people can a man live as a man among men.”

This anthology also speaks to the fraught question of how Jews in the “free zone” reacted to the Holocaust. A group of young students at the Jewish Theological Seminary angrily accused Jewish leadership of doing much too little. The Bundist leader Artur-Shmuel Ziegelboym killed himself to protest the indifference of the allies to the murder of Polish Jewry. Arthur Koestler noted that decent people in the West paid more attention to the accidental killing of a dog in the street than they did to the Holocaust. And the Lubavitcher Rebbe saw Jewish suffering as heralding the birth pangs of the Messiah.

Responses to the catastrophe varied. Some, like Sofia Dubnova Erlich, Puah Rakovsky, or I. J. Singer turned to life writing to challenge the retrospective glow of false nostalgia while using individual experience to convey a new awareness of the diversity and reality of East European Jewry. Others, like Michael Molho, in his *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, focused on the everyday, the material culture, routines of life that reflected the ethos of a rooted and devoted community in a fascinating parallel to the work of the ghetto archives. Still others turned to poetry and prose.

Taking full advantage of a temporary thaw during the war, Soviet Jewish writers reaffirmed their Jewish pride and mourned the Holocaust. Soviet Jewish photographers like Yevgeny Khaldei and Dimitri Baltermants documented not only the struggle of the Red Army but the murder of the Jews. But even in the middle of the wartime thaw, some Soviet Yiddish poets, like Peretz Markish, had uneasy forebodings about the future, expressed in his poem “Shards.” In Brazilian exile, the brilliant, assimilated Polish-language poet Julian Tuwim wrote, “We Polish Jews,” an unambiguous gesture of solidarity with his murdered people. In the United States, Rabbi Milton Steinberg's *As a Driven Leaf* and Sholem Asch's daring and controversial Yiddish novel *The Nazarene* pushed back against rising antisemitism by returning to the distant past of Roman-occupied Palestine to show Christian indebtedness to Jewish morality and to explain why the allegedly superior Greco-Roman culture ultimately lacked the ethical core that only Judaism could provide.

### *Israel (1946–1973)*

In this volume of The Posen Library, the Jewish people grapples with the challenges and opportunities of political sovereignty for the first time in two millennia. In 1944, at the height of the Holocaust, David Ben-Gurion, future prime minister of Israel, predicted that sovereignty—the experience of statehood—would create a new Jew, Hebrew-speaking and self-affirming, free of diaspora complexes, and able to defend him- or herself without sacrificing moral principles. This faith in *mamlakhtiyut*, literally “stateness,” defined Ben-Gurion’s political credo. The creative tension between his vision and a more complex reality frames much of this section of the anthology. To a great extent, post-1948 Israeli culture evolved as a dialogue with Ben-Gurion’s Zionist narrative and as a challenge thereto.

Few statesmen in Jewish history achieved as much as Ben-Gurion. His vision, his political will, his laserlike focus on the possible rather than the ideal played a decisive role in the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. Overcoming daunting challenges, and largely under Ben-Gurion’s leadership, Israel won its war of independence, absorbed one million Jewish immigrants in ten years, and built a polity based, for the most part, on the rule of law.

Despite great difficulties, the young state doggedly created a shared sense of “Israeliness” based on the Hebrew language, a shared determination to defend the country, and the emergence of a vibrant popular culture in which music was especially important. At a time when many Jews had limited knowledge of Hebrew, music—more than literature or poetry—could appeal to both veteran Israelis and new immigrants. The popularity of army song troupes in the 1950s and 1960s and the widespread habit of public singing all encouraged a musical culture loosely known as *Shirey Erets Yisrael* (Songs of the Land of Israel). Besides universal themes of love and loss, these songs stressed patriotism, love of the land, memory of the war dead, and a deep-seated yearning for peace that belied any worship of militarism.

The selections in this section, however, also show the limits of Ben-Gurion’s vision. The state could not take the place of religion, dictate a uniform sense of history, or decree that collective needs take precedence over the individual and the private. Israel did not become the melting pot that Ben-Gurion had envisaged. Tensions festered between immigrants and veterans, between Jews from Europe and Jews from Africa and Asia, between religious and secular Israelis.

The fraught question of religion in the new state surfaced with the May 1948 “Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel,” which included the ambiguous phrase “Rock of Israel” to please staunch secularists leery of mentioning God. Such deep disagreements explained why the young state deferred the drafting of a written constitution. Another source of tension in the new state derived from deep-seated Zionist contempt for the diaspora. Ben-Gurion saw the establishment of the state as a decisive break with the diaspora and its history; for the first time since the Roman destruction of the Second Temple, Jews had regained their agency and could make their own history. In this spirit of negation of the diaspora, Ben-Gurion urged all army officers to Hebraize their names. Others went even further. In “An Epistle to Hebrew Youth,” written in 1943, the poet Yonatan Ratosh appealed to young “Hebrews” to “remove the Jewish cobwebs from their eyes” and become



“Canaanites,” linked to the Arab peoples of the Middle East rather than to world Jewry. But other writers, like Haim Hazaz, pointedly reminded Ben-Gurion that the diaspora legacy of tradition and respect for learning had forged the Jewish people. What good would the state be, Hazaz asked, if it caused Jews to forget who they were? “We have ceased to be a nation,” Hazaz complained to Ben-Gurion. “We have become a state.”

In the early years of sovereignty the cult of the “sabrá” loomed especially large. This proud first generation of native-born Hebrew speakers, self-reliant, irreverent, brusque, hardworking, with names like Uzi and Dani, saw itself as the stark opposite of the diaspora Jew. Many were proud members of the Palmach, the elite fighting force of Jewish Palestine. The songs around the campfire, the slang, the tall stories (*chizbatim*), all created a sense of belonging to a special group with a new culture and language. But writers such as Amos Kenan also discerned less attractive sides to the sabra ethos, such as excessive dependence on the group and a corresponding lack of individuality.

The terrible crucible of the War of Independence took a heavy toll on the first sabra generation, poignantly described by such writers as Menahem Shemi. As the new state found its bearings, the memorialization of the fallen played an outsized role in an emerging Israeli culture. Mordechai Ardon’s *For the Fallen*, Batia Lichansky’s *Holocaust and Rebirth*, and Itzhak Danziger’s *War Memorial* were landmarks in Israeli painting and sculpture. This anthology also presents military leader Moshe Dayan’s iconic eulogy in memory of Roi Rotberg, a young member of Kibbutz Nahal Oz, who was killed by Arab infiltrators in April 1956. What made this eulogy so significant was Dayan’s brilliant evocation of empathy for the Palestinian plight in order to legitimize the Zionist cause and imbue Israelis with a determination to defend the state. Precisely because Arab hatred was so understandable, it was therefore implacable. Jews could not let their guard down, feel guilty about defending their homeland, or give in to tempting delusions about imminent peace. But some young Israeli soldiers who fought in the 1967 Six-Day War, interviewed by Amos Oz, expressed the very doubts and guilt feelings that Dayan had warned against. They gave voice to their forebodings that a more terrible war was on the way. Some worried that victory had only embittered the Arabs while threatening to turn Jews into brutal occupiers.

In time, the challenge of sovereignty forced a reappraisal of many fundamental mainstays of early Israeli culture. The collective ethos of the cult of the sabra, of the old Palmach and of *mamlakhtiyut*, confronted growing demands for privacy and individual space, even as mass immigration turned the veterans of the old Yishuv into a small minority. Ingrained rejection of the diaspora could not withstand the unrelenting intrusion of Jewish history and memory: the Eichmann trial—which had a transformative impact on previously negative and even contemptuous attitudes toward survivors—or the trauma of Israel’s isolation in the frightening weeks that preceded the 1967 war. In his 1971 book *Israelis: Fathers and Sons*, Amos Elon shrewdly dissected the Jewish fear, and even neurosis, that lurked beneath sabra bravado.

