Jewish Writers of Latin America

A Dictionary

Edited by
Darrell B. Lockhart

Jewish Writers of Latin America

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Preface

Jewish Writers of Latin America: A Dictionary represents the first attempt, to my knowledge, to provide a comprehensive examination of Latin American Jewish writing. There is a dual purpose and underlying goal in presenting this volume to both the general and specialized reader. First, it is my intention that this compilation provide greater recognition of the vast contribution that Latin American Jewish writers have made to Latin American literature as a whole. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the aim is to stimulate further critical attention not only to the works and authors included here, but also to those who do not form part of this volume. It is my hope that this volume will serve as a valuable resource for the study of Latin American Jewish literature and open the doors of this body of writing to a wider audience.

Jewish Writers of Latin America: A Dictionary includes approximately 120 entries on authors who represent ten Latin American countries. The majority of authors included in the volume are associated with Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, a fact that reflects the demographic reality of Latin America's Jewish communities. Likewise, it brings together the collective efforts of some fifty scholars committed to the advancement of Latin American Jewish studies.

In organizing the volume, each contributor was asked to provide a brief biographical sketch of the author (in some cases this has been difficult or even impossible to obtain), and then to discuss the author's work; focusing on issues and themes germane to Jewish identity and cultural tradition whenever possible. There were few stylistic or format restraints placed on the contributors, therefore the entries may differ in their approach, but each provides a general overview of the writer's works. The length of the entries was left to the discretion of each contributor, within certain parameters, in order to provide the best comprehensive coverage of the author.

The entries are organized alphabetically by the author's actual last name, or the last name of his or her pseudonym for which he or she is better known. Next to each author's name is the country with which he or she is associated as a writer and the year of birth. The country, however, is not necessarily their place of birth. For example, Ariel Dorfman was born in Argentina and now lives in the United States, but he is known as a Chilean writer. Therefore, the entry on him reads as follows: DORFMAN, ARIEL (Chile; 1942). Each contributor was asked to provide a complete bibliography of the author's works as well as criticism on their works. In the case of writers such as Clarice Lispector, for whom there are book-length bibliographies, the contributors were asked to pro-

vide a selective bibliography of criticism that in their judgement best represents the writer. The primary bibliographies include the author's works in their original language and, when available, in English translation only—the exception being works originally written in Yiddish and then translated into Spanish, wherein the Spanish edition is listed (this situation does not occur in the case of the Brazilian authors included). In the interest of space, translations into languages other than English have been excluded.

There have been a number of difficulties associated with compiling a dictionary such as this one. Regrettably there are at least as many authors left out of this volume as there are included in it. Constraints of both time and space have forced me to exclude many authors who merit greater attention. A secondary problem arose with efforts to locate critics who were willing and able to write entries. While I received an overwhelming response to my call for contributions, there were simply many more writers than there were contributors to take on the task of preparing the entries. I have attempted to include all the authors who are considered to be the major figures of Latin American Jewish writing as well introduce many lesser known writers. I am also very pleased that women writers figure prominently in the dictionary.

A central issue of concern in organizing *Jewish Writers of Latin America: A Dictionary* has been how to delineate the scope of the volume. The question was should it include only those writers whose works directly reflect a Jewish identity while excluding those whose works do not, notwithstanding their important and vast literary contributions to the respective national literary scene. Likewise, the question was raised as to whether a writer like Jorge Luis Borges, whose works contain a significant amount of what may be considered Jewish material and that many critics have analyzed from specifically Jewish perspectives, should be included. I arrived at the conclusion that the dictionary should in its totality be a critical sourcebook of Latin American Jewish writers and not just Jewish writing. While the main focus of the book is to define in what way Latin American Jewish writers directly reflect a Jewish identity in their works, I feel it equally important to include those whose work has greatly influenced Latin American socioliterary trends. By writers whose works directly reflect a Jewish identity I mean to say that their writing in large part deals with so-called Jewish concerns, which include but are not limited to the problematics of identity, assimilation, tradition, immigration, the Sephardic heritage of Latin America, Yiddishkeit, Judaism\Jewishness, self-hatred, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, Zionism, and Israel.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the individuals who have made this volume possible, first and foremost the contributors who embraced this project

with enthusiasm and without whom it would not have become a reality. I am grateful and indebted to David William Foster who has been a constant source of support and encouragement and to Melissa Fitch Lockhart, not only for her editorial assistance but also for her patience and understanding. I also wish to acknowledge and extend my gratitude to Laurel Stegina at Garland for her excellent editing of the manuscript. Finally, this project was also made possible by a grant from the Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer Memorial Research Award at Arizona State University, and I am thankful for the enthusiasm with which the proposal was received.

Darrell B. Lockhart

Introduction

Darrell B. Lockhart

To consider Jewish writing as a subdivision of Latin American literature raises a series of complex questions regarding issues that range from the theorizing of identity, both individual and collective, to canon formation. Any approach to the subject of Jewish literature in general must take into account a number of theoretical, methodological, and ontological interpretive strategies in order to define it as a legitimate socioliterary phenomenon. The debate over precisely what elements contribute to the creation of a text that can be designated as Jewish has been going on for some time and promises to continue well into the future. The forum for these discussions has been dominated primarily by a focus on Jewish literature from the United States, Europe, and Israel. Such debate is fueled not only by differing ideological postures established along the lines of nationality, language, ethnicity, and religiosity, but also by the fact that the forces that guide social and literary criticism are constantly changing. In one of the more recent attempts to pinpoint the nature of Jewish literature Hana Wirth-Nesher, in a clever deployment of reader-response theory, places the bulk of responsibility on the recipient of a text when she states that a text's "characterization as Jewish will depend upon the reader and all of the circumstances of its reception" (5).

It is not insignificant that global debates have excluded Latin American Jewish writing as a viable contributor to the wider corpus of works. Such an exclusion directly signals the double marginalization of Latin American Jewish writers. On the grand scale they are marginalized with the rest of Latin America in both geographic and socioeconomic terms as inhabitants of Third-World nations. Furthermore, they exist on the fringes of a society in which the codes, values and mores of the dominant Luso- or Hispano-Catholic society maintain a strong, often nationalistic, cultural hegemony over alter/native identities that do not conform to the established paradigm. In addition, one can maintain that the Jewish woman writer is even further marginalized as a female, constrained by deep-rooted Latin American and Jewish patriarchal traditions. Likewise is the case for Jewish queer writers. Latin American national identities have traditionally been formed around the ideals of cultural homogeneity in which the collective takes precedence over the individual. Therefore, the dynamics of cultural intersubjectivity, or the way in which the different and often disparate elements

interact, are played out under the rubric of center versus margin. Jews, as ex/centric members of Latin American societies, occupy the position of the Other.

