

## **Land of the Postscript: Canada and the Post-Holocaust Fiction of Chava Rosenfarb**

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By definition, Yiddish literature is a literature of exile, since Yiddish itself is a language of the diaspora. Nevertheless, Yiddish literature does have a “home and native land”—to borrow the words of the Canadian national anthem—and that land is eastern Europe, where the language migrated during the late Middle Ages and where most of its speakers resided. Thus, to speak of Yiddish literature in Canada is to speak of a literature that has been doubly exiled—firstly from Israel, traditional homeland of the Jewish people, and secondly from eastern Europe, traditional homeland of Yiddish-speaking Jews.

The roots of Yiddish literature in Canada go back to the turn of the century, when east European Jews, seeking refuge from persecution and poverty, began arriving in large numbers, settling primarily in the cities of Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. Montreal, where most of the immigrants settled, provided particularly advantageous conditions for the establishment of a literature written in Yiddish. From 1900 to the outbreak of World War II, Jews made up Montreal’s largest immigrant community and Yiddish was, after French and English, the city’s most widely spoken language. The result was a Yiddish-speaking culture of remarkable self-sufficiency and vitality, which earned for Montreal a reputation among Jews as “the Jerusalem of North America.” After the

Second World War, Canadian Yiddish literature was given another boost by the arrival of survivors of the conflagration in Europe--among them the poet Rokhl Korn, and the novelists Yehuda Elberg and Chava Rosenfarb.

In general, Yiddish literature written in Canada focused on Europe and on European concerns, despite the fact that many of the Canadian Yiddish writers lived the greater part of their lives in North America. Even J. J. Segal, arguably the most Canadian of the major Yiddish writers who settled in the country was essentially European in outlook, and filtered his vision of Montreal through the sieve of an Old World sensibility.

In what follows, I intend to argue that while the novels of Chava Rosenfarb--the youngest of the major Yiddish writers to settle in Canada--conform to this pattern of Canadian creation and European subject matter, her short fiction does not. Rosenfarb's novels tend to be conceived in epic terms, dealing as they do with the impact of the holocaust on the Jews of Lodz. Her three major novels, The Tree of Life, Bociany and Letters to Abrasha--all massive in scale--are European works by an essentially European writer who just happens to be living in North America.

It is only in her short fiction that Rosenfarb has permitted Canada--her adopted home since 1950--to play a role in her fiction. She has done this by effecting a synthesis between her primary theme of the holocaust and the Canadian milieu in which she finds herself, so that Canada becomes in these stories the land of the postscript, the country in which the survivors of the holocaust play out the tragedy's last act.

Rosenfarb's short fiction is thus a different take on a theme which has been explored by Saul Bellow in Mr Sammler's Planet and by Isaac

Bashevis Singer in several of his short stories--namely, the afterlife of the survivor. But Rosenfarb is one of the few writers on this theme who is a survivor herself, and thus intimately acquainted with the subtle undercurrents of pain and self-delusion in the lives she writes about. Her characters are neither ennobled by their suffering nor necessarily embittered by it. Instead they represent a gallery of all conceivable human types, and all conceivable human reactions to devastation.

First, a little background on the writer herself, whose work has only recently become available in English translation. Chava Rosenfarb was born in Lodz, Poland in 1923. She attended a Yiddish secular school and a Polish high school from which she graduated in 1941. By that time, she and her family had been incarcerated in the Lodz ghetto, and it was in the ghetto that she received her matriculation diploma. The Lodz ghetto was liquidated in September 1944, and Rosenfarb was deported to Auschwitz. From Auschwitz she was sent to a forced labor camp at Sasel, where she, her mother and sister rebuilt the houses of bombed-out Germans. From Sasel, Rosenfarb and her family were sent to Bergen Belsen, where, suffering from typhus, she was liberated by the British army in 1945. After the war, she crossed the border illegally into Belgium, where she lived as a Displaced Person until her immigration to Canada in 1950.

