"For Auschwitz was a total collapse: quite simply the abandonment of men - of men, women, and children - who died an entirely mortal death whose disastrousness is demonstrated in its very limits" Andre Neher

Abstract

Sitting in the shadows of its sister to the South, Canada and Canadians live with a type of “garrison mentality” that pushes them to create literal boundaries between themselves and other nations, especially the United States. Whether it is the French-Anglo fight of the Quebecois, the growing South Asian population in Toronto or the growth of internal Jewish migration from Montreal to the Western territories, Canada has been a country struggling to find an identity other than that of an “annexed America.” Within this struggle, lives the fourth largest Diaspora community in the world. Although the Canadian government did not initially welcome refugees from Eastern Europe during and after WWII, Jews from all over Europe and Russia ultimately made their way to Canada (including my own family). As immigrants with traumatic pasts, these new citizens recognized the need to assimilate as a means to forget, or at least handle, the haunting memories. In the large urban spaces of Montreal and Toronto, Jews began to build new lives as Canadians, as the “other Americans.” Contemporary Jewish-Canadian authors such as David Bezmozgis, an immigrant from Latvia living in Toronto, and David Albahari, a Serbian living in Calgary, attempt to come to terms with being a Jew, with being a refugee and with being Canadian. This paper will analyze the major themes of Jewish-Canadian writing with a focus on
the works of these contemporary authors, the “garrison or survivor mentality” inherent in Jewish-Canadian literature as showcased by the characters in their work and the search for Jewish and Canadian identity in the shadow of America.

Birthright:

When I was seven years old, my parents moved us to Chicago, Illinois away from the family that surrounded us in Cote St Luc, a suburb minutes outside of downtown Montreal. With that move came the birth of my brother and my first experience with anti-Semitism. A strong Canadian accent and an even larger nose was fodder for every bully that walked the school halls or played baseball on the brown, well-trod fields. “Hey, Jew girl, did your nose get to school first? Kike, Kike, Kike.” After a group of neighborhood kids actually created a swastika on our lawn out of popcorn, my parents, determined to return to the suburban Jewish ghetto moved us to Roslyn, New York. The residents of Roslyn were ninety percent Jewish, the town had five synagogues, three Kosher delis and numerous stores that catered to Judaica. Although my parents chose well, what they did not consider is the overwhelming sense of displacement that caused me to hide my face behind my bangs. Now speaking with an accent that incorporated the worst of Canada and the worst of mid-western America, the kids in Roslyn were merciless in their teasing and bullying. Only our address had changed.
Like Moses and the Israelites, my family had wandered, crossing borders, and looking for the Holy Land. Although we eventually landed in the United States, we never felt truly at home – we were always in search of our identity. Were we Canadian? Were we simply Jewish, and as such Israelites? Were we American, as true Americans define the term? These questions, while complex in nature and potentially without answer, are those asked by contemporary Jewish Canadian writers who emigrated with their families, usually elders traumatized by past horrors such as the Holocaust. How do we create an identity when we are living in a country without one? What does that identity consist of when we are a people who have spent the ages in search of home?

History:

As early as I can remember the reaction people had when I said I was Canadian, was always the same, “Do you play hockey?” No one ever asked about the beauty of the mountains of Whistler, no one ever inquired about the old cobblestone streets of Old Montreal, no one ever wondered about the life of those who chose to live in Newfoundland; instead, they relied on stereotypes, made in jest, but stereotypes non the less. As Charles Blattberg, a controversial academic, notes, Canadians have always questioned what it means to be Canadian, mainly because “Canadians have never reached anything close to a consensus on a single, unified conception of the country” (Blattberg 1). The view of Canadian identity, because of the country’s history of colonization by both France and Britain, includes an unified country, a diverse yet cohesive
community or a country with deep fragmentation. This idea that the country incorporates national, regional, ethnic, religious and political elements that are, at times, incompatible pushes it towards constant situations of compromise. George Grant, in his work *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, argues “Canadians have relatively few binding national myths” (Grant Intro). Grant further asserts that, as a postcolonial nation, Canada has always defined its identity as “tied up with its relationship to empire,” its fate in the hands of America (Grant Intro).