Latin American literature in general did not attract global consideration until the mid-1960s with the advent of the so-called Boom. Such writers as Julio Cortázar (1914-84), Gabriel García Márquez (1928), Carlos Fuentes (1928), Mario Vargas Llosa (1936), and José Donoso (1925) burst onto the international scene and focused the world's attention on the vast literary resources of Latin America. The exception to the previous statement is of course Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), whose works began to be noticed outside Argentina in the 1940s, mainly because of their universal appeal rather than for their regional particularism. Traditionally, the Latin American literary canon has been the domain of such consecrated national writers as those mentioned above. Only recently has the process of canon formation been called into question as critical attention has increasingly turned to the examination of subaltern literary voices. Most prominent in this movement has been the reassessment of women's writing. In the circles of academe there has been a concerted effort to promote Latin American women's writing to an English-reading public—the result of which has been the translation and publication of a large number of individual works and anthologies that have brought well-deserved international recognition to women writers. To a lesser extent, other marginal literatures such as Afro-Hispanic and/or Brazilian, indigenous, and gay and lesbian writing have achieved considerable notice. It is within this polyphonic chorus of marginalia that Latin American Jewish literature is situated, and from where any consideration of it as a valid discourse representative of a cultural identity must begin.

Critic Saúl Sosnowski, who has been instrumental in defining the parameters of Latin American Jewish literature, comments: "When in addition to Latin American one adds the defining term Jewish, it is easy to recall astonished gazes and conflicting images of the accepted and simple cliches for both" (1987; 299). This is a fundamental observation regarding the foundation from which Latin American Jewish literature springs, for it points to the lack of understanding about just how far-reaching and deeply entrenched the Jewish-Latin American relationship is. Nevertheless, it has only been in the past fifteen years that Latin American Jewish studies has evolved into a fully developed academic discipline. This has been achieved by the formation of such ground-breaking organizations as the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA), which has attracted a large world-wide membership and has been instrumental in providing a forum and a network for the advancement and dissemination of research in all areas of concern to the history and culture of the Jewish communities of Latin America. Specific to literary studies, the Asociación Internacional de Escritores Judíos en

Lengua Hispana y Portuguesa (International Association of Jewish Writers in Spanish and Portuguese), which publishes the literary journal *Noaj* from its headquarters in Jerusalem, has been invaluable for its efforts to promote Jewish literature in Spanish and Portuguese. University curricula have also begun to reflect the growing interest in this area, as courses in Latin American Jewish literature and history are now being offered, though primarily as special topics courses.

A certain level of familiarization with the sociohistorical circumstances that gave rise to the presence of Jews in Latin America is essential to a comprehensive understanding of the forces that have shaped Latin American Jewish literature over the course of its development. It is not within the scope of this brief introduction to recount the details of the Jewish presence in Latin America, which spans a period of over five hundred years. Suffice to say that the history of mass immigration which gave rise to the present-day Jewish communities from Mexico to Argentina belongs to the twentieth century (see the history section in the selected bibliography). Consequently, the history of Jewish literature in Latin America begins in the twentieth century as well. This is not to say that there are no Jewish-authored texts in Latin America prior to this time. One of the earliest and most significant testimonies of Jewish life in colonial Latin America was left by Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva (1539-91?). He and his family were persecuted and finally condemned by the Inquisition in Mexico for Judaizing—that is, secretly practicing the Jewish religion and customs. The nineteenth century saw the appearance of Jorge Isaacs (1837-95), who became one of the canonical Latin American authors, and whose novel *María* (1867) gained an immediate fame throughout the Spanish-speaking world that continues to this day. Nevertheless, Isaacs virtually stands alone as a nineteenth-century Jewish writer. Moreover, his own Jewish identity as well as the content of his work is rarely noted (see Doris Sommer's essay on Issacs in this volume and her "*María*'s Disease").

The figure of the Jew as literary device and romantic metaphor (Jew-as-object) in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latin American literature precedes the appearance of the genuine Jewish subject in literary texts. Some of the most obvious examples include the novel *La hija del judío* (1849) by Mexican author Justo Sierra O'Reilly (1848-1912) in which the Jewishness of the protagonist serves as a symbolic voice to promote anticlericalism. Latin American Modernism found the figure of the Jew useful for promulgating the ideals of societal advancement and progressive modernization that characterized the movement. Rubén Darío (1867-1916) and Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) both incorporated highly idyllic images of Jews as synedoches to demonstrate the

benefits of programmatic immigration to Argentina (Senkman "La representación del judío").

Other important literary characterizations of Jews by non-Jewish writers sought quite a different goal. In Argentina, several blatantly anti-Semitic novels portrayed the Jew as a dangerous invader by utilizing popular negative stereotypes, informed in large part by the bogus *Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* Such texts as *La bolsa* (The Stockmarket; 1891) by Julián Martel (pseudonym of José María Miró [1867-96]) and the two-part *Kahal* and *Oro* (1935) by Hugo Wast (pseudonym of Gustavo Adolfo Martínez Zuviría [1883-1954]), director of the National Library, were widely circulated and read. They were primarily based on myths about Jewish schemes to take over the banks, control the stock market, and ultimately gain complete economic control of the country. Jewish conspiracy myths have survived and have informed the ideology of the extreme right in Argentina to the present day (Rock; Senkman *El antisemitismo*). The Jewish poet and dramatist César Tiempo (pseudonym of Israel Zeitlin [1906-80]) wrote a scathing response to Wast's caustic literature published as *La campaña antisemita y el director de la Biblioteca Nacional* (The Anti-Semitic Campaign and the Director of the National Library; 1935). In *El mal metafísico* (The Metaphysical Malaise; 1922) Manuel Gálvez (1889-1950), one of the major figures of the Argentine canon, propagates anti-Semitic stereotypes through the negative portrayal of Jews as poor, dirty, physically unappealing, conniving, morally corrupt, and as usurers.

Throughout Latin America non-Jewish writers have approached Jewish subjects with varying results. Mexican authors Carlos Fuentes and Homero Aridjis (1931) recall the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the precarious existence of the *conversos* in the New World, Fuentes in *Terra nostra* (1975) and Aridjis in his two-volume historical narrative comprised of *1492: vida y tiempos de Juan Cabezón de Castilla* (*1492: The Life and Times of Juan Cabezón de Castilla*; 1985) and *Memorias del Nuevo Mundo* (Memories of the New World; 1988). Critic Seymour Menton found Aridjis's *1492* so authentically "Jewish" as to include it in his analysis of the Jewish Latin American historical novel. *Morirás lejos* (*A Distant Death*; 1967) by Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco (1939) and *Vastas emoções e pensamentos imperfeitos* (Vast Emotions and Imperfect Thoughts; 1988) by Brazilian Rubem Fonseca (1925), are both texts by non-Jewish authors that approach the topic of the Holocaust. Likewise, author Carlos Heitor Cony (1926) of Brazil creates a Jewish protagonist and a Jewishly motivated plot in his 1967 novel *Pessach: a travessia* (Pessach: The Crossing) in which the main character undergoes a type of awakening regarding his Jewish identity. The novel speaks quite effectively to the issue of assimilation and it

parallels the marginal condition of Jewishness with political opposition during a time of military dictatorship in Brazil, both of which run counter to official conceptions of the national character.