Rosenfarb was profoundly affected by her experiences during the holocaust, and her prodigious output of poetry, novels, short stories, plays and essays all deal with this topic in one way or another. She began as a poet, publishing her first collection of poetry, Di balade fun nekhtikn

vald [The ballad of yesterday's forest] in London in 1947. This was followed by three other poetry collections<sup>1</sup>, and a play Der foigl fun geto [The bird of the ghetto], which was translated into Hebrew and performed by the Israeli's National Theatre, the Habimah, in 1966.

Finding that neither poetry nor drama could begin to express the depths of her feelings about the holocaust, Rosenfarb turned to fiction. In 1972, she published Der boim fun lebn [The tree of life].<sup>2</sup> This three-volume epic chronicled the destruction of the Jewish community of Lodz during the Second World War. It was followed by the novels Bociany and Of Lodz and Love--soon to appear in English translation from Syracuse University Press--and Briv tsu abrashen [Letters to Abrasha], which is, as yet, unavailable in English.

Rosenfarb was a frequent contributor of essays to the Yiddish literary journal Di goldene keyt, where, in the early 1980s she also began to publish a series of short stories about the lives of holocaust survivors in Canada. One of these stories, "The Green-horn," was translated by Miriam Waddington for her anthology Canadian Jewish Short Stories. Another, "Edgia's Revenge," appeared in English in Found Treasures, an anthology of stories by Yiddish women writers. A translated collection of Rosenfarb's short stories entitled Survivors is at present being prepared for publication. These short stories are the subject of the present essay.

Survivors falls within the parameters of that worn-out category, immigrant literature, because it attempts a synthesis of the Old World with the New, but it is immigrant literature with a difference, because the

Old World in this case incorporates the stain of the holocaust, which the New World is incapable of washing away.

The stories therefore exist within a symbolic framework, which addresses the relationship between Europe and North America. For instance, in the story "Last Love," an elderly Jewish woman's dying wish is to make love to a handsome young Frenchman. All the characters in this story are European. Amalia, the heroine, is the representative of all those survivors who found refuge in Canada after the ravages of the war. She has settled in Montreal with her sculptor husband, and both husband and wife grow old on Canadian soil. But when Amalia learns that she has only a short time left to live, she begs her husband to take her back to Paris, the city where the couple had first met after the war. Once there, she announces that her dying wish is to make love to a young man. It is as if she hopes to incorporate within herself a more innocent Europe, cleansed of atrocities and pain. Amalia herself represents the dying order of an Old World corrupted as much by the presence of its victims as by that of its aggressors. After much hesitation, her husband dutifully finds an idealistic young Frenchman who overcomes his initial reluctance and grants Amalia her last wish for a last love.

But his experience with Amalia destroys the young man. He becomes restless, infected by a malaise he cannot understand. In possessing Amalia, the young Frenchman has become possessed by her. Although he had been about to get married, he leaves his fiancée in France, and goes adventuring in Canada, driving across the country to the Canadian Rockies. There he plunges his car off a cliff, seeing in the

towering mountains the beckoning form of the old lady to whom he had once made love. The story's conclusion suggests the impossibility of Amalia's longed-for purification. The young European can find in the pristine Canadian landscape only seductive reflections of the dying face of the old Jewish woman for whom he was--and who was for him--a last love. The future has become a sacrifice to the past.

Canada in these stories does not wipe out Europe--not even symbolically. It cannot nullify the European past. Canada here plays the role of the spam in the sandwich. It is bland neutral territory, which is nevertheless deadly, because its unflavoured ahistorical terrain, like a *tabula rasa*, permits the intrusion of a corroding European reality. Rosenfarb's depiction of Canada in these stories is markedly different from the kind of easy Jamesian dichotomy that defined America as naive and innocent, and Europe as knowing and corrupt. Here Canada is the neutral land of refuge, which like blank paper patiently permits the survivors to impose their past on its present.

I use the blank paper analogy advisedly, because the dominant season in Rosenfarb's depiction of Canada is winter. This is not really surprising given the harshness and duration of the Canadian winter, nor is Rosenfarb the first writer to mine this season for its symbolic potential. But the significance of winter to her stories has a different twist. In "A Cottage in the Laurentians," the climactic scene, in which a manuscript and its Jewish writer are burned to death takes place in a remote Laurentian cabin in the middle of a snowstorm--a suggestion of anti-Semitic book-burnings, inquisitorial auto-da-fé s and Nazi crematoria

transplanted to the frozen Canadian landscape.