Many contemporary Canadian authors express, through their work, the notion that “Canada [is] a single ‘nation’ that nevertheless contains many nations within it” (Blattberg 3). While this vision of separate nations existing within a larger territory is essential to any analysis of Canadian identity, one should not equate this with the ethnic communities that exist within its borders. As Blattberg notes, “the members of nations share a desire for political powers to achieve their ‘self-determination’ as well as their nations be recognized for its specificity by the state or states under whose sovereignty it lives, whereas the members of ethnicities, who emphasize their common descent rather than a specific language, have no need of political power or recognition” (p.3). When looking at the last century of Canadian politics, one can find evidence to back Blattberg’s argument (especially when analyzing the fight of the Quebecois for succession), I would argue that Blattberg is wrong in his belief that ethnicities are not in need of power or recognition. In fact, the contemporary Jewish writers discussed in this paper showcase the long fight of Jewish Canadians to gain acceptance,
politically, socially and economically, in a country that once closed its doors to them.

There are additional pundits who have led the movement for Canada to actually merge with the United States to become a super-power, rich in resources, skilled workers and military strength. Diane Francis asserts that in order for America and Canada to continue to exist in an ever-changing economic world where China is becoming “the” superpower, they must “alter course by devising protective policies and [to] merge into one gigantic nation” (Francis 10). While Canadians would balk at this suggestion (one that they have heard many times), Francis makes the point that Canadians and Americans are already considered, by most of the world as “so indistinguishable…that Canadians who don’t want to be mistaken for Americans pin Maple Leaf flags on their lapels or backpacks when they travel” (Francis 3).

In Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism, George Grant argues that Canada is nothing more than a postcolonial country awoken to its potential absorption by the United States, both economically and culturally (Grant xii). The very fact that Canadians remained silent while their sister to the South dominated showcases that fact that “Canadians have relatively few binding national myths, but one of the most pervasive and enduring is the conviction that the country is doomed” (Grant x). Is Canada simply a “branch-plant” of the United States and if so, how does this affect national identity? What happens to those who come to this “branch-plant,” their identities already in question due to conflict or genocide?
Remarkably, what makes Canada uniquely Canada is this struggle to define its self within the shadow of the giant, America. Imagine, if you will, living in a country that has had British and French influence (which remains), a consistent entry of immigrants from various Diasporas and a territory of such expanse that creates a strong provincialism. Imagine coming to a country that is struggling with the potential of becoming an American territory while fighting for what it means to be Canadian. Imagine coming to a country where citizens actually argue for a merger with the United States, a world where their country no longer exists. This is the world that the ethnic writers exist within.

Under the Canada Multiculturalism Act, the Canadian government recognized that one of its greatest assets was the diversity of its people and that the country’s culture could be best served to create a defined identity. This recognition of using the culture of one’s citizens to create a national identity is not a new concept as it is one the United States has used from the day it chose to describe it’s self as a “melting pot.”

Yet the Jews of Canada (along with the Quebecquois) never let go of the feeling of otherness; “while American Jews yearned for integration…Canadians strove to express their Jewishness in a country that had no coherent self-definition, except perhaps the solitudes of duality, isolation, northernness and borrowed glory” (Brym 34). This sense of northernness and isolation led Margaret Atwood, one of Canada’s best know writers, to identify Canadian literature as that of “survival” in an “unexplored and uninteresting wasteland, punctuated by a few rocks, bogs and slumps” (Atwood 2). Having published her
masterpiece of Canadian literary theory, *Survival*, in 1972, Atwood reconsiders her theory in the 2004 work, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. Atwood now looks at Canadian literature through the lens of the Wendigo, a cannibal monster, who can transform man with one bite, is the “personification of winter, or hunger or spiritual selfishness” which leads to a better understanding of the “repressed inner life made visible” (Atwood 83). Such a monster is terrifying in its ability to highlight man’s vulnerability, especially that of one living in the cold of the North. As Atwood notes, “The North, as we’ve seen, has frequently been credited with driving strong men mad…” (Atwood 96).