Finally, as a non-Jewish author, Jorge Luis Borges must be considered as unique among the previously mentioned writers. It is not difficult to sustain the notion of Borges as one of the most Jewish of Latin American authors. His intense interest in and study of Judaica led him to write a significant portion of his literature which is not only thematically, but more significantly is structurally or stylistically Jewish. His emphasis on Kabbalistic thinking, Jewish mysticism and mythology, as well as his focus on the power of the written word, hidden meanings, and textual labyrinths single him out as a Jewish writer par excellence. Various critics have cogently investigated these elements in Borges's works toward a delineation of the writer's uniquely Jewish perspective (Alazraki; Aizenberg; Sosnowski *Borges y la Cábala*; Solotorevsky).

The foregoing observations regarding non-Jewish writers who write "Jewish" texts lead to an important critical question. What is it that renders a text "Jewish?" Certainly, it is not the mere fact that an author can be identified as a Jew. Such reductionist labelling serves little purpose and indeed is counterproductive. It places restrictions on writers whose works as a whole surpass or are not limited to an identifiable connection with Judaic tradition. Furthermore, it seemingly establishes the precedence of Jewish over Latin American identity and transforms the hyphen that joins the two together into an instrument of separation. Some authors do not adhere to a Jewish identity, either ethnically or religiously. Many Latin American Jewish intellectuals have embraced Marxism in lieu of Judaism as a means of mediating cultural identity. This is not an uncommon practice, as Mark Shechner explains with regard to American Jewish writers: "It is not mistaken to regard Marxism, at a certain moment of its penetration into Jewish existence, as a substitute Judaism, endowed with all the powers once possessed by halakhic or Orthodox Judaism for interpreting the world, dictating principles, forming character, and regulating conduct" (8). Uruguayan author and social critic Egon Friedler recently questioned the ideological foundation of this practice among Latin American Jewish intellectuals, particularly as it relates to Jewish identity.

The interpretation of identity is a highly personal one that occurs on an individual level. Therefore, it is for each author to decide what being Jewish means for him or her and how it will be enacted in the process of daily living. Others choose not to incorporate Jewishly defined elements, at least overtly, into their works. Indeed, so-called Jewish texts often form only a minimal part of a given writer's entire *oeuvre*, which more often deals with the complexities of

Latin American reality. Moreover, the Jewish perspective is never separate from the larger social environment, but instead provides for the possibility of a dialogic discourse of alterity. Jewishness, then, is not necessarily a self-evident component of a text. Nevertheless, returning to the question of the author, there is a significant distinction to be made. Non-Jewish authors write *about* the periphery, while Jewish authors are relegated to the position of writing *from* the periphery. So, while Borges or any other may be able to write *like* a Jew in terms of style or theme, they cannot write *as* a Jew. Latin American Jewish authors, on the other hand, write both as Jews and as Latin Americans as they draw on two cultural and historical sources for their writing, each an integral part of their identity.

In spite of the problematics surrounding the characterization of Jewish writing as a subcategory of Latin American literature, one cannot overlook the fact that as a corpus of works, texts written by Jewish authors work in conjunction to forge a Latin American Jewish discourse. As authors bring to the page, and thereby to the scrutiny of the reading public, topics of Jewish concern within a Latin American context, they provide a unique lens through which to view their individual societies. The forces that shape these authors' texts may include, in part, issues pertaining to Jewish identity such as immigration, assimilation, acculturation, religious and ethnic identity, language, Zionism, anti-Semitism, and Judaic tradition, as well as Latin American sociopolitical realities like authoritarianism, economic underdevelopment, and nonpluralistic societies. Each of these topics may be approached from and motivated by different viewpoints and/or opposing ideological stances, but together they constitute the artistic expression of a shared Jewish collective social reality as experienced throughout Latin America. However, one must be careful not to conceive of Latin America as a single geographical space in which the Jewish experience unfolds, even within the boundaries of a single country. The cosmopolitan environment of a city like Buenos Aires informs the Jewish writer's worldview in a way that is substantially different from one who wrote as an immigrant farmer in the interior of the country. Likewise, it is just as dissimilar to the writer in Mexico City, Caracas, or São Paulo, where differences derive from distinct historical, linguistic, and cultural circumstances.

As a vehicle for a culturally specific discourse, though not necessarily a homogeneous one, Latin American Jewish writing constitutes a socioliterary phenomenon that exercises and contributes to the creation of cultural identity. Also, as a social text marked by its decentered marginal status as a minority discourse, Jewish writing serves an important function as a countervoice to official discourse. Latin American Jewish writing, like other minority literatures,

endures as a contestatory response to the hegemonic telling of social history. Jewish writers offer a reversion of events and challenge the facticity and authority of the established canon as the authentic voice of Latin America. This does not imply that they seek to demarcate a new set of truths, but rather to question the process by which accepted truths have been established as such.

Contemporary critical theories associated with postmodernism and postcolonialism readily lend themselves to the analysis of Latin American Jewish literature. It may at first seem contradictory to think of this writing in postmodernist terms inasmuch as this seems to indicate a break with tradition, the negation of the master narrative, and the denial of historical authority, all of which results in the apparent dissolution of textual coherence. Nevertheless, there are convincing arguments for viewing Jewish literature as abiding, at least in part, to the posturing of postmodern textual practices.

Norman Finkelstein has aptly described the influence of postmodernism on several major American and European Jewish intellectuals, and his discussion is equally germane to the situation of contemporary Latin Americans. He begins his assessment by stating that postmodernism has failed to attract what he terms "self-conscious" Jewish writers and intellectuals—those who ascribe to a Jewish identity—because they tend to adhere to history and cultural metanarratives of Jewish tradition. However, this fact, he goes on to state, does not prevent Jewish intellectuals from being affected by the postmodern world in which they live and operate. He utilizes Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* to point out that this fundamental component of postmodernist ideology "speaks directly to Jewish intellectuals' self-conception, their understanding of their obviously vexed Jewish identity and the role they play in the greater drama of culture at large" (15-16). Similarly, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon theorizes postmodern narrative as what she calls "historiographic metafiction," defined as texts that are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). She cogently explicates how postmodern thought has led to a valuing of the margins as a result of the disintegration of the center (see especially chapter 4, 57-73). What these critics have in common and what they share with others is their reliance on Derrida's *différance* as the basis for an advantageous marginal position from which to speak. This concept has most recently been applied specifically to the context of Latin American Jewish writing by Nelson H. Vieira, who relies heavily upon *différance* as the guiding ideologeme in establishing the theoretical framework of his analysis of Brazilian Jewish literature. He relates Derrida's suitability to his study in the following way.