The “challenge of sovereignty” struggled to absorb masses of immigrants. Some Ashkenazi veterans, such as the journalist Aryeh Gelblum, felt disdain for “backward” Jewish immigrants from the Arab lands, especially Morocco, and questioned whether the bedrock Zionist commitment to open

immigration really made sense. Newly arrived Jews from Iraq, Yemen, and North Africa quickly began to resent their treatment. Salman Shina's *From Babylonia to Zion* conveyed the anger felt by a cultured Baghdadi Jew toward bureaucrats totally ignorant of the great achievements and traditions of Iraqi Jewry. Others lashed out at an official policy that sought to "civilize" non-European Jews instead of seeing them as equal partners in the building of a new culture. Yehuda Nini, in "Thoughts on the Third Destruction," saw the humiliating treatment of Yemenite Jews as an ominous sign of Zionist decay, a loss of such fundamental values as appreciation for manual labor and basic egalitarianism.

But while these tensions between Ashkenazim and non-Ashkenazim led to deep scars and occasional outbreaks of violence, in the end they did not seriously threaten the integrity of the state, largely because of important countervailing trends. For all its faults, Israel was a functioning democracy, and aggrieved immigrants slowly learned how to work the system. There was also the common Arab enemy; many Jews from Arab lands felt pride in the Jewish state and its military successes. In turn, the elites and Ashkenazi Jews understood that the best guarantee of long-term survival was Jewish numbers.

Ironically, the spectacular victory of the 1967 war encouraged heady visions of total Jewish sovereignty in all of the "Land of Israel" and thus sparked the emergence of the very religious-messianic nationalism that Ben-Gurion had hoped to contain. While some leading Israeli writers supported a "Greater Land of Israel," others, like the political activist Lova Eliav and the noted religious scientist Yeshayahu Leibowitz, warned that the fetishization of land and power would endanger the future of the state. Other warnings about the perils of victory and militarism came from the playwright Hanoach Levin, who, in works such as *You, Me and the Next War* and *Ketchup*, subjected the triumphalist pieties of post-1967 Israel to withering and controversial criticism.

The challenge of sovereignty in the early years of statehood also encouraged a far-reaching attempt to define what constituted a distinct, indigenous, Israeli culture. To what degree should Israeli painters, musicians, and writers look to foreign models, if at all? If so, should they turn to Europe? The Middle East? The legacy of the Jewish past? Or was it possible to transcend these models entirely?

In 1953, the Israeli conductor, composer, and music critic Alexander Uriah Boskowicz wrote a revealing article, "The Problems of Native Music in Israel," which called on Israeli composers to avoid aping easily available European or Arab traditions and craft instead a distinct Israeli music inspired by the Mediterranean milieu, the landscape of Eretz Israel, the Bible, and the very sounds of the Hebrew language. Four years later, Haim Gamzu, a leader of the Israeli art world and a director of the Tel Aviv Museum, declared that Israeli artists and sculptors had successfully begun to fashion their own original and distinctive style. The new experience of sovereignty had helped create new tastes and sensibilities. The culture of memorialization played an especially important role in encouraging a specifically Israeli "public sculpture" that forged a bond between the artists and the wider public.

Many Israeli artists, such as Yosef Zaritsky, Marcel Janco, and Mordechai Ardon, felt a natural tension between a search for the contours of a distinct original and Israeli culture and a determination to gain wider recognition in the international art world. But these years saw ongoing experiments that, even as they embraced biblical themes and local landscapes, stood out for their originality and

creativity. No less important was the work of Israeli photographers like David Rubinger, who documented the struggles and achievements of the young state. His 1967 photo of Israeli paratroopers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem acquired iconic status and transformed the image of Jews in public perception throughout the West.

Jewish scholarship in Israel also began to find its own distinct voice. As early as 1944, Gershom Scholem called for a fresh turn in Jewish studies that underscored a new relationship between Jewish scholarship and the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty. The apologetic scholarship of the diaspora, Scholem emphasized, had dictated outworn agendas that should give way to an unencumbered awareness of a living Jewish people and of the diverse and often overlooked strains of Jewish cultural development, including mystical and messianic movements and folk culture.

Meanwhile critics and essayists worked their way toward an understanding of an evolving Israeli literature that engaged the growing complexity of Israeli society. The influential critic Barukh Kurzweil lambasted both secular Zionism, which he saw as culturally sterile, and Scholem's heterodox denial of a normative, integral Jewish cultural tradition. In his 1950 critique of S. Y. Agnon's *A Guest for the Night*, Kurzweil saw Agnon as a literary model for the Israeli literature of the future, liberated from false nostalgia for a failed diaspora but still firmly anchored in Jewish tradition. He compared the author's return to his Polish town to Odysseus's return to Ithaca, a masterly evocation of a "before," of a lost past.

While Kurzweil measured Israeli literature by the yardstick of an integral Jewish culture, other critics saw Israeli culture as a frenzied work in progress where few of the younger writers possessed the firm grounding in Jewish texts that had marked older authors like Hazaz or Agnon. The very newness of Israel, the breakneck pace at which an unformed society was emerging from the many corners of the diaspora, put a priori constraints on Israeli literature that writers from other nations did not have to face.

The Israeli literature of the future, the prominent Israeli writer Amos Oz pointed out, would be created by writers watching a new society take shape at warp speed. "This is a world without shade, without cellars or attics, without a real sense of time sequence. And the language itself is half-solid rock and half-shifting sands," he wrote. "We had folk songs before we had a folk."

Nothing better captured the pace and the rhythms of this "world without shade" than Israeli life writing and reportage, which individualized the tension between national rebirth and personal anguish, between collective triumph and individual introspection and doubt. Exaltation and celebration were emotions often tinged with simultaneous anguish and anxiety, the joy of victory and national pride frequently marred by foreboding for the future. Yet it was precisely during this period that Hebrew literature went through a process of consolidation and transformation that would later gain it more respect on the world stage.

By 1939, where this volume begins, Hebrew literature in the "free zone" was largely safe; it had completed its migration from Eastern Europe to Eretz Israel. The wartime Yishuv was torn by powerful crosscurrents and paradoxes: on the one hand, wartime prosperity and the growing self-confidence of the new Hebrew-speaking youth, on the other hand, guilt and anguish caused by news

of the murder of European Jewry. Nathan Alterman's 1940 poem "The Mole" evoked the power of the living dead, whose constant presence shaped Jewish memory and held the living in a firm, endless grip. This presence would frame one of the iconic poems of modern Hebrew literature, Alterman's ambiguous "Silver Platter," written in 1947 on the eve of the Israel's War of Independence. This poem, which entered Israel's secular liturgy, evoked a gathered, expectant nation confronting two young, exhausted Jews, a man and a woman, whose sacrifice would be the unending price that Jews would have to pay for the state.

During the war years, the creative tension between Hebrew literature and the Zionist narrative, which would emerge in full force after 1948, dominated key writings, brilliant and disturbing reminders that Zionism was riddled with puzzles and contradictions, and that it was precisely literature, with its ability to delve into the world of individual emotions and imagination, that could offer insights lacking in the monochrome language of political cant. Wartime stories by S. Y. Agnon and Haim Hazaz confronted many sensitive questions. Hazaz's "The Sermon" challenged readers to understand how Zionism could offer salvation when it seemed to deny much of Jewish history. In "From Foe to Friend," Agnon's readers had to ask how Jews could fight off the Arabs and the British in the long run. Agnon's novel *Only Yesterday* rested on the fraught paradox of Zionist promise in a land where so many Jewish immigrants found failure and heartbreak. Yet in the end, what mattered was that somehow the Zionist project went forward, despite setbacks and even when Zionism seemed to defy logic and common sense. There was little triumphalism in these wartime stories by Agnon and Hazaz, who sensed the great struggle that loomed in the future. But the fact that they wrote in Hebrew, and lived in a Hebrew-speaking Yishuv, offered a vision of a house that might finally endure.