Atwood is not alone in her attempt to find a Canadian literary identity. Scholar Northrop Frye saw the Canadian experience as a “garrison mentality” where the military fort stands as a symbol of the strength of a country that has a tendency to huddle together behind the walls. Due to strict immigration laws, few European Jews were able to enter the Canadian garrison. However, once they did, believing that Canada was a peaceful country, they retained their values, behavior patterns, traditions and identification as Jew. In fact, many argue that Canadian Jews identify as such “more strongly than their American counterparts” (Brym 295). "The smallness of the Jewish Canadian population, both absolutely and relatively, may well contribute to a greater insecurity with respect to status and an increased feeling of marginality. Equally important, Canadian Jews are more likely to be foreign-born and thus one generation closer to the traumatic experiences of the Old World…” (Brym 296). What is striking about the Jews of Canada is their creation of ghetto type experiences, residing primarily in Jewish
neighborhoods replicating their Eastern European lives. Of course one must acknowledge that not every Canadian Jew is alike, simply because of their Jewish identity. If one visits a Montreal Jew, they will find an observant community whereas a Toronto Jew would be more likely to attend synagogue only on the high holidays. If one visits a Winnipeg Jew, they will find conservative practices whereas a British Columbia Jew may not engage in any practice of Judaism. However, one may be sure to find “a vestige of early European presence…when civilization consisted of isolated garrisons surrounded by harsh and forbidding wilderness” (Patton).

The “Jewish-Canadian” Author:

Into this confusion comes the ethnic literary figure attempting to use their art to define themselves both as citizens of Canada, as survivors of Diaspora and as a race that has been tested for centuries. In order to truly understand the dilemma faced by contemporary Jewish Canadian authors one must look to the past, to those authors who were first faced with post –Diaspora conflict. Unlike their forefathers, however, these Diaspora Jews have chosen to come to Montreal, Toronto, and Calgary to better their lives after experiencing the horror of the Holocaust. Although many saw Canada as a safe harbor, the truth was that Canada maintained harsh quotas prohibiting the majority of Jews from entering its borders.

The Jewish immigrants entering Canada were at a unique disadvantage as their culture and traditions had been barbarically stripped forcing them to yet
again wander the earth in search of home. In 1910, virulent anti-Semitism, included an emergence of a Quebec “blood libel” spewed by Quebec City notary, Plamondon. Plamondon argued that the Jews had killed Christ, violated Christian women and were animals who lived in filth (Brym 9). It was not until the Jewish community won its fight for the public schooling of Jewish children that Jews began to feel a sense of pride and a sense of being part of the fabric of Canada. Unlike America, Canada hit its economic/immigrant stride later than its comrade to the South leading to an increased amount of immigrants coming to its borders well through the 1920s (Brym 16). These immigrants entered the country, witnesses to numerous pogroms and conflicts that would not be easily forgotten; these memories become the literature of Jewish-Canadians.

At their center the early literature of Jewish-Canadians can be considered journey or exile literature. Like the hero in Campbell’s mythic Hero’s Journey, our characters are forever in search of the elusive identity they have either lost in the Diaspora or have never gained through immigration. They are on a never-ending journey where the answer may never be found, where the trials and tribulations represent the “leap from mere Existence back to Essence” (Klein 47). In his complex novel The Second Stroll, A.M. Klein takes us on the personal, biblical and historical journey of a young male narrator in search of his family’s history. Klein, using the books of the Torah as chapter titles, attempts to analyze and define the Jewish experience in Canada (and in the world) through the eyes of two characters: “the European uncle and the Canadian nephew” (Klein xii).
Having immigrated from the small Ukrainian town of Ratno to Canada, the family at the center of the novel retains both its religious and cultural traditions in the new world. The young narrator (loosely based on Klein) relates his journey across the world to track down his Uncle Melech, who refuted his Jewish identity in order to survive the pogrom in the early 1900s only to ultimately be placed in a concentration camp during World War II. The initial refutation creates a divide in the family with the Canadian side refusing to utter the uncle’s name, refusing to assist with passage to Canada, while the European side focuses on survival. It is the narrator, however, in his attempt to understand his uncle’s actions and the nature of the Diaspora that serves as the witness to history. While the Uncle experiences “contemporary Jewish history” first hand, the narrator will never be able to do so, even vicariously through his uncle (Klein xiv) – metaphorically, he is the true wandering Jew.