> Derrida's ideas and expositions are especially relevant to my discussion because he demonstrates how Judaic hermeneutics reflect his own stress upon the importance of textuality and writing and how différance relates to philosophy and literature as well as to power, knowledge, and politics. (41)

The privileging of the margins has produced an inversion of the hegemony maintained by colonial Luso- and/or Hispano-centric totalizing discourse. Contemporary Latin American Jewish discourse, then, is fashioned out of the postmodern conception of identity formation based on difference as opposed to conformity. The clarifying term "contemporary" must be used here since early manifestations of Jewish writing operated on the hope of inclusion, before the realization that exclusionary practices would systematically relegate it to a marginal status. Finkelstein, though referring to the subjects of his study, makes an important observation that can equally be applied to Latin American writers.

> Through the assertion of difference, Jewish intellectuals reveal their historical—or better, counterhistorical—aspect. Secular, largely assimilated, they speak of culture and to culture, knowing all the while that culture itself can be understood as a play of differences. Yet they do not dissolve completely into this play of differences [...] They cleave to the narratives of culture, including that of Judaism itself—a narrative of difference from which they are free to speak. (17)

This assessment also signals the role, or one could even say the responsibility, of Jewish authors as creators of culture and keepers of collective memory. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi also seems to ascribe to these notions when he declares "it would appear that even where Jews do not reject history out of hand, they are not prepared to confront it directly, but seem to await a new, metahistorical myth, for which the novel provides at least a temporary modern surrogate" (98). This in turn reverts back to Hutcheon's conceptualization of historiographic metafiction as a means of "rethinking and reworking the forms and contents of the past" (5). In this way many Latin American Jewish authors not only break with conventional modes of literary creation, but they also undertake a process of de/scribing the nature of contemporary Latin American and/or Jewish identity. Jewish writing reveals itself as postcolonial discourse in the way in which aspects of the texts that characterize them as marginal increasingly become superimposed on the values and traits of the center. For example, this is most readily

apparent in works that incorporate multiple linguistic encodements and culturally specific referents that function doubly as the signifier and the signified within a given context. One of the more common narrative strategies employed by authors is to create polyphonic texts by including words, phrases, and expressions in Jewish languages like Yiddish, Hebrew, and Ladino, as well as national languages that signal origin such as Russian, Polish, or Arabic. By doing so, the author resists homogenization by the dominant culture symbolized by the monolingually-restricted canon and the consequent loss of an alter/native identity.

This leads to the characterization of much of Latin American Jewish literature as being essentially dialogic in nature. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic imagination neatly applies to the vast majority of Jewish-authored texts in Latin American literature. The interaction of different narrative voices, languages, points of view, and the semiotic connotations embedded in utterances, all contribute to the heteroglossia of a given text (Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination*). At the core of Bakhtin's theory is the notion that language is the primary motivator of and vehicle for the transmission of ideology, or what Fredric Jameson would call the "political unconscious" of a text. The protagonist of the Latin American Jewish novel often functions as the mediator of multiple voices who may or may not aid the reader in sorting out the myriad layers of meaning that constitute the heteroglossic strata of the text. This textual dialogue between center and margin is one of the defining features of Latin American Jewish literature.

While sociohistorical circumstances specific to individual countries have influenced Jewish writing within national boundaries, as a whole Jewish literature has evolved through a series of basically common stages throughout Latin America over the course of the twentieth century. Any discussion of the development of this literature into an identifiable socioliterary phenomenon as it is today must begin in Argentina with Alberto Gerchunoff (1884-1950). Argentina, as home to the world's fifth-largest Jewish population, consequently produces the overwhelming majority of Jewish literature in Latin America. Two recent bibliographic publications illustrate the enormity of the Argentine Jewish literary community: David William Foster's and Naomi Lindstrom's primary bibliography of works by over three hundred writers "Jewish Argentine Authors: A Registry," and the two-volume biobibliographical source book *Escritores judeo-argentinos: bibliografía 1900-1987* (Jewish-Argentine Writers: A Bibliography 1900-1987; 1994), compiled by Ana E. Weinstein and Miryam E. Gover de Nasatsky, which lists over two hundred authors.

Gerchunoff is generally perceived to be the forefather of Jewish literary tradition in Argentina, and by extension in the whole of Latin America. His 1910

Los gauchos judíos (*The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*), which can be read either as a novel or as a collection of interrelated short stories, is widely considered to be the urtext of Latin American Jewish literature. It was written on commission from Leopoldo Lugones, who encouraged Gerchunoff to provide a specifically Jewish work as part of the cultural festivities in celebration of the Argentine Centennial. Gerchunoff was driven by a strong desire to assimilate into Argentine society and he viewed the nation as a literal Promised Land in which the Jew could find earthly and spiritual redemption from the hardships of Eastern Europe and Russia. He was the first, and one of the few, Jewish writers to gain acceptance into mainstream Argentine literature, and by extension society. His writing—first and foremost *Los gauchos judíos*—has become normalized into the Argentine literary canon to such a point that he no longer represents a problem, as a Jewish writer, within a predominantly Hispano-Catholic literary tradition. This is the case largely because of his engagement in a life-long program of identity formation by which he consciously and energetically sought to forge a nonthreatening identity as an Argentine of Jewish descent. A central part of such a process of self-identification was Gerchunoff's insistence on language—in this case Spanish—as the vehicle by which he constructed his personal and his cultural identity. Although *Los gauchos judíos* endures as his most familiar work, and it is still the most-read work by a Jewish author in Argentina, he wrote over twenty other books.

Contemporary critics such as David Viñas, Saúl Sosnowski, and Gladys Onega have found ample reason to criticize *Los gauchos judíos* for its idyllic, glossed-over representation of the early immigrant experience at the turn of the century. In sum, they reproach the author's motivation for writing a work that would gain him favor with the established conservative literary and political power centers of the country. Naomi Lindstrom approaches the text from a different optic, insightfully analyzing the influence of Eastern European Jewish thought in the author's narrative. Leonardo Senkman and Beatriz Stambler are the two critics who have most thoroughly analyzed Gerchunoff's contribution to Argentine literature. Senkman apportions a significant part of his book *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (1983) to the examination of Gerchunoff's works. He focuses primarily on Gerchunoff's effort to legitimize the Jewish presence in Argentina by recalling the Sephardic past of the Iberian peninsula in literature, language, and culture in the hope of establishing a Hispano-Jewish commonality. Stambler's *Vida y obra de Alberto Gerchunoff* (1985) is the most complete study to date on Gerchunoff's literary corpus as a whole. These different critical approaches and interpretations provide an idea as to the multiplicity

of meanings found in the text and also of the sociopolitical motivations underlying it.

Gerchunoff's influence as an author and journalist has impacted subsequent generations of writers in Argentina, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The first generation of Jewish writers to succeed Gerchunoff included Samuel Eichelbaum (1894-1967), Enrique Espinosa (pseud. of Samuel Glusberg; 1897-1987), Carlos Grünberg (1903-68), Lázaro Liacho (1897-1969), and César Tiempo, all of whom reached a level of relatively lasting fame owed, at least in part, to the door opened to them by the efforts of Gerchunoff. Several authors of this generation, namely Grünberg and Espinosa, continued to seek official acceptance into Argentine society by insisting on the building of the Hispano-Sephardic cultural bridge. Curiously, all of these authors were of Ashkenazic origin with no real ties to Sephardic tradition or culture.