The establishment of a Jewish state in 1948 presented Hebrew writers with great challenges but also with great opportunities. After 1948, the ongoing, critical dialogue between Hebrew literature and the Zionist narrative would proceed in a new register and reflect an interplay of parallel generations of writers: an older generation (Agnon, Alterman, Goldberg, Greenberg, Hazaz) at the peak of its powers, the first generation of native Hebrew speakers (Bartov, Gouri, Kaniuk, Megged, Shamir), new immigrants from Europe and the Arab lands (Appelfeld, Ballas, Pagis, Kovner, Kalo, Michael), and finally the "generation of the State," writers like Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua whose formative experience had been not the battle for independence but the early years of statehood. This literature confronted the same problems addressed in life writing and political thought: the tension between the collective and the individual, the fraught relationship between Zionism and the Jewish past, the impact of mass immigration on a society that had privileged the myth of a sabra elite, the changing nature of the Hebrew language, and finally, the difficult theme of the Holocaust.

The War of Independence—which began in 1947 and continued until 1949—inspired a literature that highlighted the triumphs and the pitfalls of the battle for Jewish sovereignty. The theme of the "living dead" became ever more salient as two years of vicious fighting decimated an entire generation, especially the soldiers of the elite Palmach. All Israeli writers in the first years of independence were haunted by the deaths of family members and close friends.

The existential danger faced by the Yishuv in its fight for independence underscored the priority of the collective; everything else—individual need, private concerns—was secondary. Poems such as Haim Gouri's 1948 "Behold, Our Bodies Are Laid Out," written after thirty-five Palmach soldiers were killed trying to relieve a besieged settlement, conveyed the emotional toll of the ceaseless fighting even as it underscored the just cause for which the soldiers fell and the absolute necessity of victory. Gouri also composed what would become one of the most memorable songs of the War of Independence, "The Song of Friendship." S. Yizhar's "The Prisoner," written that same year, focused on the inherent tension between the just battle to win independence and the serious threat of moral degradation that caused Jews to mistreat a helpless Arab man. Few works written during the war made a greater impact than Moshe Shamir's 1948 *He Walked through the Fields*, a gripping story of conflict between the personal and the collective. Written in the colloquial Hebrew of the new Yishuv, *He Walked through the Fields* was Israel's first best seller.

When the war ended in 1949, an inevitable emotional letdown followed. The return to civilian life, the disparity between the dreams of independence and the disappointments and failures of a new state, austerity and rationing, the enormous challenge of a mass immigration that threatened to inundate the old Yishuv, all contributed to a sense of depression and disillusionment. The guiding spirit of heroic sacrifice and stoic bereavement was questioned in such short stories as Yehudit Hendel's 1950 "A Common Grave." In 1954, Nissim Aloni's popular play, *Most Cruel of All the Kings*, depicting the succession struggle for King Solomon's throne, raised pointed and timely questions about the tendency of political power to corrupt leaders and to distort formerly lofty ideals.

In the 1950s a reaction set in against the collectivist, Zionist ethos as a new search began for a fiction and poetry that would evoke the individual and private sphere. Poets like Natan Zach declared that poetry should eschew exalted language and collective bombast for a new personal voice. This yearning for private space was also reflected in Pinhas Sadeh's irreverent 1958 autobiography, *Life as a Parable*, and in Yehuda Amichai's 1961 *Love in Reverse*. Dahlia Ravikovitch's landmark poem "Clockwork Doll" explored how a woman was caught in a trap shaped by men's expectations and demands. In one of his Jerusalem poems, "Tourists," Yehuda Amichai mused about a new kind of Zionism that eschewed national pathos even as it embraced the quotidian pleasures of everyday routines in the homeland.

In 1966, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, who would become one of Israel's major stylists, published one of her first stories, "The Glass Bell." In remarkable prose, which often followed the stream of consciousness of mostly women protagonists, Kahana-Carmon helped open up new vistas in Israeli literature: emotional fragility, the toll of memory and failed choices, the tension between social expectations and individual happiness. In a 1973 essay, "What Did the War of Independence Do to Its Writers?" Kahana-Carmon offered an intriguing insight into what she regarded as the potential pitfalls that faced Israeli literature. The generation of writers of that heroic era, she asserted, were good writers not because of the war, but despite it. For her, constant danger and existential vulnerability do not necessarily encourage good writing.

Jewish writers from the Arab countries, mainly Iraq, also began to make their mark on Israeli literature as they explored the traumatic experience of displacement, the searing loss of language and



status, the pain of discrimination, and at the same time, a determination to master Hebrew and to find a foothold in the Jewish state. Sami Michael's "The Artist and the Falafel," originally written in Arabic, drew a picture of poverty and displacement, of insensitive crowds who see in a poor young street artist nothing but a source of entertainment and diversion. A turning point in modern Israeli fiction was the appearance in 1962 of Shlomo Kalo's "The Pile," a modernist portrayal of desperate Mizrahi immigrants seeking a demeaning and low-paid city job clearing a garbage heap. The same theme of social protest appears in Shimon Ballas's *The Ma'abarah (The Immigrant Transit Camp)*, where immigrants from Arab lands express their bitterness at Ashkenazi condescension and vainly look for way to organize and fight back.

The first significant confrontation of Hebrew literature with the theme of the Holocaust was the 1951 publication of Uri Zvi Greenberg's collection of poems *Streets of the River*, the only volume of Holocaust verse to achieve near-liturgical status. Greenberg, a vociferous opponent of the left-wing labor Zionist establishment, also defied its mandate to highlight Jewish heroism and resistance. Instead, he tore open the raw emotional wounds and guilt of Jews who had enjoyed the safety of the Yishuv while their families were murdered, even as he defied the political correctness of the socialist left by cursing the entire gentile world for its betrayal.

In a cycle of poems addressed "To God in Europe," Greenberg depicts a drastically diminished God, a shepherd without a flock. In a godless, Jew-less world, it is left to the "lying poet" to rage, to mourn, to prophesy the coming redemption of Israel. "Where are there instances of catastrophe / like this that we have suffered at their hands?" asks the poet. "There are none," he replies, "no other instances." This annihilation is without analogy.

Greenberg also evokes the shame, the disgrace, the helplessness, and the guilt of those who could only look on:

Yes I saved this body of mine when I fled the house of mother and father  
 But I did not save my soul  
 A soul faint and rank and embittered by tears,  
 Plucked of its feathered glory, its wings cropped.

Aside from Greenberg, Hebrew literature in those early years paid relatively little attention to the Holocaust. There were many reasons for this. Holocaust survivors like the poets Abba Kovner and Dan Pagis were few and far between. The younger generation of Hebrew writers had not grown up in Europe, and their formative personal experiences had left them unprepared to write about the disaster. Yiddish writings did not excite much interest among Hebrew readers. For many sabras, the Holocaust and its survivors were a foreign world, to be approached with caution and even involuntary feelings of disgust. And confrontation with Jewish survivors evoked more guilt-ridden ambivalence, explored in such works as Hanoach Bartov's *The Brigade*.

By the late 1950s, new writers appeared on the Israeli literary scene who were themselves survivors. Uri Orlev, a child survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, went on to become one of Israel's most celebrated children's writers. His 1958 *The Lead Soldiers*, about children hiding in Warsaw, narrated

from the perspective of a young child, reached a wide audience of Israeli readers, especially young people. Another survivor, Aharon Appelfeld, dealt with those events through a strategy of indirection and through haunting, almost timeless tales of exile and return. Against the backdrop of national rebirth, survivors lived their private lives and wrestled with their private demons, in private spaces untouched and unnoticed.

The stark contrast between traumatized survivors and Zionist aspirations of refuge and redemption is just one of many questions raised by Yoram Kaniuk in his 1968 masterpiece *Adam Resurrected*, which explores Israel's fraught relationship to the Holocaust, in several parallel registers. These include black humor, irony, cynicism, and a main character, Adam Stein, whose story upends all clichés about morality, God, and human agency in the Holocaust. Old Zionist visions of a new, healthy Jewish society based on "good human material" face the wrenching reality of traumatized masses of survivors still struggling with their past, while well-meaning doctors and benefactors try to heal their wounds and restore their faith.