Furthermore, the winter season can have many meanings. In “The Greenhorn,” the earliest and shortest of the stories, the newly arrived immigrant, Barukh, refuses to stop wearing his winter coat even when it is long past the season for it. “He cannot seem to get warm in this country,” writes the narrator, “and he does not find the coat too heavy for spring.”

But the chill which Barukh feels is not the chill of the Canadian climate, but of the memories frozen within him. In this story, Montreal is portrayed as a hot place--hot with the steam of a shmoteh factory and with the warmth of sexual allure. Briefly, the story tells of Barukh, a holocaust survivor newly arrived in Canada who is working his first day at a garment factory in Montreal. The factory foreman is also a transplanted Jew, as are several of the other workers. The Jewish workers in fact are a mix of newly arrived greenhorns, mostly holocaust survivors like Barukh, and of Jews from earlier migrations. But the Jews are not the only inhabitants of this factory world. There are also French-Canadians. One of these, a flirtatious young woman tries to befriend Barukh.

The dialogue between the two reveals the chasm that separates them. The young French Canadian is envious of Barukh’s European past, which to her suggests romantic far-off places that she can never visit. When Barukh tells her that he has lived in Paris, she immediately imagines the Paris of the tourist brochures, full of nightclubs, opera, theatre--the Paris of elegance and the high-life. But Barukh has known none of these enchantments. In Paris he lived the life of a penniless DP. She, for her

part, has no idea what a displaced person is. The cataclysmic events that Barukh has lived through have barely penetrated her consciousness. Barukh and the young French Canadian flirt their way through a conversation in which they talk past each other, her side of the exchange made up of unrealized dreams and fantasies, his side made up of the searing memories of a barbarous past in which he lost his wife and children. There is no way that these two versions of Europe can be reconciled, so it is not surprising that the underlying sexual play of the encounter misfires, disintegrating in the grubby present reality of steaming factory presses and the need to earn a living.

Barukh carries his past with him wherever he goes. When the young French Canadian eagerly quizzes him about living in Warsaw, he replies, “I no longer have any feeling for Warsaw.” She suggests that this is because he has been away from the city for too long. To which Barukh replies, “No, I am still there.”

This theme of the persistence of Europe and European memories within the context of what should be a new beginning in North America recurs in several of the stories. In “Edgia’s Revenge,” a tangled relationship of gratitude and resentment, which began during the holocaust plays itself out against the backdrop of Montreal. The story is narrated by Rella, a former kapo. Kapos were Jewish concentration camp guards whom the Nazis had put in charge of their fellow inmates. Rella, who had become a kapo through bestowing sexual favours on a guard, lorded it over the other women in her barracks, beating them, and

indulging in the petty cruelties which her position permitted. Her one good deed was to save the life of Edgia, another camp inmate, by hiding Edgia under a bunk during roll-call. After the war, the two women, Rella and Edgia, meet again in Montreal, where each has settled unbeknownst to the other. "Edgia's Revenge" chronicles their desperate attempts to come to terms with their past and with each other.

Rella tries to cope with her past by blotting it out and throwing herself wholeheartedly into the cultural life of Montreal. She becomes a self-confessed "culture-vulture," desperately running after every new fad and diversion. She also runs after Edgia's husband, Lolek, another holocaust survivor who seeks to bury the past in the distractions of the present. Edgia, however, cannot shake the past, and she continues living the life of the victim, even on Canadian soil, although now the oppressor has become her husband, who belittles, betrays and torments her for her inability to put the past behind her.

"Edgia's Revenge" is one of the most complex of Rosenfarb's stories, containing many levels of meaning. Among the most interesting of these are the varying emotional reactions of the survivors to their new North American reality. For instance, Rella, in her determination to remake herself, masters English and judges her acquaintances by how well they speak the language. She is thrown into despair, however, by the thought that she will never lose her accent. "The accent prevented me from becoming a new person," she laments. Despite this, Rella is not above exploiting the implications of that accent. She opens a ladies' dress shop which she calls "La boutique européenne," and she admits,

“My European accent contributed to the continental ambience of the shop, which in turn appealed to the predilections of my customers. This made me realize how attractive Europeanness could be in a non-European setting” (262).