Contemporary heirs of Gerchunoff often portray the Jewish experience in Argentina with a perspective 180 degrees from that of *Los gauchos judíos*. Mario Szichman most readily comes to mind as an author who represents the anti-Gerchunoff figure, with all the parricidal implications the term connotes. His saga of the Pechof family—(*La crónica falsa* [The False Chronicle; 1969], revised in 1972 as *La verdadera crónica falsa* [The True False Chronicle]; *Los judíos del Mar Dulce* [The Jews of the Fresh-Water Sea; 1971]; *A las 20:25 la señora entró en la inmortalidad* [*At 8:25 Evita Became Immortal*; 1981])—depicts a very different reality for the Jews of Argentina. In spite of his (in)version of Gerchunoff's original model, however, *Los gauchos judíos* is incontrovertibly the master narrative that informs Szichman's trilogy.

Generally speaking, Latin American Jewish literature can be grouped into three generational periods. The first represents the generation in which authors focus thematically on the experience of immigration. Feelings of alienation in a new country, nostalgia for the old country, the desire to gain acceptance while maintaining Jewish cultural identity, the depiction of economic hardship and the strife of establishing roots in a foreign land are all common themes to this generation of writers. The second phase is carried out primarily by the children of immigrants who, as first-generation Latin Americans, feel a closer bond to the dominant culture than to the traditions, languages, and religious identity of their parents. Literature of this generation is characterized by interfamilial conflict brought on by issues of rapid assimilation, intermarriage, loss or shunning (depending on the perspective) of traditional values in favor of blending into the dominant society. Second-generation authors also tend to openly confront matters that directly affect them as Jews such as anti-Semitism, and as citizens and full participants in national politics. With the realization that as

Jews they are granted at best second-class citizenship within Luso- and Hispano-Catholic societies, these writers no longer are concerned with not offending those in power. Instead, they boldly assert their alterity and they challenge hegemonic versions of Latin American cultural identity. Third- and fourth-generation writers, almost exclusively secular and completely assimilated, often seek a return to and recovery of Jewish identity by salvaging the remnants of their ethnoreligious heritage through literature. Many write texts based on family genealogy and history in an attempt to preserve and/or restore cultural memory. The narrative of nostalgic remembrance is common, often told through the voice of a child narrator. The literary text becomes an exercise of self-identification as authors attempt to blend their Jewish past with their Latin American present in such a way as to fuse the two elements into a single identity.

The number of works that attempt to give expression to the devastation of the Holocaust is quite limited relative to the enormous quantity of texts that comprise the Latin American Jewish literary corpus. Most provide fictional accounts of how Jewish communities dealt with the effects of the Holocaust and its aftermath specific to the context of Latin American societies. Texts range from the allegorical to fictionalized accounts of survival and endurance. The majority of authors that deal with the topic include it as but one element of a given text rather than as the central theme. Argentines Bernardo Verbitsky (1907-79), Bernardo Kordon (1915), and especially Simja Sneh (1914), a Holocaust survivor, stand out as authors who have given expression to this greatest of Jewish tragedies. Sneh, incidentally, also survived the terrorist bombing of the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina [Argentine Jewish Mutual Association]) building in July of 1994 in which nearly one hundred people fell victim to a virulent act of anti-Semitism. In Brazil, both Zevi Ghivelder (1934) and Eliezer Levin (date unknown) have written novels with significant content relating to the Holocaust.

The Latin American Jewish historical novel is a prevalent form of narrative among contemporary writers. Such works tend to be rather lengthy narrations in which authors combine fiction with historical fact, and often with a good deal of fantasy. Common to this type of text is the reaffirmation of the Jewish presence as part of the ethnic and cultural heritage of Latin America by creating narratives that conform to what Hutcheon designated as historiographic metafiction and what Yerushalmi termed the novelistic metahistorical myth. As counterversions of official discourse these novels represent a direct challenge to the center in their brazen attempt to rewrite the historico-cultural memory of Latin America. They harken back to Sepharad, the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the colonial era in Latin America. Likewise, they are populated by

heroic protagonists who overcome persecution, survive in exile, and maintain the integrity of their Jewish identity. Notwithstanding their focus on the past, many times these novels speak directly to the present. The themes of the Inquisition, persecution, and exile parallel the reality of contemporary Latin Americans living under fascist military regimes. Some of the most exemplary of these texts include *Aventuras de Edmund Ziller en tierras del Nuevo Mundo* (Adventures of Edmund Ziller in the Lands of the New World; 1977) by Pedro Orgambide (1929), *Identidad* (Identity; 1980) by Antonio Elio Brailovsky (1946), *La gesta del marrano* (The Epic Song of the Jew; 1991) by Marcos Aguinis (1935) in Argentina; *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (*The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes*; 1983) by Moacyr Scliar (1937) in Brazil; *Tierra adentro* (Homeward Bound; 1977) by Angelina Muñiz-Huberman (1936) in Mexico; and *Colombina descubierta* (Discovered Colombine; 1991) by Alicia Freilich Segal (1939) in Venezuela.

Israel and Zionism, as a political movement and ideology of the national resurrection of the Jewish people, have had a wide-reaching and lasting effect on Latin American Jews. Zionism was embraced by many as a way to express a nonreligious Jewish identity, and in fact became the religion of the majority of Latin American Jews. It allowed them to demythify their Jewishness in religious terms and align themselves politically as Jews to the new Jewish homeland. This, of course, stimulated a great deal of mistrust against Jews as questions of dual loyalty were raised. Israel and Zionism as literary motifs figure most prominently in the literature of Argentina and Brazil, and to a lesser extent in Mexico. Poetry proved to be the preferred genre for singing praises of Zion and celebrating the creation of the Jewish state, although the themes also appear in narrative and essay.

Theater, as a literary genre and mode of artistic and cultural expression, is able to reach a large number of people simultaneously and directly. Yiddish theater troupes thrived in Argentina during the first part of the twentieth century and enjoyed considerable success in Brazil and Mexico as well, due to the larger populations and the organization of the Jewish communities. Although the heyday of Yiddish drama faded, the tradition of the theater survived through a number of Jewish dramatists who have achieved national and international recognition for their works, and several have been major influences in defining and developing the nature of Latin American theater. They bring to the stage the reality of the Latin American Jewish experience and provide an important medium for the dissemination and continuance of cultural diversity. Samuel Eichelbaum, Osvaldo Dragún (1929), Ricardo Halac (1935), Germán Rozenmacher (1936-71), Jorge Goldenberg (1941) and Diana Raznovich (1943) in Argentina, Isaac Chocrón (1930) and Elisa Lerner (1932) in Venezuela, Samuel Rovinski

(1932) in Costa Rica, and Sabina Berman (1954) in Mexico have all been instrumental in shaping theatrical traditions and form in their respective countries.