### *Europe (1946–1973)*

In 1945, the future of European Jewry was dire. Jewish survivors returning to their former homes in France and the Netherlands encountered indifference and even hostility, especially when they tried to reclaim their homes and property. In the aftermath of widespread collaboration and German occupation, many Europeans wanted to subsume uncomfortable memories of Jewish suffering in a general narrative of resistance. Indeed, the reemergence of European Jewry was far from certain.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish reintegration into European society sparked debates that engaged Jewish intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic. One important example was the reaction to Jean-Paul Sartre's foundational series of essays *Reflections on the Jewish Question*, written in 1944, published in the United States under the title *Anti-Semite and Jew*. The Jew, Sartre argued, was largely a creation of the antisemite, his sense of his identity and history dependent on a memory of suffering and persecution.

But events soon proved Sartre wrong, and the postwar world witnessed a surprising resurgence of Jewish self-confidence. While Jewish thinkers in Europe and the United States welcomed Sartre's condemnation of antisemitism, they adamantly rejected his claims that Jewish identity was a creation of non-Jews. Indeed, a Europe compromised by war and fascism could learn a great deal from Jewish values. For instance, in his 1947 response to Sartre, the French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas asserted that the Jew not only had a positive identity of his own but also carried a message of universal importance. "The Jew," Levinas wrote, "is the entrance itself of the religious event in the world, better yet it is the impossibility of the world itself without religion."<sup>7</sup> Judaism offered Europeans, Levinas believed, a way out of a fateful deadlock between land-and-soil determinism and abstract transcendent universalism. Grounded in rabbinic texts, Judaism emphasized mutual responsibility, which demanded constant attention to specific situations and concrete obligations toward others. Meanwhile, writing in German, Martin Buber, Ignaz Maybaum, and others also defiantly asserted Jewish relevance. The lessons of German Jewry's long struggle for dignity, equal rights, and the best ideals of German humanism mattered more than ever for a German nation tarnished by a

total moral collapse. However shaken by the Holocaust, European Jews, Maybaum argued, still had a role to play as a community distinct from both Israel and North America and perhaps in the future, as a bridge between Russian Jews and world Jewry.

On both sides of the Atlantic, Jewish thinkers, culturally identified as well as assimilated, struggled to address the meaning of the Holocaust and whether it should be seen primarily as a crime against Jews or as a crime against humanity. René Cassin drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Raphael Lemkin coined the term *genocide*. It was for the crime of genocide, rather than for the killing of Jews per se, that Hannah Arendt believed Israel should have tried Eichmann. By the same token, key Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee funded social science research into the origins and causes of prejudice in an effort to show that antisemitism was not just a Jewish problem but a lurking cancer that threatened all healthy democratic societies. European-educated American rabbis harnessed the memory of the Holocaust to remind Jews of their obligation to support African Americans in their struggle for civil rights.<sup>8</sup>

If in the early postwar years the fate of Jews behind the Iron Curtain was largely a closed book to world Jewry, by the middle of the 1960s this was no longer the case. Important analyses of Polish and Soviet Jewry appeared in both the émigré press and illegal publications, the so-called samizdat. Polish Jewish intellectuals, such as Zygmunt Bauman, offered important insights into the dynamics of antisemitism in the communist bloc and hammered another nail into the coffin of what used to be the Jewish romance with the communist left. In the Soviet Union itself, some embers of Jewish culture continued to glow: concerts of Yiddish song, some high-quality poetry and fiction in the journal *Sovetish heymland*, the art of Anatoly Kaplan, Zinovii Tolkachev, and Mikhail Grobman. As an artist attached to a propaganda unit in the Red Army, Tolkatchev drew sketches of Maidanek in 1944 and Auschwitz in 1945. The first artistic renderings of these Nazi camps after the liberation, they captured the bittersweet interplay of the joy of freedom and the anguish of bereavement, and his emotional involvement not only as a Soviet soldier but also as a Jew.

A key development of this period, with worldwide ramifications, was the startling emergence of the Soviet Jewry movement and the national awakening of Soviet Jewry itself. An interplay of simultaneous activism—inside and outside the Soviet Union—reflected growing communication between different Jewish communities. Galvanized by the Six-Day War, the civil rights struggle in the United States, the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, and a sensitivity to the lessons of the Holocaust, the Soviet Jewry movement marked an important milestone in postwar Jewish history. Thanks to this movement, which mobilized both religious and secular Jews in the United States and elsewhere, essays written in the Soviet Union, which could be published only in the clandestine press, nonetheless found a receptive audience in the Jewish world.

Postwar life writing in Europe and the United States explored many important themes: the Holocaust, cultural displacement, the need to define place and memory, a renewed awareness of the importance of family, and the exploration and celebration of the diverse journeys that lead from poverty and obscurity to fame and recognition. Many of those who made those journeys did not forget their Jewish context. Their life writings revealed a lingering amazement about how they could reinvent themselves even as they took memories of their old culture with them.



Interest in life writing about the Holocaust depended greatly on language and place. While memoir literature and historical research flourished in Yiddish in the immediate postwar years, publishing houses in French and Italian preferred books with a more universal resonance that played down specific Jewish suffering. By contrast, publishers in the new Jewish state preferred Holocaust accounts that comported with the Zionist narrative of struggle and resistance to memoirs of hiding and escape. Therefore Leyb Rochman's gripping 1949 Yiddish-language memoir about how Polish petty crooks and prostitutes helped him and four other Jews survive elicited very little interest when it was translated into Hebrew. Jews who hid, and small-town, traditional Jews at that, were less interesting than the young Zionists who fought.

When Primo Levi presented his memoir of Auschwitz, *If This Is a Man (Survival in Auschwitz)*, immediately after the war, it was turned down by Natalia Ginzburg's well-known Einaudi and five other publishers before a small publisher accepted it. (In his memoir, Levi described his nightmare that when he returned to Italy, no one would be interested in hearing his story.)

By the mid-1960s, Jewish life writing about the Holocaust in all its diversity began to find both a Jewish and a non-Jewish audience. There was a sudden, new surge of interest in Levi, as well as in the memoirs of fellow Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel.

Levi and Wiesel did not know each other, and their memoirs were quite different. Levi, a trained chemist, wrote careful, detailed, precise descriptions of what he observed: how the camp functioned, its rules of survival, its debasement of language, and the diabolical ability of the Germans to recruit some prisoners to debase and crush the rest.

Wiesel's *Night*, in contrast, was a spare account that focused on one main character, the young Elie himself. The excerpt from *Night* anthologized here includes one of its best-known passages, when Wiesel and his fellow inmates are forced to watch the hanging of a small boy and two other prisoners. The boy dies slowly, and as one prisoner nearby asks where God is, a voice from within the young Wiesel answers that God is on the gallows. This story of a young boy, his education in hell, and his improbable survival became, like Anne Frank's diary, an iconic Holocaust book.

Another important example of life writing in postwar Europe focuses on the mass migration of North African Jews to France and the ensuing transformation of French Jewry, which became Europe's largest Jewish community. The tug of war between different identities—Jewish, French, Tunisian—is explored by Albert Memmi in his 1962 *Portrait of a Jew*. Sobered by his encounter with Tunisian as well as French antisemitism, and disillusioned with Europe and its false promises of universalist humanism, he recovers his agency through a reengagement with the complexities of a Jewish identity, which he comes to realize as being much more consequential than he had imagined. Even as Memmi struggled to find his way, other Jews from Arab lands still looked for a means to preserve their Arab cultural heritage and maintain the rapidly fraying age-old ties. In a last letter penned on the eve of his execution in 1949, an Iraqi Jewish communist, Sasson Shalom Dallal, still hoped that revolution would allow Jews to live together with their “fellow Arabs.” But in fact, centuries of Jewish settlement in Iraq and other Arab-speaking lands were rapidly coming to an end.

