

surviving remnant was too scattered and powerless to reclaim their posthumous writings as the Urtexts in a canon of Holocaust literature. Typically, the publications of the ghetto writings from Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna appeared in small Yiddish editions in Poland, and only decades later were a small portion of them translated into major languages.⁵⁰ It was only the efforts of the surviving Jewish writers and critics to reclaim and reference a few of the perished writers' works from the ghettos that ensured the latter's literary afterlife which, for decades, existed only in Yiddish and Hebrew. After the war the perished writers' posthumous works were reconceived, reframed, and removed from their original readership and cultural and political contexts. Fictional portraits of Shayeitsh appeared in Rosenfarb's novels and essays; of the Polish Jewish writer Bruno Schulz in Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987) and David Grossman's *See: Under Love* (1986); of the contributors to the Ringelblum archive in John Hersey's *The Wall* (1950); and most recently of Chaim Rumkowski and a host of (fictional and historical) characters from the Lodz Ghetto in the Swedish author Steve Sem-Sandberg's novel *The Emperor of Lies* (2009). Thus the historical ghetto figures regained a lease on a literary afterlife by being removed from their original historical and cultural contexts, and reconceived for a very different readership.

Rosenfarb's short story collection *Survivors* (2004), a compilation of works originally published in *Di goldene keyt* in the 1980s and 1990s, depicts Holocaust survivors in Canada, "the Land of the Postscript." The stories focus on rootless refugees who, despite their outward success, are plagued by survivor guilt and live a shadow existence. The novella "Edgia's Revenge" is a confession narrated by the Jewish *kapo*, Rella. The relationship between Rella and Edgia as it develops over decades in Montreal is the main focus of the story. Both women belong to a small circle of Holocaust survivors who participate in the cultural riches of the Canadian metropolis. Rella's one and only act of human empathy as a Jewish *kapo* was to save Edgia from a selection for the gas chamber. Over decades of upward social mobility and business success as a designer in Montreal, Rella is haunted by the fear that Edgia will reveal her past as a *kapo*. It turns out that the survival of this group has been bought at a high price. Rella's sexual favors to a German overseer in the camp secured her a privileged status; Lolek, a survivor from Lithuania who claims to have been a Jewish partisan, actually survived unheroically in hiding.

Unlike Isaac Bashevis Singer's survivors in the novels *Shadows on the Hudson* (1991) and *Enemies: A Love Story* (1972), who are deeply rooted in Judaism and Jewish culture, Rosenfarb's survivors make a deliberate effort

to distance themselves from their Jewish roots. They speak Polish or English among themselves, and Edgia is drawn to the Christian cross at the top of Mount Royal, a particular landmark in Montreal. Rella's only reason to go on living is her friendship with Edgia, the sole witness to Rella's humanity in the camps. When Edgia terminates their friendship, Rella decides to take her own life. The sleeping pills she has been hoarding from the day of liberation serve as replacement for her family, community, and identity by offering the alluring promise of death: "These pills were the only possessions that I brought with me to Canada from the European continent. They took the place of my parents, my grandparents, my sixteen-year-old brother and my ten-year-old sister; my darling Maniusha. They took the place of all my aunts, uncles, and cousins, of my hometown, my childhood, early adolescence, and my first and only love. Sleeping pills became my life—and my death. And now they have become my only road back to innocence."⁵¹

Uniting the suicide Rella with her perished community, Rosenfarb has come full circle: from her apprenticeship as a Yiddish writer in the Lodz Ghetto, to her postwar rebirth, followed by decades as an acclaimed novelist, poet, and essayist on behalf of Yiddish culture in Montreal. Rosenfarb crossed the bridge to postwar affluence from "the other side"—in the Lodz Ghetto, in the Auschwitz, Sasel, and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps—and became a prolific Yiddish writer adored and supported by a vibrant Yiddish cultural network in Montreal. Although Rosenfarb spent a significant part of her career writing novels, it was in her short fiction and essays that she most astutely captured the nightmarish desolation of the Jews from "the other side." As she had already intuited in her Bergen-Belsen diary, the novelistic form allowed her to be expansive; to utilize multiple perspectives and chronological frames while threatening to become "a mask that covered the rawness and directness" of the Lodz Ghetto experience.⁵² The immediate experiences of the Jews trapped in the ghetto had found their most authentic and precise expression in the poems of Shayevitsh. Like most Lodz Ghetto Jews, Shayevitsh was largely unaware of the destiny of the deportees, a blindness that seeped into his poetry as a daily torture of doom and death premonitions. Having survived Auschwitz, Rosenfarb would never be able to return to that tangled emotional state of living in a community on death row. Instead, like other Yiddish survivor writers, Rosenfarb erected literary monuments that faithfully documented the inner historical, social, and cultural trajectories of a centuries-old Polish Jewish community in its final death throes. It was this strong impulse to commemorate and mourn that compelled Rosenfarb to select six white pages to represent the six million Jewish

victims as a wordless memorial at the end of the trilogy. As Rosenfarb feared in her Bergen-Belsen diary, the prose style and narrative of a realist, historical novel risked serving as a mask covering the truth of a community under siege, thereby becoming "an insult to my dear ones and myself." Instead, the trilogy received almost no critical attention in English translation outside Canada, while being acclaimed but rarely reviewed in Yiddish.

In Rosenfarb's essay "The Last Poet of Lodz," the context of writing and performing Yiddish poetry in the ghetto is brought to life in a devastating portrait of Shayevitsh that allows the reader to gauge the tragic magnificence of his life and poems:

the reading of this one [the unfinished poem] was transformed into a sort of morbid ritual. It would take place on the day when he had picked up his food and firewood or peat ration. He always wore one of his washed shirts for the occasion. His hair was combed. He would light not one but two candles, seat himself on the floor, and begin to recite the chapter of his work in a hasty slurping voice, as if he were a pious Jew rushing through a prayer. He often broke into sobs, and his hoarse voice began to crack. As he raced through the lines, his torso bent lower over the sheets of paper on his knees, and his entire body, like Laocoön's, seemed to writhe with pain. It was torture to watch and listen to him.⁵³

The images used here to depict Shayevitsh's poetic performance combine the traditional Jewish Kaddish, recited after the death of a relative and on the anniversary of their death, readings from Lamentations during Tisha B'Av (while sitting on the floor), and the tragedy of the Roman poet Laocoön, who predicted the invasion of the Spartans, was blinded, and lost his two sons in battle. It is in this portrait that Rosenfarb comes closest to capturing the tragic dimensions of Shayevitsh, the man and the poet. That Shayevitsh's two poems were found in a garbage heap in the Lodz Ghetto after the war and "made their way into print and are thus imperishable" is finally a solace to the surviving writer.⁵⁴