Women writers deserve a special mention for their extensive and highly innovative contributions to Latin American Jewish literature. They provide a unique perspective on both the Jewish and Latin American traditions. In Mexico, women writers constitute the overwhelming majority of Jewish authors and their literature ranks with that of the best in the country. Brazilian Clarice Lispector (1926-77) is easily the most well-known and widely read woman writer from Latin America. Although her works do not reflect any overt treatment of Jewish themes, several critics have recently approached her writing as revealing a Jewish sensibility in her style and creative process (Vieira; Wengrover; Schiminovich). Likewise is the case of the controversial Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-72) (Goldberg). Writers like Marjorie Agosín (1955) from Chile, Teresa Porzecanski (1945) from Uruguay, Alicia Steimberg (1933), Silvia Plager (1942), and Cecilia Absatz (1943) from Argentina, Sabina Berman, Margo Glantz (1930), Esther Seligson (1941), Angelina Muñiz-Huberman and Sara Levi Calderón (1942) from Mexico contribute to the making of a Jewish feminist discourse in Latin American literature as they write against patriarchal tradition while affirming a strong Jewish identity.

While the thematics of Jewishness continue to dominate Jewish writing in Latin America, there is an increasing number of authors who are beginning to surpass theme to concentrate on Judaic substance. Put differently, in some instances their writing represents an evolutionary change described by Irving Howe as a "transition from Jewishness as experience to Jewishness as essence" (70); that is, texts that contain Jewish metaphysical content, Kabbalism, a reliance on Hebraic hermeneutics, an emphasis on textual interpretation, Midrashic commentary, Talmudic exegesis, and the power of the written letter and word. This does not mean that writers replicate these styles of writing, but that their literature draws on and is informed by these traditionally Jewish modes of scriptural production and thought. This type of writing, represented by authors like Mario Satz (1944), and Marcos Ricardo Barnatán (1946) adds a new dimension to Latin American Jewish literature.

While Jewish authors have made significant contributions to Latin American literature, they continue to remain on the margins of what is considered to be the canon. Most are not widely read, even within their own countries. The few who have gained international recognition—Clarice Lispector, Moacyr Scliar, Humberto Costantini (1924-87), Isaac Goldemberg (1945) to name a few—represent but a small fraction of the hundreds of authors who have joined voices to produce the socioliterary manifestation of Latin American Jewish iden-

tity. When one peruses the many dictionaries, encyclopedias, histories, anthologies, and bibliographies of Latin American literature, one of the most striking features common to them all is the resounding echo of absence created by the underrepresentation of Jewish authors. Their voices speak to us from the margins and challenge us to read Latin America from their alter/native perspective.

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ABSATZ, CECILIA (Argentina; 1943)

Cecilia Absatz was born and raised in Buenos Aires, where she continues to reside. She studied philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires and soon after initiated a successful career in advertising, publishing, and journalism beginning in the mid-1960s. Absatz worked as an editor for and eventually became director of the magazine *Status*, a *Playboy*-style publication for men. She also has worked for a variety of other magazines and newspapers (*Claudia*, *Vosotras*, *Somos*, *La Nación*) in the capacity of editor or columnist. In addition, Absatz has written several television film scripts and she is a professional translator.

As an author, Absatz maintains a low profile within Argentine literary circles. In interviews, she has expressed a certain degree of reluctance toward literary success, or what is perceived as such, stating that she views success as a "risk" (Lóizaga 10). More directly she contends, "The worst thing that can happen to a writer or a literary generation is to be successful. When I see that all published books are systematically around six hundred pages long, I feel distrust because I can see business looming behind it" (Flori, "Cecilia Absatz" 206). Clearly then, as an author Absatz does not engage in writing as a commercial venture. Instead, she describes writing in very personal terms as a survival technique: "Writing is my salvation. I'm a marginal being and I don't belong to any type of structure, so when I feel the world is collapsing around me, the only thing that can save me is to sit down and write" (Flori, "Cecilia Absatz" 208).

Absatz's first published book, *Feiguele y otras mujeres* (Feiguele and Other Women; 1976), contains a novella "Feiguele" and six short stories, which all revolve around the other women mentioned in the title. The thematic common denominator contained in all the stories of this collection is the characters' efforts to forge a space for female identity within (masculine) Argentine society. *Feiguele* was banned in Argentina by the military government just three months after its publication. The rationale given was that it was immoral in content, but Absatz attributes its proscription to the military's persecution of the publishing house (Ediciones de la Flor), not as a direct threat to herself (Flori, "Cecilia Absatz" 205). She did not leave the country during the years of the dictatorship (1976-83), as did many other writers and intellectuals. While she continued to write throughout this period, her next book was not published until 1982, when the grip of the military regime was already beginning to loosen.

"Feiguele," the novella that opens the book, is the story of a young girl growing up in Buenos Aires within a middle-class family of Polish-Jewish immigrants. It is narrated in the first person by the young Feiguele, who recounts approximately one year in her life. To a certain extent, the text is autobiographical. One finds episodes in the book that correlate directly to revelations about her

own family that Absatz has disclosed in interviews. For instance, Feiguele states that her father never spoke Spanish, only Yiddish, even after having lived in Argentina for forty years (39). Similarly, Absatz states that her own father never spoke Spanish at home, even though he knew how (Flori, "Cecilia Absatz" 210). From this and other examples one may draw the conclusion that the story draws heavily upon the author's own experience, even though it is not a story about her own life. The tone of the story is established in the opening lines, which read, "Me llamo Feiguele y soy muy gorda. Tengo catorce años, y aunque ustedes se rían, conozco bastante del dolor del mundo" (My name is Feiguele and I am very fat. I'm fourteen years old, and although you may laugh, I know plenty about the pain of the world [7]). Feiguele, like many teenagers, is consumed with conflicting emotions, angry, and very insecure. She is self-conscious about her weight, her appearance and her Jewishness. She views her father's stubborn adherence to Yiddishkeit (his newspapers, radio shows, and insistence on speaking only Yiddish) as an anachronism, which she finds both annoying and endearing. Feiguele's name sets her apart, labels her as different. She is constantly subjected to odd looks and even laughter when she is introduced, and she must repeatedly pronounce and/or spell out her foreign-sounding name for others. Absatz endows her character with an acerbic wit and a knack for sarcasm that she wields with great expertise. Feiguele turns the ostracism and rejection of her peers into a means of independence. Most significantly, she discovers—as her friends do not—a sense of empowerment that comes from surviving on one's own, rather than becoming dependent on male companionship. Her rejection of the ideals that men (or adolescent boys) place on women (or adolescent girls) frees her to pursue her own interests. Nevertheless, this does not prevent Feiguele from feeling the emotional pain brought on by her so-called friends' nonacceptance of her.