Although a citizen of Canada, “the land of his [father's] adoption” (Klein 10), our narrator is called American, as those he meets assume Canada is nothing more than the “forty-ninth states (Klein 27). His identity is always at question whether it be the ethnicity of his forefathers, the ritual of his father or the nations of citizenship, he is always searching for the answer. As he moves from city to city, country to country, he begins to recognize that his quest is hopeless, that he may never find Melech: “It was as part of an ascension, a going forward in which I was drawn on and on by the multiple-imaged appearing and disappearing figure of Uncle Melech” (Klein 45). Does it really matter if our
narrator finds his uncle or is it simply a journey he must take as a Jewish-Canadian or Canadian Jew?

The quest or hero's journey (the definition of a hero still has not been delineated) remains a narrative that Jewish-Canadian writers explore. Interned in Canada as an “enemy alien,” author Henry Kreisel questions his loyalty to a country that saw him as the “other.” In his collection of short stories, *The Almost Meaning*, Kreisel explores the Jewish search for identity post Holocaust, asking the essential question – can the past and present every become one or must they remain as separate stories of the whole? Like the works of Klein, Kreisel’s characters engage in physical and emotional journeys searching for their identity in a world of hybridity. In the title story, “The Almost Meeting,” struggling writer Alexander Budak receives a letter from his hero, the writer David Lasker, setting in motion a journey for identity and truth. Budak, on a visit to Toronto, attempts to meet with Lasker, as he has a hunch that Lasker is the father he has never known. His search for identity has many levels, emotional and spiritual, as he journeys to meet his father. Throughout the piece, Budak ruminates on the literary work of the man who is his father, “Often in his writing, people of different nationalities came together and almost touched, only to find themselves pulled apart again” (Kreisel 12).

To Budak’s dismay, Lasker refuses to meet with him. Although his disappointment is great, Budak does not walk away unsatisfied; rather, he has discovered that the journey towards identity meant more than the destination. This search for self through literature, the search for identity through words
showcases the barrier that exists between the first Diaspora generation and the subsequent ones. “The second generation, however, do not need to live with the past and accordingly, they throw away the culture and accept the culture of their new home” (Kreisel ). This almost meeting is not meant to take place.

In the “Chassidic Song,” Kreisel tells the story of Arnold Weiss, a Montrealer on an airplane to New York who finds himself seated next to a Chasidic man. Curious, Weiss strikes up a conversation with his neighbor asking if the men, and his group, are on their way to a Farbrengen, the Yiddish word for gathering. Shocked, the Chassid, Josef Shemtov, asks how Weiss, clearly a secular Jew, would know such a word. Weiss can’t be sure but believes he heard it in his grandfather’s home in Poland. Frustrated Shemtov asks if Weiss follows the commandments, goes to synagogue, practices Judaism, or is he simply a secular Jew without faith. Weiss, enraged by the assumption made by Shemtov asks, “Who says that a man must do what his father did, let alone that a grandson should follow the grandfather?” (Kreisel 18). Shemtov’s beratement leads to Weiss’ clear discomfort; however, Shemtov has little to no concern, his only concern is to insure that a Jew, a Canadian Jew, returns to the flock. Shemtov tells Weiss, “Then I was scooped up again. Like a stone in a great shovel. With other young people I was sent to Canada. To start a new life” (Kreisel 23). It is Shemtov’s memories of life after the Holocaust that bring Weiss back to his own memories of his Polish grandfather, of the Yiddish words taught and of the Jew that was.
Kreisel’s attempt to understand the plight of the Jew is best showcased in his novel, *The Rich Man*. The narrative tells the story of Jacob Grossman, an Austrian Jew transplanted to Canada, who, after years of saving, cashes in his money in order to return to his family in Austria. At first the reader is confused over this decision; however, many Jews were involved in reverse-immigration, returning to their place of birth after years living in a country that would always remain only a place to visit. What makes this decision all the more concerning is the fact that Grossman will be returning to Austria on the eve of the Nazi takeover. Although he is a poor man, his return to his European home is considered the return of a rich Westerner (albeit from Toronto) who can assist the family to leave. The assumption that a Jew outside of Europe is one that has succeeded, one that has become part of the land of gold, leads to misperceptions and judgments which place Grossman in an impossible situation where he must amidt to his family the true plight of a Jewish Canadian. Kreisel is asking the reader to consider the question – is it better for Jews to stay with their family even in times of conflict, thus retaining their heritage or is it better to assimilate in the new world? Kreisel leaves us with no clear answer, only the discomfort of knowing that Grossman’s reverse immigration has left him caught in an impending mass murder the world has never seen before. The immigrants in Kreisel’s works are grappling with the dual identity of living as a Jew in a new world while attempting to remember the past.