This ambivalence about their European roots haunts all the characters in “Edgia’s Revenge,” who, as a group, live dual lives. Outwardly they adapt very well to their Canadian reality, learning English, making a success of their various business enterprises, participating in the cultural life of their city--but inwardly, as the author makes clear, they have never left the Europe that tortured and rejected them. Like Barukh in “The Greenhorn,” they are still there. “The truth was,” writes Rella, “that we felt alien in this new world, that we were so caught up with modernity because we found it so frightening”(p. 277).

“Edgia’s Revenge” is about dealing with the unfinished business of the European past. Towards this end, it exploits its Montreal setting for symbolic and contrapuntal resonances. For instance, Rosenfarb puts to good use the winding wooden staircases that are so distinctive a feature of Montreal architecture. These external staircases, which curl up to the second and third floors of the city’s older triplexes are certainly picturesque, but they are also a hazard in both summer and winter, since they are steep and slippery. Edgia and her husband live in one such triplex with a winding staircase, and Rella’s deep fear that Edgia intends to do her harm centers on this staircase, which must be negotiated in order to get to the floor where Edgia lives with her husband, who is also Rella’s lover. In the end, it is Edgia’s husband, not Rella, who slips on one such

ice-covered staircase--this one outside a brothel--and breaks his neck. This is death by architecture, an ironic and pathetic Canadian demise for a man who had managed to survive the much greater dangers of the European holocaust.

Another feature of Montreal that finds its way into this story concerns the cross atop of Mount Royal, the mountain in the center of the city. This cross can always be seen from wherever in the city Edgia chooses to live. Even when she marries her second husband and moves to a richer part of town, the cross is still visible from her window. This is, in fact, an accurate reflection of the geography of Montreal. Because the cross is the highest point in the city, it can be seen from poorer neighborhoods as well as from richer ones. The fact that the cross follows Edgia through her various permutations of personality, fortune and changes of address hints at the symbolic underpinning of Rosenfarb's story. As Edgia notes, the cross is missing something. "Every cross should have its Jesus and every Jesus should have his cross. . .The cross is the question and Jesus is the answer" (286).

The cross on the top of Mount Royal--first planted, according to tradition, by the French explorer Jacques Cartier in the name of the king of France--attests to the strong Catholic presence in Montreal, and to the city's beginnings as a colonial outpost. It thereby alludes obliquely to the place of the Jews in Western history as well as to their victimization, a victimization that culminated in the holocaust. But while Edgia's remark adumbrates the victimization of the survivors, it is also a statement of incompleteness, of a lack of closure. On this level, it seems to allude, not

merely to human sacrifice, but to the never-ending need for resolution. The cross follows Edgia everywhere in much the same way as the past haunts the future of all the survivors, bleeding into their present with intimations of incompleteness, of something missing that can never again be found.

“Francois,” in many ways the bitterest of the stories, makes a similar point through its use of doubles. “François” is the account of a marriage that is crumbling. Leah and Leon are survivors who met and married after the war. As their echoing names suggest, their union should have been a harmonious one based on their shared experiences of pain and loss. Both have, in fact, responded to the emotional emptiness inside them with a similar obsessive restlessness, an incessant searching for something that they cannot find.

Leon has silenced the “howling void” inside him by denying it. He has made a fortune in real estate, buying and selling Canadian land. The land of Canada has been good to Leon in more ways than one. But his wealth has transformed him into a crass vulgarian, a man who exorcises his demons by denigrating his wife. His wife, for her part, tries at first to silence her own inner demons by drowning them in activities. She takes courses at universities, volunteers at hospitals, participates in community work and good causes, tries painting, lectures, keeping a diary, moving frantically and aimlessly from one thing to another. Finally, after many years of this, she takes a lover. He is an imaginary lover, formed to her own specifications, out of her own need, a French French Canadian. He is

Frenchness squared, and, not surprisingly, his name is François. François tells Leah what she wants to hear, comforts her in her misery, compliments her, caresses her, and converses with her on matters of the human heart.