The other stories in the book portray equally strong female characters. In contrast to Feiguele, though, the "other women" in the subsequent stories are more mature. As adult women, they are in search of success in their professional lives and happiness in their private lives, which at times prove to be incompatible aspirations. Absatz's characters seldom achieve the ideal situation, but it is the struggle or the search as a means that is more important than the end. The stories are feminocentric in nature; they spring from the very core of female identity. The dynamics of the male-female relationship are central to these urban tales of women who find themselves at pivotal moments in their lives. Furthermore, the stories take on an erotic dimension afforded by the often sexually aggressive behavior of the protagonists (and herein lies the so-called immorality for which the book was censored). These metropolitan heroines, in the course of their daily

lives, challenge the obstacles placed before them by a patriarchal, machista, society. Through the stories, Absatz speaks out against the victimization and stereotyping of women, and the constraints placed on them by the institution of marriage. In texts following *Feiguele*, such as the short story "El descubrimiento de Barracas" (The Discovery of Barracas; 1984 [published in two different anthologies of Argentine erotic literature]), Absatz continues to make use of eroticism as a means of female empowerment and liberation.

Although her characters tend to be Jewish, specifically Jewish themes are not the focal point of Absatz's writing. Rather, her stories and characters can be seen as representative of the degree to which Argentine Jews have assimilated into the dominant culture, to the point of being only nominally Jewish. Her short story "Rosenberg" published in *Buenos Aires: una antología de nueva ficción argentina* (Buenos Aires: An Anthology of New Argentine Fiction; 1992), exemplifies this tendency. It is the uneventful story of a Buenos Aires journalist by the name of Rosenberg who dreams of more exotic places than the dreary atmosphere of his office. His boss sends him on an assignment—authorizing his full access to the expense account—to gather important, and somewhat secret information about the visit of an American dignitary. He easily obtains the information with one phone call, but the story ends with him boarding a plane to Bogotá for a vacation at the expense of his employer. There is nothing specifically Jewish about the story, save the protagonist's name. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the extent to which Argentine Jews have come to form part of the middle class, with all the drudgery that such an inclusion entails: a dead-end job, a failed marriage, a drab existence. The text is unique to Absatz's literary corpus in that the protagonist is a man. The author quite effectively portrays a genuine (as opposed to satiric) male perspective as Rosenberg relates to the reader—of whom he is very aware—the events that led up to his "free" vacation.

The novel *Té con canela* (Cinnamon Tea; 1982) is Absatz's second book. It received favorable reviews, although it was largely misunderstood by the critics and the public alike, mostly because it does not conform to the traditional parameters of novelistic discourse. It is composed of a series of disjointed narrative fragments and the author calls the book a "tribute to television" (Flori, "Cecilia Absatz" 211). The novel is structured around the interior ruminations of the protagonist who, in the midst of an emotional crisis, locks herself up in her apartment over a long holiday weekend to reevaluate her life. *Té con canela* is particularly suited to demonstrating, within the artistic space of literature, the process of self-identification that women undertake. The protagonist embarks on an interior journey of self-discovery in which she constructs an identity based on her qualities as individual, discarding the labels that society has placed on her as

a woman. The novel also contains the characteristic sardonic humor and eroticism that inform Absatz's writing.

The novel *Los años pares* (The Even-Numbered Years) was published in 1985. In terms of style, it is much more conventional than *Té con canela* in that it follows a traditional plot line. There is an undercurrent of intrigue that links the text to the narrative genre of detective fiction and that keeps the story flowing. The novel is circular in structure, beginning in 1980, then moving to 1976, 1978, and finally back to 1980. These dates situate the novel during the period of the most virulent oppression of the military dictatorship, which serves as the backdrop for the novel. The narration begins with the protagonist, Clara, an Argentine Jew, having difficulties as she tries to renew her national identity card; an act that from the beginning establishes the issue of identity as central to the text. Through a series of events Clara (whose last name significantly is Auslender, German for "foreigner") meets Eric, who is from Holland, and a relationship ensues. Clara is confronted with several different issues of identity. In order to resolve the question of her identity card she must travel to the interior of the country. Once surrounded by the largely indigenous and creole population of the interior of the country, she is compelled to come to terms with her own European ancestry. The larger issue for Clara, however, is that of her identity as a woman, and her independence. This is the theme that has most attracted critics to the novel, and the way in which Absatz so eloquently presents the topic makes the text especially accommodating to feminist theoretical models (Flori; Gimbernat González). Notwithstanding the fact that all of Absatz's works readily lend themselves to a feminist reading, the author herself denies writing as a feminist. She has rather forthrightly stated that "El feminismo es como la política, no tiene nada que ver con la literatura" (Feminism is like politics, it has nothing to do with literature [Lóizaga 15]).

Absatz's latest novel, *¿Dónde estás amor de mi vida, que no te puedo encontrar?* (Where Are You Love of My Life, that I Cannot Find You?; 1995), is based on the television miniseries she scripted by the same title. The miniseries was directed by the well-known Argentine filmmaker Juan José Jusid, who had also made the feature film version in 1992. The story revolves around the production of a radio program from which the novel takes its title. The original idea was Jusid's, as Absatz makes clear on the title page with the clarifying statement, "Sobre una idea de Juan José Jusid" (Based on the idea of Juan José Jusid). Octavio Luz, a famous radio personality, and Liliana Milman, a psychoanalyst, host a call-in radio show that caters to the lonely and lovelorn inhabitants of the Buenos Aires metropolis. In contrast to the author's previous works, *¿Dónde estás amor de mi vida?* is written with a decidedly less somber outlook. Com-

posed some thirteen years after the end of the military dictatorship, the novel is not charged with references to political violence and repression nor is it formulated around narrative postulations of identity formation. It narrates the foibles, perserverance and ingenuity of human nature through the optic of a wide gamut of characters representative of different generations and social classes. This fictional microcosm provides a contemporary view of daily life in Buenos Aires as it focuses on personal relationships that are both platonic and amorous. Lonely callers reach out to the program in search of help in finding if not a soulmate at least a companion. The novel advances by narrating the circumstances of several love stories, both failed and successful, which tend to be overdetermined by romantic clichés that make an appeal for soap-opera passion. Nevertheless, trite sentimental formulas, or parodies of them, are superseded by the down-to-earth depiction of the characters as real and feeling individuals who confront each day in search of meaningful emotional contact. The separate episodes are connectd by the core story of the relationship between the two radio hosts themsleves, which evolves from friendship to the awakening of requited romantic love. Absatz's characteristic humor and irony fill the pages of this entertaining text that engages the attention of the reader from the onset. The women in the novel continue to be the type of strong, independent individuals found in the previous texts.