This idea of physical and psychological journey to identity is explored in all
of the novels of the father of Jewish Canadian literature, Mordecai Richler. Richler writes of a Montreal where Jews live in tight communities much like the ghettos of Poland. To a Canada unsure of its own identity, Richler comes, a young man without a country, with an ethnicity that the world has showed its hatred to. In his most famous work, *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, Richler focuses on the second generation of Holocaust survivors, specifically Jacob Hersh, a famous television director. Jacob has spent most of his life running from the Jewish ghettos of Hampstead and Cote St. Luc where his family lives with their memories and survivor’s guilt; he has married a non-Jew (“shiksa”), has moved his family from Canada to London, has stopped speaking to his father and his religious sister and has built a wall (the garrison of Frye). Although comfortable, Jake suffers from the "Jewish nightmare;" reliving in his mind the famous picture of the young Jewish boy, his hands above his head as the Germans point their guns at him. This vision ultimately evolves into an image of the Nazis entering his London home and taking his children (Richler 72-73).

Although Hersh has built a fortress around himself, he allows the con-man Hankel or Harry, to enter. Hankel has a long history of sexual perversion, of stealing and of money-laundering but Hersh is simply too blind to recognize these traits. Rather, he spends most of his days dreaming of his long-lost Uncle Joey (a narrative reminiscent of that in Klein’s work). Joey has been a type of urban legend, who the family talks about constantly with disappointment and love. Hersh spends his days envisioning Joey on horseback searching for
Mengele and Goering, the Nazi madmen who murdered Jews during the Holocaust. These daydreams keep Hersh from recognizing the chaos circling around him as he is indicted for allegedly helping Henry to drug and sodomize a young-want-to-be actress.

As the con gains momentum, Richler chooses to change the location of the tale bringing the reader, and his hero, Hersh, back to Montreal for his father's funeral. Reluctant to return to the city, and the family, he has turned his back on, Hersh returns to Montreal, to St. Urbain Street, for the funeral and shiva (the seven day mourning period). It is in Montreal that Hersh finds himself again, through the sounds of the Kadish and the moans of his aunts, Hersh remembers who he really is. The assimilated Jew soon finds that one can never truly shed one's identity as he is surrounded by the unconditional, albeit problematic, love of family.

Harry - Herschel - has set him up = says that Jake asked him to bring the au pair to his room

Mrs Hersch disappointed in her secular son..."Watching him stagger off to the glass-topped table, seeking the bottle, she thought, why, oh my God, why did he ever leave Montreal, the fool? In those years, after the war, who wouldn't have given his right arm for a Canadian passport? What Jew wasn't on his knees to be let into such a good country?" 91

St Urbain's Horseman - name of his new script/film

"There was already enough trouble. Street incidents caused by roaming gangs of truculent French Canadians were constantly increasing. Premier Duplessis's Union Nationale Party circulated a pamphlet that showed a course old Jew, nose long and misshapen as a carrot, retreating into the night with bags of gold. Laurent Barre, a minister in the Duplessis cabinet, told the legislature that his son, on entering the army, had been exposed to the insult of a medical examination by a Jewish doctor." 135 -6
St Urbain, Canada’s ghetto