Acting on impulse, but probably with an arrière-pensée of trying to save his marriage, Leon suddenly decides to take Leah to South America. There they do touristy things, like journeying to the famous Angel Falls, swimming in the Amazon River, and flying out to visit Machu Pichu. But wherever they go, Leon and Leah encounter people who remind them of their European past--a tour guide who may or may not also be a holocaust survivor; a German couple who own a lodge on the Amazon River, and who may or may not be former Nazis.

All the while, the couple bicker. At Machu Pichu, Leah finally realizes that her marriage to Leon is over, that the two can no longer get along, that they have grown tired of each other, that they have grown apart--a shared experience of the holocaust is no guarantee of compatibility. Having come to this realization, Leah also realizes that she no longer needs François, because she no longer needs the crutch of his presence to compensate her for all that she lacked in Leon. Dramatically she kills François by throwing him off a precipice at Machu Pichu, allowing the American context from which he sprang to take him back again.

The presence of François in this story suggests the complicating element in Rosenfarb's depiction of Europe. Europe in these stories is not just the ravaged and desecrated eastern Europe, ancient homeland of Ashkenazic Jews. Rosenfarb's Europe also contains France--the country

of elegance, style, civilization and romance, the country which dreams are made on. Not only does this French element provide Rosenfarb with a dual image of Europe as both barbarous and ideal, it also permits her to meld Europe to America through the presence of French Canadians in her stories.

For instance, the chimeric François in the story above is described as a Parisian Frenchman living in Montreal, a professor of French literature at Montreal's French university, hence an amalgam of Europe and America. The fact that François is a creature of Leah's imagination suggests how, when it comes to creating an ideal lover, Leah's mind attempts to synthesize Europe and America. Yet the story exploits the ambiguity inherent in such doubleness, for instance in the like-sounding names of the mismatched couple Leah and Leon.

The story also exploits the duality inherent in the couple's experience of the two continents, North and South America. The North America of Leah's Canadian experience is snowy, dreary and devoid of Old World associations. The South America of her trip, by contrast, is overgrown with European allusions. In the ruins of Machu Pichu lies America's claim to harbouring a civilization older than that of Europe. Thus, the two continents of America bracket Europe. In Blakean terms South America is the land of experience, North America that of innocence. In between lies the ambiguity of Europe--its horrific past and its romanticism.

The geographical juxtapositions add symbolic weight to the stories for which they serve as backdrop. Rosenfarb's survivors cannot be still; their afterlife is marked by relentless voyaging. Many of the stories in the

collection contain a trip beyond the initial transplant of European holocaust survivors to America. For instance, "Little Red Bird" is about the abduction of a child to Mexico, while "Serengeti" describes a safari in Africa. These trips constitute a nod in the direction of the legendary wandering Jew. Yet they are wanderings in which the traveller does not get very far, because, all the while, behind these peregrinations, there hovers the pursuing shadow of the inescapable European past ruthlessly dictating the terms of a North American present.

"Serengeti" is in fact an anomaly among the stories, since it features a Jewish protagonist who is not a holocaust survivor, and not a Canadian. Dr. Simon Brown--his surname is a shortened form of Brownstein--is a third-generation Jewish-American psychiatrist who is leading a group of other psychiatrists on a safari in Africa. Among this group of psychiatrists is a holocaust survivor, Marisha Vishnievska. who was formerly one of Dr. Brown's patients. Dr. Brown has always felt an antipathy towards this woman, although he could not have said why. The narrator suggests, however, that this antipathy has to do with Simon Brown's projected hatred of his own Jewishness, a Jewishness he has been trying to deny and evade all his life. However, during the course of the group's visit to the Serengeti, Simon's antipathy towards Marisha resolves itself into an attraction.