However, memories endured. Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff's “A Letter from Mama Camouna,” written in Israel in 1968, explores Jewish identity through an extended family tour through space and

time: Tunisian Jews move to France, Israel, and Egypt but remain linked by photographs, by letters, and by common memories that merge into what Kahanoff calls a “Levantine” sensibility. That very space becomes, in Kahanoff’s exquisite writing, an extraterritorial counterpart to unwelcome labels such as “Ashkenazi” or “Mizrahi” that failed to capture the nuance and charm of the Levant, rooted in a rich interplay of space, time, and language.

Life writing assumed special importance behind the Iron Curtain, where growing state antisemitism dispelled any lingering Jewish hopes in communism. Accounts of visits to native shtetls, such as that of Gulag-survivor Shmuel Gordon, often slipped taboo details past the censors, such as broad hints about widespread participation of neighbors in the killing and plunder of Jews. Nadezhda Mandelstam’s *Hope against Hope* defiantly rejected the myth, still held in the 1950s by hopeful Soviet intellectuals, that Stalin’s terror was an aberration and not an essential part of a criminal system begun by Lenin.

Ilya Ehrenburg reflects on what he calls the worst time of his life, the late 1940s and early 1950s, when mass arrests decimated the ranks not only of Yiddish writers but also of Russian Jewish intellectuals like himself. Ehrenburg wrote his memoirs after Stalin’s death, so he was well aware of rumors that he owed his survival to his usefulness as a “court Jew” and even to his status as an informer. In trying to dispel these suspicions, he reveals striking details about Stalin and about the stubborn persistence of official antisemitism even after Stalin’s death.

As the children of Jewish immigrants gained acceptance in postwar Britain and Western Europe, a certain genre of life writing appeared that reflected the successful navigation of a road that led to recognition and success, and thus made it safe, and even important, to reflect back on one’s Jewish roots. In *Two Worlds: An Edinburgh Jewish Childhood*, the eminent writer and literary critic David Daiches recalled his formative years in Edinburgh, where his father was the chief rabbi of Scotland. He found absolutely no contradiction, no tension, between those two worlds: the Jewish world, which he evoked in his memoirs, and the Scottish world in which he lived. Tellingly, both the Jewish and the Scottish identities put forward claims of difference; both staked out their own space in the much wider universe of “British” or “English-speaking” culture.

These claims to difference in wider cultural spheres, anchored in the relatively safe space of family and memory, not only marked life writing; they were also important themes of fiction and poetry by European Jewish writers, especially in France, where Jewish writers began to enjoy unprecedented prominence beginning in the 1960s. Tunisian-born Jacques Zibi’s *Mâ* measured the distance between his new life in France and his Tunisian Jewish childhood. The latter was anchored in a warm, traditional home, a mother’s love, and an Arabic-Jewish dialect gone forever. Corfu-born Albert Cohen’s *Her Lover (Belle du Seigneur)* evoked the sometimes hilarious, sometimes poignant contrasts between his earthy origins and his urbane reincarnation as a successful French diplomat. Underneath the comedy and the brilliant style lie more somber reminders of the bonds of time, family, place, and memory—and Jewishness.

In postwar Europe, Holocaust literature explored many different themes: ghettos, memory, the representational limits of language, how to narrate destruction, the ethical dilemmas of trapped Jews, the limits of resistance. Poems such as Paul Celan’s subversive and paradoxical “Todesfuge”

(Death Fugue) and Nelly Sachs's "O the Chimneys" pushed language to its limits as they confronted the black core of the Holocaust.

Behind the Iron Curtain, opportunities to write Jewish-themed poetry and fiction, mainly about the Holocaust, opened and closed depending on the political climate. In Poland, Adolf Rudnicki, who wrote relatively little on Jewish themes before the war, penned some of his most powerful fiction on the destruction of Polish Jewry. In 1951, he published a short story, "The Ascension," in which a young woman faces a stark moral choice that forces her to ask what ethical price she will pay to survive.

Another Polish-language masterpiece of Holocaust literature anthologized here is Bogdan Wojdowski's 1971 *Bread for the Departed*. Wojdowski, who had survived the Warsaw ghetto as a child, evokes the disruption and confusion of the ghetto as seen through the eyes of a young boy, David Fremde. Instead of a plot, there is a depressing kaleidoscope of scenes often narrated in the chaotic, deformed "ghetto speak" that alone provided the right words to describe what David saw.

A very different kind of novel, this time about the Łódź ghetto, was Jurek Becker's 1969 *Jacob the Liar*, written in East Germany. Becker was a survivor, and he brilliantly decoded ghetto life by highlighting lies and illusions enlisted to fight despair. These powerless, isolated denizens of the ghetto used their only weapon—words—as they analyzed and parsed the optimistic lies that Jacob disseminated based on his fictitious ghetto radio.

In the postwar years, two Jewish writers born in Eastern Europe and writing in their nonnative French produced Holocaust fiction that broke new, artistically daring ground in the representation of atrocity: Piotr Rawicz's 1961 *Blood from the Sky* and Romain Gary's 1967 *The Dance of Genghis Cohn* (not anthologized here). Both Rawicz and Gary (born Roman Kacew) were masters of acquired identities, a talent that frightened antisemites even as it bemused many Jews. The former's use of multiple angles of narration and representation make it a classic of Holocaust literature, as Rawicz uses the perspective of different voices, none necessarily reliable, to describe atrocity with a frankness that spares no one, including Jews.

Just as the French Jewish community was being transformed by large-scale immigration from North Africa, French Jewish writers began to have a major impact on a nation struggling to come to terms with its ambiguous record in World War II. Two works in particular, André Schwarz-Bart's 1959 *The Last of the Just*, which won the Prix Goncourt, and Jean François Steiner's 1967 *Treblinka*, caused major controversies by highlighting such themes as the Christian roots of antisemitism, French complicity in the Holocaust, and, in Steiner's case, the paradoxical interplay of Jewish passivity and Jewish resistance. These books made the Holocaust more visible as an event separate from World War II.

### *Diverse Diasporas (1946–1973)*

It was in the postwar period that Jewish writers of the changing diasporas of Argentina, Canada, South Africa, and Australia began to play a visible role as cultural figures and interpreters of the Jew-

ish experience. Almost invariably the children of Yiddish-, Ladino-, or Arabic-speaking immigrants, their parents had all lived on their own “Lower East Side”: the Jewish colonies on the pampas, the lonely peddler life in the South African veldt, the grim adjustment to the slums of Montreal, Buenos Aires, or Johannesburg. Jews settled even in the most remote frontiers. Yaacov Hasson’s “Iquitos: The Jewish Soul in the Amazon, Notes of a Voyager” evokes the tenacity of Jewish identity—and the impact of Zionism—even in the middle of the Amazon rain forest.

But after the war, these communities redefined themselves as they sought out different ways of becoming Argentines or Canadians while remaining Jews deeply concerned with their own history, with the legacy of the Holocaust, and with the security of the new Jewish state. Life writing especially captured the challenges and the poignancy of putting down markers in unknown and uncharted territory. Like Daiches’s description of Scottish Jewry, this life writing in the changing diasporas highlighted how Jews sought to preserve their identity within non-Jewish cultures that were themselves, in places like Canada and South Africa, often defined by dueling narratives and sharp cultural differences.

Larry Zolf’s “Boil Me No Melting Pots, Dream Me No Dreams” and Mordecai Richler’s memoir of hardscrabble Jewish neighborhoods in Montreal highlight real differences between Jewish Canada and Jewish America. Canadian Jewish identity was forged in a society that valued cultural pluralism and eschewed the ideal of the melting pot, where Jews had to maneuver between larger, competing communities. A generation closer to the “old home,” Canadian Jews were less likely than their American cousins to intermarry or to live in non-Jewish neighborhoods. It was during these years that Canadian Jewry began to become an integral but distinct part of a Canadian society that was itself struggling to define its identity in the face of rising nationalism in Quebec.