Jenny, daughter of hanna - runs from all that is her Jewishness - marries a well known non Jewish playwright and throws parties with "assimilated anchovies curled like worms on white bread.Little liberated pork sausages" 150

Jenny represents the young Jew who wishes to leave the religion, the culture - assimilate

Search for Joey, the horseman, the long lost uncle who seemingly disappeared; Jake imagines Joey as this legend roaming the world in an epic search for Mengele, to right the wrongs of the Holocaust

Discussing Jake and Luke (his partner) success and their move to London..."They were the progeny of a twice-rejected land. From the beginning, Canada’s two founding races, the English and the French, had outbid each other in scornfully disinheriting them."...."Jake, Luke and others of their generation were reared to believe in the cultural thinness of their own blood." 195

"...Jake had foolishly held Canada culpable for all his discontents..." 302

Life lived under the fog of anti-Semitism, of annihilation - one can never truly experience happiness or joy...304

Canada showing films to get people to immigrate...the country as holy grail

When Jake returns to Montreal to his father's funeral and shiva, he begins to realize that Canada is his home.

"Sitting with the Hershes, day and night, a bottle of Remy Martin parked between his feet, such was Jake's astonishment, commingled with pleasure, in their responses, that he could not properly mourn for his father. he felt cradled, not deprived. He also felt like Rip Van Winkle returned to an innocent and ordered world he had mistakenly believed extinct."396

His uncle Abe discussing the changed state of Jews in Montreal..."They can't sleep, they feel guilty about the Indians. So there they are, our Jewish children, wearing Indian headbands. Smoking pot. It's the burden of being white, it bugs them. How long have we even been white? Only two generations ago, who was white? We were kikes, that's all. 408

Ultimately Joey is found dead, a cigarette smuggler, in Argentina - the dream is over, much like the dream of the immigrant
ALBAHARI

Considered one of the greatest contemporary Serbian writers, David Albahari moved to Canada with his family in….

Since his first piece was published, Albahari has been critiqued within the criteria of postmodernism or metafiction (Ilic 266). Ilic (2000) asserts that Serbian fiction is made up of “realist fiction – or, new realist fiction – and postmodernist fiction (Ilic 267). As a work of postmodernism, Albahari’s writing consistently questions the world we live in (or the world he has lived in) through a lens that is at time ambiguous and a bit fantastic. Is this because of the conflicts he has witnessed? Is this because, as Elie Wiesel has noted, it is simply impossible to tell the story of horror? Writers, especially those considered in this paper, enter their narratives with the intent, and hope that they will be able to “work through problems, including rituals of mourning [and] viably come to terms with (without ever fully healing or overcoming) the divided legacies, open wounds and unspeakable losses of a dire past” (LaCapra 45). Accordingly, it is Albahari’s destiny to follow the quest narrative of those who have come before.

In his short story, “Two Homes, One Wolf,” Albahari addresses the ultimate immigrant dream – to own a house. The narrator, a character similar to the author, moves outside to shovel snow, and is reminded of his mother’s saying that “If a house were a good thing, a wolf would have one” (Albahari). What does such a statement mean? As he sits in a Calgary airport, he is accosted by a man who quickly identifies him as Serbian; when asked how he
did so, the man advises him that they are immigrant brothers, with two hearts.

“And that’s why immigrants have two hearts,” he said with a note of triumph in his 
voice. “They have two homes. A new one in Canada and an old one somewhere 
else in the world.” (6). Unlike Klein, Kreisel and Richler, Albahari recognizes and 
welcomes the inherent conflict of being a Jew, of being a Canadian and of being 
an immigrant from conflict. The notion of flight is seen throughout Albahari’s 
work; in “Shuttle Survivors” he is on his way to the airport when he encounters a 
young Japanese woman in the airport shuttle. When asked where he lives, 
Albahari responds, “‘Calgary, Canada. I decided not to mention the war in the 
former Yugoslavia, my homeland – it would only puzzle her. (It still puzzles me, 
although I lived there for many years.) (3) (Albahari, Shuttle Survivors) As the 
shuttle fills with people from Salt Lake City, from Hungary, from Croatia, Albahari 
notes the irony, “What an absurd paradox, I thought. You fight in a bloody civil 
war because there are people who do not like what Yugoslavia stands for and 
want to get rid of that name forever, and yet you are recognized only when you 
mention the name that should have been forgotten. History really likes to play 
games sometimes.” (6)