But Simon is already married and his wife Mildred has accompanied him on this trip. Mildred is not Jewish, and this, it seems, is why Simon loves her: "He loved Mildred, and through her, he loved America. Thanks

to Mildred he not only felt himself more of an American, but also more of a citizen of the world. . . Every time that he held her in his arms he had the feeling of coming home from a long voyage. The history of America which he had mechanically absorbed in his childhood and youth, became, after his marriage, as familiar and near to him as Mildred's heartbeat."<sup>3</sup>

At first glance, Rosenfarb seems to be preparing us for the classic triangular plot, albeit with a Jewish twist, in which a self-hating Jewish male awakens to the self-delusional quality underlying his attraction to gentile women and comes to accept himself for the Jew he really is, an acceptance usually signalled by a romantic passion for a Jewish woman. (The non-Jewish George Eliot pioneered the prototype for this Jewish twist on the traditional triangle in her 1876 novel Daniel Deronda.)

But Rosenfarb's story is more complex than this. To begin with, the Jewish side of the triangle, Marisha Vishnievska is as full of self-hatred as Simon Brown. Thrown from a Auschwitz-bound train at the age of two by a Jewish mother trying desperately to save her child from certain death, Marisha is found and raised by a Polish peasant woman. Rosenfarb consistently confounds expectations however. Marisha's mother does not die in the gas chamber at Auschwitz, but survives the war and returns to reclaim her daughter, setting up in the girl a tension between the Polish mother who raised her and the Jewish one who took her back. To further complicate the child's feelings, Marisha's mother, having escaped the Nazis, is murdered by anti-Semitic Polish thugs in a post-holocaust attack on Jews. Marisha is then raised as a Pole by an assimilated Polish-Jewish couple. Thus Marisha's feelings about her own sense of identity are no

less complex, no less filled with self-disgust and self-hatred than Simon Brown's. Simon is the offspring of American-born Jewish parents whose highest ideal was to melt into the melting pot. "Simon Brown ascribed everything which he disliked about himself to the disheveled little Jew who dwelled within his well-groomed, sportive body of a modern American." The attraction between Simon Brown and Marisha Vishnievskaya is thus based as much on a recognition of their shared ambivalence about their own Jewishness as it is on their shared Jewishness itself.

But Simon's attraction for Marisha does not obviate his love for Mildred. Interestingly, he expresses this love in terms of the concept "home," declaring to Marisha, "I love Mildred. She is my home." To this Marisha replies: "I am your home. Your real home. Call me Esther." To complicate matters still further, this tug-of-war over the allegiance and love of a man, this semantic tussle over what is an appropriate home for the Jew is played out against the backdrop of the Serengeti, a perfect showcase for the demonstration of the survival of the fittest, where nature is red in tooth and claw, and life is at its most elemental--eat or be eaten. At the same time the natural cruelty of life on the Serengeti is constantly compared to the unnatural cruelty of human beings, especially during the holocaust. When Simon Brown sees a lioness stalking her prey, he remarks to Marisha that the scene reminds him of a photograph he saw of a concentration camp where Dr. Mengele was making a selection. "Don't abuse the lioness, professor," is Marisha's only reply. Thus, it is not only Rosenfarb's holocaust survivors who cannot escape the long shadow of the event, no matter where they travel; it is also

third-generation American Jews with a more peripheral connection to the great disaster who cannot evade its impact.

“Serengeti” does not end with either Marisha or Mildred getting the upper hand in the fight over Simon Brown’s heart. On the contrary. Simon cavalierly offers his sun-hat to Marisha when hers is blown off her head and into the center of a pride of feasting lions, where it is irretrievable. This gallant act exposes Simon to the sun and causes him to faint from sunstroke. As he loses consciousness he sees a vision of the two women fighting over him: “One pulled in this direction, the other in the opposite direction. They were like the animals of Serengeti, fighting over their victim, tearing chunks from his body. . . To whom did he belong? Where did he belong?”

The story ends with this heat-induced hallucination, which resolves the conflict by moving away from the problem of the two women to end on a note that makes both the women and the opposing identities they represent irrelevant:

Simon had his human dignity, the dignity of a proud Jew and a proud American, the dignity of a small fly who had drunk from the waters of the infinite and had not drowned. Of what importance was it to whom he belonged? He belonged to no one except the global Serengeti. He belonged to the sun, the queen of life and death. That was enough for him. Dayenu. . . That was plenty.