Montreal’s A. M. Klein, sensitive to cultural difference and linguistic nuance, wrote with equal empathy about the Holocaust, the formation of the Jewish state, and the French-Canadian culture that shaped his surroundings. His 1951 novella *The Second Scroll* is a profound gloss on the modern Jewish experience: the Holocaust, flirtations with communism, the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty, and the Hebrew language, all strikingly conveyed by the excerpt from *The Second Scroll* found in this anthology. Klein’s very sensitivity to the critical place of cultural difference and linguistic nuance enabled him to write powerful poetry about another people struggling to protect its identity, his French Canadian neighbors. Klein became an important influence on his fellow Montrealer, the songwriter and poet Leonard Cohen. It was not by coincidence that when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau addressed a gathering of Canadian Jews in 1970, he told them that the “Jewish community also afforded Canadians a model in miniature of what Canadian society could and should be.”<sup>9</sup> The next year, the Canadian government officially endorsed a vision of multiculturalism that encouraged different minority groups to protect and advance their own cultures.

South African Jewry also took root in an environment that encouraged Jewish difference rather than assimilation. Chaim Sacks’s “Sweets from Sixpence” evokes the challenges faced by Lithuanian Jewish immigrants on a new continent, as well as their ongoing struggle to find a niche in a land beset by conflict and tension between Afrikaners, English-speaking whites, Black Africans,

and millions of “coloreds.” These years were a defining time for South African Jewry, as surging Afrikaner nationalists shut down Jewish immigration from Europe by the late 1930s, flirted with Nazi-inspired antisemitism, and finally gained political power in 1948. The political ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalists, marked by the growth of legally sanctioned apartheid after 1948, confronted Jews with a tough dilemma. On the one hand, Afrikaner antisemitism declined as the new government dismantled barriers to Jewish immigration and offered Jews the enormous material and social privileges connected with being white in an apartheid state.

But those privileges came at a deep moral price. How could Jews profit from and sanction apartheid? Yet what choices did they have? The bitter 1957 exchange between Daniel Jacobson and Ronald Segal on how Jews should react to apartheid also spoke to deeper issues, such as how Jewish minorities should navigate the fraught space between moral integrity and self-preservation.

Despite these painful conflicts, which impelled many Jews to leave the country, the South African Jewish community stood out for its major contributions to South African culture: Lippy Lifschitz, Moses Kottler, and Irma Stern in painting and sculpture; Dan Jacobson, Sara Millin, and Nadine Gordimer in literature; Olga Kirsch in poetry. Olga Kirsch herself offers a striking example of how South African Jews moved in the uncertain and creative spaces that marked the boundaries of different cultures. Kirsch was born in a small town on the Orange Free State, wrote her poetry in Afrikaans, and emigrated to Israel in 1948. She spoke English with her husband and Hebrew with her children. As Andries Wessels points out, key themes in her poetry appealed simultaneously to both Zionist Jews and to Afrikaners:<sup>10</sup>

Yet the silent longing remains unstilled  
O land, o rest yet unfulfilled

During these years Latin American Jewish literature in Spanish also came into its own, especially in Argentina. As in Canada and South Africa, writers who had grown up in Yiddish-speaking immigrant homes published journalism, poetry, and fiction that reflected the promise and pitfalls of new frontiers and wide horizons. In Argentina, a major center of postwar Yiddish culture, second-generation Spanish-language writers, including Lázaro Liacho, Samuel Glusberg, Samuel Eichelbaum, Bernardo Verbitsky, and David Viñas, took their place alongside already-established Argentinian Jewish writers such as César Tiempo and Alberto Gerchunoff. Some, like Gerchunoff and Verbitsky, would leave their mark on Argentine culture not only as creative writers but also as leading journalists.

Today Gerchunoff is justly celebrated for his 1910 collection of short stories entitled *Jewish Gauchos*, devoted to the Yiddish-speaking Jewish pioneers from Russia who settled in the new farming colonies of the pampas. These stories, called by one critic the “urtext of Latin American Jewish literature,” were also a paean to Argentina, an expression of Gerchunoff’s heady optimism about a Jewish future in this new country. Gerchunoff offered a template for Jewish integration into Argentine society and into the Argentine Spanish culture, especially attractive because of a centuries-old



bond that linked Jews to the Spanish language. Indeed, the writer Bernardo Verbitzky would say that it was through *Jewish Gauchos* that “Argentine Jews acquired their citizenship papers.”<sup>11</sup>

But his 1945 essay on newsreels of the Nazi camps, excerpted here, shows a Gerchunoff who is much more eager to assert his Jewish identity and to temper his earlier optimism about a Jewish future in Argentina. Like other Argentine Jewish writers, Gerchunoff was profoundly affected by the Holocaust and by Zionism. The decades that followed *Jewish Gauchos* saw not only accelerated Jewish immigration and urbanization but also growing antisemitism and a new awareness of the stubborn “otherness” of Jews making their way in a Catholic country. This “otherness” reverberated in César Tiempo’s cycle of Sabbath poems, and to a certain degree in the fiction of Bernardo Verbitzky and David Viñas. Over time, it was both tested and nurtured by the populism of Juan Perón, the left-wing radicalism that attracted many young Jews, and the crisis caused by Israel’s kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann in 1960.

### *United States of America (1946–1973)*

The postwar rise of American Jewry had far-reaching consequences for the entire Jewish world. World War II brought about profound shifts in a community that had been grappling with anti-Semitism and discrimination. The impact of the Holocaust made antisemitism less acceptable, and American Jews as a group more determined to affirm their identity and defend fellow Jews around the world. The crowning of Bess Myerson as Miss America in 1945 seemed to symbolize that new era of acceptance. Hollywood abandoned its former reluctance to deal with Jewish issues: films like *Crossfire* and *Gentleman’s Agreement* harshly condemned antisemitism. Popular war novels like Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*, Herman Wouk’s *The Caine Mutiny*, and Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions* depicted Jewish soldiers and officers who “belonged” in the military just as much as their non-Jewish comrades-in-arms did. Few Americans failed to hear the story of the four chaplains, including Rabbi Alexander Goode, who sacrificed their lives for others after the USS *Dorchester* was torpedoed in 1943.

While some observers doubted that American Jewry—with its low level of Jewish knowledge—could ever reach the creative heights of Spanish or Babylonian Jewry, Salo Baron, the foremost Jewish historian in the United States, expressed unbounded confidence. Jewish creativity, he insisted, could indeed flourish in an open society such as America’s. Another leading Jewish scholar, Gerson Cohen, also contended that America’s openness was “good for the Jews.” For many centuries, he observed, interchange with the gentile world had stimulated Jewish creativity.

The year 1945 saw the first issue of *Commentary* magazine, which would become one of the most important journals in postwar Jewish America. In his introductory article, “An Act of Affirmation,” *Commentary*’s editor Elliot Cohen saw the establishment of this new journal as an “act of faith in our possibilities in America. . . . Surely, we who have survived catastrophe, can survive freedom, too.”

*Commentary* became an especially important forum for secular Jewish intellectuals who, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, began to evince an interest in Jewish matters. In one landmark article, a

January 1949 response to Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*, critic Harold Rosenberg stressed that Jewish identity and Jewish memory were far more than just a reaction to antisemitism. Rosenberg defended the right of Jews to seek total assimilation if they so chose, an act that Sartre called inauthentic. But, he concluded, "Jewish identity has a remarkable richness for those who rediscover it within themselves" (anthologized here). Jews were free to fashion their own story and shape their Jewishness in any way they chose. Indeed, this new readiness to embrace, or at least to discern Jewishness in all its variety and indeterminacy, would play a major role in the cultural life of American Jewry in the three decades that followed the end of World War II.

In 1948, in "The Future of the American Jew," Mordecai M. Kaplan, founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, had urged his readers to have faith in the "recuperative powers" of the Jewish people and Jews to adopt the prophet Ezekiel as their patron saint. Ezekiel, too, had confronted a people ravaged by national disaster, but he preached a message of self-confidence and revival.