BEZMOSGIS

Look up "This was 1983 by Bezmozgis"

"Subsuming the consciousness of the child in the reflections of the man, 
Bezmozgiz makes us feel the profound awkwardness of the immigrant situation, 
the difficulty of knowing exactly how to behave" 115

"...the new immigrant literature comes from the children of educated 
professionals; their own formation is as much North American as European…”
"These are growing-up stories in which the embarrassments of an adolescent's coming-of-age meld with the immigrant family's awkwardness at adapting to a new culture, a new language, a somewhat alien way of life" 116

notion of wandering Jew, perpetually exiled

Morris Dickstein discussing "Minyan" "Here, a fable about dying old men, and perhaps a dying tradition, takes on a humane contemporary moral. In its wide embrace, the minyan will be like life itself. Diversity and tolerance spring from the notion that we may be sinners but are all God's children" 126

Question one's identity in a globalized landscape where everyone is an immigrant of some sort

Bronisława Volko - "long-distance runner of the universe" 161

"If we feel compelled to leave our native environment, something clearly breaks in us. It is almost as if our innocence is lost, as if we no longer can rely on very basic securities in the world that surround us" 163 BV

2 sets of everything - a person doubled with one foot in past, one in present

BV "At the same time, exile can be a great gift. It makes it possible to have more than one life, more than one country, more than one culture, and more than one perspective on political and cultural reality: 174

BV "Exile makes us bigger people with bigger hearts. Thus, if it does not break us, exile, paradoxically, makes us more humane." 175

"The circumstances surrounding individual migration, and the wider context in which it takes place, can have enormous practical and psychic repercussions, reflected in the various designations we use for those who leave one country for another" (234)

"By deciding to emigrate, they in effect chose exile, with its aura of finality, its sense that departure was irrevocable" 236

"Perhaps it can be said that Jewishness for these writers was above all the first bifurcation of identity, the first marker of difference. They all had training in being "Other" - but also in being hybrid" 240
Bezmozgis uses his writing to remember the trauma of his youth in the Soviet Union, his trauma of being a Jew in a country that hated him simply for that identity, and for his citizenship in a country that has yet to clearly identify its self. To a certain extent this is a form of “working through, an attempt to gain perspective, to distinguish between past, present and future” (LaCapra 143). While Bezmosgis has not personally experienced the Holocaust or the anti-Semitism of his Soviet ancestors, he is witness via narrative, a narrative that can be as incapacitating as the experience. As the writer works through the past, he becomes part of it and a new fractionalized identity forms; this identity can be personal in nature (i.e. I am David, I am a Jew, I am a Canadian) or collective in nature (i.e. We are Jews, We are Survivors, We are Canadians).

In his short story for The New Yorker, “The Russian Riviera,” Bezmozgis brings the reader to the Canadian Russian ghetto in Toronto where gangsters roam imposing financial duties on the business men. Kostya, a former boxer and current doorman, loves Ivetta, a ballet dancer in love with him. Before the Montreal Olympics, Kostya is chosen to train as part of the Russian team and returns to Russia, a home which he, and his parents, have never seen. Emil, Kostya’s coach, becomes the constant in his life until he decides to leave the Soviet Union for Canada. Six years later Emil brings Kostya to Canada, specifically to the Russian “ghetto” where Russian bookstores, Russian delis and Russian schools replicated the old country. Kostya is lost, unable to move forward in the new world and unable to return to the old; the Russian Riviera is simply a duplication of the Russian he lived in and left behind, a never ending live
memory. At the end of the story, after Kostya has used his skills to knock down a gangster, the following conversation occurs:

“How did I get here?” the gangster asked.

“I don’t know, “ Kostya said.

“How do I get out of here?”

“I don't know that either.”

What then is Jewish-Canadian Literature?