The rich symbolism of this story, its straddling three continents and yoking all three together through a focus on recent Jewish history and Jewish dilemmas is masterful. But what is even more interesting is that

the story achieves its effects by taking on a series of Jewish stereotypes and clichés and presenting them in a new light. Thus underlying the character of Dr. Simon Brown, we can find the combined stock figures of the Jewish-American psychiatrist and of the generic Jewish male who marries a gentile wife with a pedigree going all the way back to the Mayflower. In *Marisha* we have another common Jewish type--the sweaty, unkempt, vulgar, loud-mouthed Jewish woman, who has no sense of grace or decorum, elegance or self-restraint. And, of course, we have a theme that is quickly becoming the sine-qua-non in late twentieth-century Jewish fiction, namely, the allusion to the holocaust as the fountainhead of Jewish angst in the latter part of this century. Yet the stereotypical elements evoked here seem to be evoked precisely in order that they may be re-examined, and that re-examination takes place against the backdrop of a safari in Africa, an activity and a location not usually associated with Jews, indeed an activity and a location which tend to consign problems of Jewish identity to the margins of concern.

It is because of this need to re-examine some of the stereotypes of Jewish life that Rosenfarb defines her main character as American rather than Canadian. Canadian Jews--much like Canadians themselves--have few identifiable tags which can immediately stamp and label them in the popular imagination. For Rosenfarb, Canada is a country empty of history, and--ironically-- empty of Canadians, unless they be French Canadians. For this reason, Canada serves her well when she wants to describe the afterlife of the holocaust survivor, who imprints the reality of his or her horror-filled past on the blank patient page of a Canadian present. It is

only when she seeks to portray Jews who are second and third generation, who have a history outside of Europe, that Rosenfarb automatically shifts her focus to the United States. The reason for this is not that there are no second, third and even fourth generation Jews in Canada, nor that there is a lack of Jewish psychiatrists in Canada. The reason for Rosenfarb's southward reach is that the fight between dual allegiances, between where to belong and which national reality represents home, seems so much more an American-Jewish problem than a Canadian-Jewish one.

Yet whether she locates her survivors in Canada, or the US, whether vacationing in South America, or wandering across the plains of Serengeti, Rosenfarb's depiction of the holocaust survivor remains the same. Her survivors are those for whom the present, not the past, is a foreign country. They are haunted by their holocaust experiences, but haunted in all the diverse and individual ways that make one human being different from another. Rosenfarb's survivors are too complex to be labeled as the walking wounded, yet they are people who can never again live happily ever after--not in America, not in Canada, not in Europe, not even in Africa.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Rosenfarb's collections of poetry are Di balade fun nekhtikn vald [The Ballad of Yesterday's Forest] (London: Moishe Oved, 1947). This was republished a year later as Di balade fun nekhtiken vald un andere lider [The Ballad of Yesterday's Forest and Other Songs], in conjunction

with Fragmentn fun a tog-bukh [Fragments of a Diary] (Montreal: H. Hershman, 1948). This was followed by a book-length poem, Dos lid fun dem yidishn kelner Abram [The Song of the Jewish Waiter Abram] (London: Moshe Oved, 1948); and Aroys fun gan-eydn [Out of Paradise] (Tel-Aviv: Peretz farlag, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Der boym fun lebn 3 volumes (Tel-Aviv; Hamenora, 1972) has been translated into Hebrew and English. Bibliographic information for the English version is The Tree of Life, trans. Goldie Morgentaler (Melbourne: Scribe, 1985). Excerpts have appeared in Midstream 31, 4 (April 1985), 14-18, and in Canadian Yiddish Writing, ed. A. Boyarsky and L. Sarna (Montreal: Havesthouse, 1976), 23-48.

For a fascinating discussion of the differences between the English and the Yiddish versions of The Tree of Life, see Norman Ravvin, A House of Words (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>“Serengeti” was first published in Yiddish as “In serengeti” in Di goldene keyt 128 (1990), 115-156. All translations from the story are my own..

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