This new Jewish assertiveness and optimism took many forms. As early as 1942, the philosopher Horace Kallen had unapologetically stressed that American Jews, far from being guests in America, were actually playing a critical role in the shaping of American society, whether in labor relations, civil rights, or the theater. What had been confined to the immigrant ghetto was now part and parcel of the American mainstream. "It was Hebraic mortar," Kallen asserted, "that cemented the foundations of American democracy." In the postwar years Kallen's argument found new resonance as Jewish thinkers in various disciplines, eschewing any hint of prewar apologetics, proudly affirmed the importance of Jews for the West and for America.

That same spirit of hope for the future animated the opening of Brandeis University in June 1948. For the first time ever, American Jews were founding an American university and not a Jewish seminary, and this just one month after the establishment of a Jewish state. The new university, its supporters claimed, was a stirring symbol of Jewish resiliency. Its first president, Abram L. Sachar, called the new school "a corporate gift of Jews to American higher education." His autobiography bore the telling title *A Host at Last*.<sup>12</sup>

Admission quotas were slowly disappearing as the GI Bill gave many Jewish veterans a chance to attend college. Barriers to hiring Jewish faculty also gradually lowered, even as Jewish scholars became less diffident about expressing their Jewishness. As late as 1944, the eminent literary critic Lionel Trilling had declared in a symposium sponsored by the *Contemporary Jewish Record* (*Commentary*'s predecessor), "I do not think of myself as a Jewish writer. I do not have it in mind to serve by my writing any Jewish purpose." But by 1950, in a *Commentary* essay entitled "Wordsworth and the Rabbis," Trilling linked one his favorite poets with a Jewish text that he knew well, *The Ethics of the Fathers* (Pirkei Avot). There was a certain irony that Trilling, the first Jew to secure tenure in the Columbia University English department, would mention first-century rabbis in the same article as Wordsworth. The alleged inability of Jews to appreciate the subtleties of English literature had been a frequent pretext to deny them appointments. Now Trilling could write that "between the Law as the Rabbis understood it and Nature as Wordsworth understood it there is a pregnant similarity."

Indeed, the postwar years saw a remarkable resurgence of Jewish scholarship in the United States and set the stage for the later establishment of Jewish studies programs in America's finest universities and, in 1969, for the founding of the Association of Jewish Studies. This resurgence was due to many different factors: a decline in antisemitism, increasing interest in Jewish theology and history, a growing dialogue between Jewish and Christian scholars, the migration of many eminent Jewish scholars from Europe to the United States, and finally the postwar economic boom. In his 1950 article "The Challenge Facing Modern Jewish Scholarship," Robert Gordis, one of the intellectual leaders of the Conservative movement, analyzed the achievements of the past and laid out an agenda for the future. He urged Jewish scholars to reject apologetics and reclaim biblical scholarship from often-biased Christian scholars.

Growing Jewish self-confidence also led to new efforts to fashion a usable past for American Jewry by ensuring that the memory of East European Jewry not be determined by comedians and crooners.

Max Weinreich, in his magnum opus, *History of the Yiddish Language*, and his son, Uriel Weinreich, in his call to create a cultural atlas of European Jewry, pointed the way to a usable past based on a distinct European Jewish civilization, Ashkenaz. Ashkenaz was rooted in the Yiddish language, in European space, and in a creative sense of time determined by textual study that led to constant dialogue between past and present. Ashkenaz had been no hermetic ghetto; its values could not only explain the past and but also guide American Jews in the future.

By the same token, literary critics like Irving Howe and Abraham Tabachnik called for a fresh reading of Yiddish culture as a locus not of shtetl piety but of revolutionary ferment and modernist creativity. Rabbi and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel, in *The Eastern European Era in Jewish History*, portrayed East European Jewry as a civilization defined by time and spirit rather than space. To remember that civilization was not only an act of piety but also a matter of urgent necessity, the survivors of that world had to transmit its legacy to American Jewry. "Solidarity with the past," Heschel told an audience in January 1945, "must become an integral part of our existence. . . . [W]e still have the keys to the treasures. If we don't recover them they'll be lost forever."

For the first time, rabbis became part of the American mainstream. In his runaway 1946 best seller, *Peace of Mind*, Joshua Loth Liebman explained how Jewish religious principles could help all Americans in their search for psychological well-being.

Four years later, the October 15, 1951, cover of *Time* magazine featured Louis Finkelstein, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, with the revealing caption: "The Days of Fear Are Over." Finkelstein predicted a renaissance of Jewish life in America, based on a new interest in religion. By 1955, Will Herberg's *Protestant—Catholic—Jew* had promoted Judaism to the status of America's third religion, despite the small numbers of Jews in the United States. Both Conservative and Reform Judaism showed a new assertiveness and optimism.

Finkelstein's call for "more religion" also spurred interest in Jewish theology. This new importance of theological writing contradicted a widely held belief that, since Judaism stressed halakhah (law) and linked faith to action, it put less stress on the formulation of religious doctrine. The postwar years indeed encouraged new interest in theology. Christian thinkers like Reinhold Niebuhr



underscored the relevance of Jewish thought while the Second Vatican Council presaged an unprecedented era in Catholic–Jewish relations.

Although most observers of Jewish religious life agreed that American Orthodoxy faced a bleak future, in a prescient 1954 interview, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the intellectual leader of Modern Orthodoxy, confidently predicted an upsurge in Orthodox observance, as young American Jews would come to seek a total Jewish experience not offered by Reform and Conservative synagogues. In time, Orthodoxy indeed became stronger, facilitated by the establishment of new yeshivas, the growing prominence of the Chabad movement, and a post-Holocaust Hasidic revival spearheaded by Satmar and other sects.

The cultural ferment of the 1960s underscored social scientist Nathan Glazer’s observation that Jews did not stop being Jews but searched for innovative ways of adapting their Jewishness to a rapidly changing America. Creation of a kind of Jewish countercommunity as an alternative to suburban conformity appealed to growing numbers of young Jews. This search for new kinds of community led to the beginnings of the havurah movement.

Another major Jewish response to the counterculture of the 1960s was Jewish feminism, based on demands that women take their rightful place in Jewish religious and communal life as equals rather than as “peripheral Jews.” In 1972, a manifesto, “Jewish Women Call for Change,” addressed to Conservative rabbis, demanded that women be counted in the minyan, the quorum of ten men required for communal prayer, and that they be admitted to rabbinical and cantorial schools. In 1972, the Reform movement ordained its first female rabbi, Sally Priesand, and Sandy Sasso became the first woman admitted to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. As Deborah Dash Moore points out, these decisions by two liberal Jewish religious movements presented a clear alternative to both Modern Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism and stimulated Jewish feminists to press for even more changes, many of them appearing after 1973 and thus documented in Volume 10 of *The Posen Library*.

Leftist Jews also confronted new challenges. Old ties between Blacks and Jews, forged in the early days of the civil rights movement, began to fray because of the Black Power movement and growing tensions between Black and Jewish interests in urban politics. The New Left turned against Israel as a matter of course. As the ideal of the melting pot gave way to a new multiculturalism, why, some asked, should Jews accept Black claims to difference but deny their own identity?

Jewish life writing also underscores the special character of the United States, a country that offered Jews unprecedented opportunity not only to prosper but also to redefine themselves and to calibrate the fine balance between personal ambition and collective identity. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, this kind of life writing exemplified the centrality of American Jewry. Immigrant memoirs describe choices, some seemingly quixotic, but others focused on future prospects.

In America, Jewish life writing could also be more frank and uninhibited in comparison with Europe. Judd L. Teller’s description of “Goyim,” violent gentiles who terrorized Jews in his hometown in Poland, showed an openness and self-confidence that might have been less apparent in his birthplace. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, it was also in America—a gathering place of immigrants—

that life writing could evoke and recenter memories of different, shattered Jewish worlds, in part by drawing on common American experiences of immigration. Leon Sciaky's *Farewell to Salonica: City at the Crossroads*, Jehiel Isaiah Trunk's *Poland: Memoirs and Scenes*, and Joseph Buloff's *From the Old Marketplace* pictured their lost Ladino- and Yiddish-speaking homes through the lens of personal experience: place, streets, childhood games, and above all, the bedrock of family.