Although this literature is as difficult to define as what it means to be Canadian, a search for definition is essential. It is clear that these stories are quest narratives with characters in search of identity and home. However, at its heart, the literature relies on creating a type of demarcation point between those who have suffered through diaspora due to their ethnic or religious background versus those who have not. I would suggest that this literature, Jewish Canadian literature, must be identified with new terminology - “demarcation literature” or literature that considers that which “sets apart as if by definite limits or boundaries” http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/demarcate. It would be apt to discuss the literature of Klein, Kreisel, Richler, Albahari and Bezmosgiz as work that grapples with the concerns of a people who have always been set apart and defined by their age-old search for home. However, one must assess whether or not the contemporary writers can fall within such a definition, especially during a time of globalization and multi-culturalism. Rather than identifying simply with Canada, with their country of birth or with their identity,
these authors are writing works that transcend these “demarcations” as they struggle with their own hybridity. Let’s call their work “fractionalized” literature, the work of authors who have been literally and physically broken into pieces, each piece being essential to create the whole.

Assuming the reader has agreed to my labeling of this work, let us then consider if this fractionalized literature can also be considered a type of trauma literature. Trauma literature is most known for its focus on “paradise absent” (LaCapra 57), an awareness in the person that something is missing, that the past remains only as a “haunting presence” (LaCapra 49). For those, like the writers in this paper, who did not actually experience the Holocaust but are children or grandchildren of those who have or had, the survivor mentality becomes an inherent, and often unwanted, part of one’s identity. To add to this trauma, Jews who came to Canada after the war found themselves unwanted, forced to move into areas with others like them in order to survive once again.

Furthermore, these exiles must adapt to their new homeland, to be educated and reeducated, “to reformulate [tardily] the premise of initiation and becoming,” to “compromise between what he brought with him and what he acquires later” (Rosenfeld 19). Anne Roiphe, in her book Generation Without Memory: A Jewish Journey in Christian America, argues that although Jews may appear to be assimilated in their community, the reality is quite different as “the Holocaust remains a constant, open wound, a continuing sense of distrust of the political sanity of nations, anew knowledge of the potential for violence, destruction, sadism and, worst of all, depersonalization that may be in all of us”
This powerful memory becomes a part of the cohesion of the group, a part of what makes us Jews and forces us to close the “tribal gates to those outside” (Roiphe 26). Diaspora Jews share many of the same beliefs and practices: “Jewish language(s) and culture(s); a sense of common origin and history; a sense of communal bond; a tie to a given territory (Israel); and in the words of psychologist Kurt Lewin, an interdependence of fate” (Brym174).

Although Canadian Jews remain “clannish,” living in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, in close knit communities where most of one’s friends are Jewish, “the development of Canada’s social and economic institutions has set in motion forces that heighten assimilation” (Brym 34). "The smallness of the Jewish Canadian population, both absolutely and relatively, may well contribute to a greater insecurity with respect to status and an increased feeling of marginality” (Brym 296). Equally important, Canadian Jews are more Canadian Jewish success may also be its downfall as more Jews are intermarrying and assimilating.

As a Serbian émigré to Canada, Albahari lived in a world that retained and retains its strong relationship to the past, to his Serbia identity, an identity that has been torn apart by conflict. He moves to a world that welcomes him with arms that are slightly open as he is a human without clear cultural identification – is he Serbian? Is he Jewish? Is he Canadian? Albahari struggles through his writing with the question of self and finds that he is a fragmented man, made up of all that has come before, all that is present, and that which may come in the
future. Bezmozgis, as a Soviet refugee, finds himself in a world that offers freedom but at what price; must he shed his Soviet skin in order to be considered Canadian? Unlike the immigrants of the past, Soviet Jewish emigres have not yet “defined their needs for cultural development and their strategies for achieving cultural satisfaction in terms consistent with the values and behavior patterns deemed appropriate by the established Jewish community” (Brym 403).

Accordingly, Bezmozgis, a Soviet Jew who was taught to hide his identity may struggle in a country that welcomes their ethnicity.

Works Cited
Albahari, David. Shuttle Survivors. n.d.
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