Precisely that interplay of memories anchored in family and place refracted through a new prism of postwar sensibility made Alfred Kazin's 1951 *A Walker in the City* such an important example of American life writing. This long "prose poem" was a striking departure from familiar stories of immigrant poverty, squalor, and despair. Instead of naturalistic determinism, it stressed freedom and possibility. Poverty marked Kazin's family but it did not prevent his parents from creating a home. And it was from that home, anchored in the family kitchen, that Kazin set out on his walks through the city, discovered the joys of literature, and exulted in his growing mastery of language. The slum did not destroy Kazin but propelled him forward and outward; through writing and memory he could reimagine his world and remake himself.

The late 1940s, when Kazin was writing *Walker in the City*, was a liminal moment in the development of Jewish fiction and poetry. A new generation, mostly raised in immigrant, Yiddish-speaking homes came into its own just when American literature stood ready to embrace Jewish writers, Jewish themes, and the cadences of Jewish writing in English, not as examples of exotica, parochialism, or immigrant culture but as a mainstay of postwar American culture.

Just a few subway stops away from Kazin's Brownsville, Jacob Glatstein ("Without Jews"), Kadya Molodovsky ("God of Mercy"), and Aaron Zeitlin ("To Be a Jew") were mourning the Holocaust in some of the most powerful poetry ever written in the Yiddish language. Yiddish literature was still a closed book to American Jews, and Holocaust memory still defined and segregated by the barriers of language. But by the early 1950s, the first glimmer of change appeared: Saul Bellow's translation of Isaac Bashevis Singer's "Simple Gimpl," a brilliant tale of how in an immoral and wicked world, gullibility and purposeful naïveté were the only foundation of honesty and integrity.

Many factors shaped the Jewishness of this generation of writers and critics: exposure to an immigrant culture that foregrounded Jewish memory and difference, the lingering impact of Yiddish speech, a tradition of secularism and moral commitment that sought new outlets after the eclipse of 1930s leftism, and an uneasy relationship with postwar bourgeois American Jewry.

One of the most touching postwar voices was Grace Paley's. A sense of "at-homeness" in America, so different from Europe, emerges in her short story "The Loudest Voice," which transforms traditional, dangerous reminders of Jewish marginality—the story of Christ's birth and crucifixion—into a buoyant description of the insouciance and self-confidence of a young daughter of Jewish immigrants. Shirley Abramowitz's loud voice lands her the best role in the school Christmas play, the voice of Christ. Far from feeling inferior or out of place, Shirley, encouraged by her immigrant father, confidently channels Jesus' words in her own cadence as other Jewish children enact the nativity scene.

But if Shirley Abramowitz was a picture of self-confidence, Neil Klugman in Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* or Alexander Portnoy in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* revealed a more complex

picture of Jews in midcentury America, with its fraught transition from immigrant poverty to material affluence, from the old ethnic neighborhood to leafy suburbs. Jews had arrived, but to what? Some American Jewish writers, like Herman Wouk in *Marjorie Morningstar*, regarded this new suburban frontier with optimism, with opportunities for Jewish continuity and for better family life. In contrast, Roth, who had little use for the communitarian pieties of the organized Jewish community, deftly explored the fragile vulnerabilities of a new generation of American Jews who were too American to be comfortably Jewish and who felt too Jewish to be totally American. Materialism, dysfunctional families, suffocating Jewish mothers, and sexual neuroses were all fair game for Roth's satire, condemned by some as deplorable self-hatred, lauded by others as brilliant literature.

It goes without saying that the Holocaust loomed large in postwar American Jewish culture. Susan Sontag remembered her first reaction to photographs of the concentration camps:

Nothing I have ever seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. . . . Something was broken. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horrors; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.<sup>13</sup>

In some of their most powerful writing, Philip Roth (“Eli, the Fanatic”) and Bernard Malamud (“The Last Mohican”) expose the psychological brittleness of anxious, insecure assimilated American Jews in their encounters with Holocaust survivors. These encounters triggered deep feelings of guilt and even identification.

In a different vein, Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, which vented his outrage against the self-indulgent and overly permissive counterculture of the 1960s, also presented, through Mr. Sammler the Holocaust survivor, a deep moral message rooted in Jewish culture: the imperative of “meeting the terms of one's contract.”

The newfound salience of American Jewish writers was exemplified by the success of Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, an unmistakably American novel, despite the fact that most of the characters were Jewish. The brilliant portrayals of New York and Chicago, the large tableau of secondary characters, the comic tension between intellectual brilliance and emotional failure—all serve to make *Herzog* much more than a “Jewish” novel.

This was a time of trauma and rebirth, of despair and soaring self-confidence. For the most part, with the exception of communist Europe, these years were “good for the Jews.” Indeed, one need only look at the major changes in the depiction of Jews in photography and the visual arts to understand the incredible transformation of the Jewish condition that took place. In 1939 and the early 1940s, Jews were commonly portrayed as poor and struggling, as refugees dependent on the goodwill of others. By the end of this period, such images largely disappeared; in Garry Winogrand's photographs, for example, Jews are middle-class Americans. This is not to say that by 1973 trauma and worry had disappeared from Jewish life. The Yom Kippur War ended the “heroic era” of Israeli history and ushered in a sober realization that Israeli power had stark limits. In the United States,

the pace of assimilation and intermarriage began to quicken, as did growing doubts about the future of the postwar “golden age” of American Jewry. But compared to the dangers of 1939, these worries were mere trifles.

If form is content, then an anthology of arts and letters, culled from two dozen languages and covering all but one continent (Antarctica) is the only form that can do justice to “Jewish culture and civilization” between 1939 and 1973. Certainly no novel, no epic poem, no memoir, has yet been written; no canvas has yet been painted and no blockbuster movie yet made that can capture so many voices and images, so many shades of red, blue, white, and black. However the sources anthologized here are accessed, whether in print or online, whether followed in sequence or in sound bites, there is no gainsaying the chutzpah and sagacity, the passion and hilarity, the precision and artifice, the folly and the prescience of these people called the Jews. Although every effort has been made to situate them in time, place, and form of self-expression, the ultimate purpose of such an anthology is to cross party lines, to overcome the barriers of language, and to defy geography, so as to create a composite, multidimensional portrait of an ever-evolving civilization. It is our hope that each and every entry serves as a door to rooms and palaces as yet unexplored.

### Notes

1. A good source on Jewish anthologies is David Stern, ed., *The Anthology in Jewish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
2. See, for example, the excellent collection of articles in Hana Wirth-Nesher, ed., *What Is Jewish Literature?* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994).
3. This postwar effervescence of Yiddish culture is well described in Jan Schwarz, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015).
4. *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, “The Rome Colloquium,” Summer, 1972.
5. See, for example, the entry for Siegfried Moses, “Programme for the Leo Baeck Institute of Jews from Germany,” in our anthology.
6. A good introduction, among many, to these problems of reintegration is David Bankier, ed., *Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after World War II* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).
7. Emmanuel Levinas, “Être juif,” *Confluences* 7 (1947): 253–67, 261.
8. On this research, see Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
9. Harold Troper, *The Defining Decade: Identity, Politics, and the Canadian Jewish Community in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 288.
10. Andries Wessels, “The Outsider as Insider: The Jewish Afrikaans Poetry of Olga Kirsch,” *Prooftexts* 29 (2009): 63–85.
11. Leonardo Senkman, “Argentine Culture and Jewish Identity,” in *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, ed. Judith Elkin and Gilbert Merkx (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 255–70, 258.
12. Edward S. Shapiro, “World War II and American Jewish Identity,” *Modern Judaism* 10 (1990): 65–84, 79.
13. Quoted in Edward S. Shapiro, “World War II and American Jewish Identity,” *Modern Judaism* 10 (1990): 65–84, 74.