Absatz's other recent work is not fiction, but a collection of essays titled *Mujeres peligrosas: la pasión según el teleteatro* (Dangerous Women: Passion According to the Soap Operas; 1995). It consists of a series of essays in which the author reflects on Argentine popular culture—more specifically, how it is influenced by United States popular culture—, the roles of women, feminist issues, and passion as it is played out on television and in literature. Absatz not only discusses and compares Argentine, Mexican, Brazilian, and American soap operas, but she also examines contemporary American situation comedies such as *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne*, both very popular in Argentina, in her analysis of the ever-changing public roles and images of women in/on television. Likewise, she draws upon a wide range of literary texts from Latin America, Europe and the United States in order to delineate and define a variety of women's issues. What is most amazing about *Mujeres peligrosas* is the way in which Absatz is able to coordinate such a diverse assortment of popular culture artifacts (a small sampling includes the rock lyrics of Pink Floyd, *The Simpsons*, the fiction of Stephen King, *Apocalypse Now*, Susan Faludi's *Backlash* [1991], Marta Lynch's novels, Verónica Castro, and *Simplemente María)* in order to compose a coherent, entertaining, and fascinating analysis of the situation and image of contemporary women.

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Darrell B. Lockhart

AGOSÍN, MARJORIE (Chile; 1955)

Spanning poetry, fiction, literary criticism, and the editing of anthologies, the work of Marjorie Agosín engages concerns representative of many Latin American Jewish women writers today. Her recurring themes include the experiences of love and loss, the struggle for human rights, and the attempt to represent feminine experience from within. Her poetry and prose poetry reveals a remarkable range, veering from satires on the hypocrisies of social identity to lyrical exploration of the elaborate codes of intimate relationships, with forays into a variety of rich, sensual, descriptive topics: the experience of the body, the sea, the countryside. Agosín's self-identification as a Chilean and a Jew have been central aspects shaping the more recent (post 1988) publications in fiction and nonfiction which have added to the already considerable reputation that she enjoyed as a poet. From at least the mid-1980s Marjorie Agosín has emerged as one of the leading voices of Latin American feminism in the United States.

Born of Chilean parents in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1955, Marjorie Agosín was raised in Chile. Her maternal grandfather was born and raised in Vienna, which he had left "for the love of a cabaret dancer," according to Agosín, in the mid-1920s. His having escaped Europe prior to the rise of Nazism enabled him to help subsequent refugees establish themselves in Chile. Agosín's other grandparents and greatgrandparents, also from Vienna and Odessa, similarly belonged to that minority within a minority, of German-speaking European and Eastern European Jews, whose children were Chilean citizens. Because Agosín attended Santiago's remarkable Insituto Hebreo for her primary as well as secondary schooling she grew up speaking both Hebrew and Spanish. Her parents lived in

one of Santiago's older neighborhoods, Nuñoa, close to sites such as the Carabineros school, the Pedagogical Institute, and the commercial district of Irrarrázabal Street. For large portions of every summer she went with her family to live by the rocky shore south of Valparaíso and Pablo Neruda's (1904-73) Isla Negra, and marine imagery consequently pervades Agosín's poetry and prose. When Agosín was in her teens, rumors of an impending coup led her immediate family (her father was a doctor and biochemist) to move to the United States in what they expected to be a fairly short-term arrangement. Once the seriousness of the 1973 military takeover became evident, her family settled in the state of Georgia, where Agosín studied philosophy as an undergraduate. She went on to take a Ph.D. in literature from Indiana University: her doctoral dissertation concentrated on the work of Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal (1910-80). Agosín has been teaching in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Wellesley College for the past fifteen years, where she is currently an associate professor. Married, with two children, Agosín is a US citizen, but she spends part of every year with members of her family in Chile.

Agosín's earliest publications were in poetry: *Conchalí* (1980) is a book of poems named for the old Jewish cemetery in Santiago, where some of Agosín's uncles are buried. *Brujas y algo más/Witches and Other Things* (1984) enjoyed good sales and critical success: this interesting collection of poems indicates Agosín's playfulness, multi-levelled use of language, and the interest in esoteric knowledge which is a persistent theme for Chilean women writers, from early twentieth-century theosophists, up through the poet and Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), to the popular novelist Isabel Allende (1942).

As a poet one of Agosín's commitments is to the expression of love, be it erotic or filial. Her poetry details what she calls the "gestures" of love; irony and self-mockery often co-exist with the strongest nostalgia. Much of her poetry, criticism, and prose poetry takes human rights as its primary concern, but this too is founded in what could be termed a vatic vocation. The compulsion to bear witness to suffering comes first, almost involuntarily, its form and shape fast on the heels of the urge to speak and write.

A number of Agosín's books are organized around recounting women's resistance to the tyranny of the military dictatorships ruling Argentina and Chile in the 1970s and the 1980s. She has described the ordeal of Renée Epelbaum, a central figure in the Argentine Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo movement, with whom Agosín lived for several months (see *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* [1989]). After having described in non-fiction prose the Mothers' attempts to obtain information about their children who were "disappeared" during the so-called Dirty War conducted by the Argentine military against its own people,

Agosín went on to write poetry based on the experience of the Mothers, in the book *Circles of Madness* (1992). Still another book, *Scraps of Life* (1987), details the work of the Chilean *arpilleristas*, women who with their needles described the day-to-day lives of the families of persons who had been disappeared or held as political prisoners. As with other Chilean writers, politics has had a direct and immediate impact on Agosín's subject matter. At a time when the military dictatorships governing the writer's native Chile as well as neighboring Argentina made it difficult for many writers to survive, Agosín was able to take advantage of her freedom, as an American citizen, to return to Argentina and Chile and to chronicle the efforts of the opposition. She offers invaluable documentary commentaries on the lives of women who suddenly found themselves projected into the political realms, by virtue of disappearances and murders of their husbands and children.

Feminism is key to Agosín's continuing, compassionate articulation of the lives of the women who are in one way or another outsiders. Much of Agosín's work focuses on the perspectives of individuals whose every existence challenges and points up the limitations which "good society" imposes. Exiles, recluses, and seeming madwomen are prominent in her catalogue of heros. These may be figures such as Anne Frank (1929-44), whose writings are a touchstone in Agosín's work, appearing in *Zones of Pain/Las zonas del dolor* (1988), as well as in her most recent collection, *Sagrada memoria: reminiscencias de una niña judía en Chile* (*A Cross and a Star: Memoirs of a Jewish Girl in Chile*; 1994). This latter book, told from the perspective of the writer's mother, is a fascinating historical document, beginning in family history but going far beyond that, including memories of the various Indian and mixed-blood women who worked in her parents' and grandparents' houses. It includes as well harrowing accounts of the popularity of Nazism among the German enclaves of Southern Chile, and the day-to-day experiences of the children of the four Jewish families of Osorno, Chile, who on being excluded from the Catholic and German schools, attended the local schools with the Indians.

Much of Agosín's work approximates the genre of testimonial literature, popular throughout the eighties, yet what is most original in her writing emerges from her differences from this form. A problematic of testimonial literature is the sense that a privileged speaker has appropriated another person's otherwise silent voice to her own, so that instead of "giving voice" to those who suffer, the writer/editor actually confirms the muteness of the person who is being "spoken for." Agosín, on the other hand, never represents herself as "speaking for" another. Rather, she engages in what could be termed a duet, which conjoins her own awareness of suffering with another's. What emerges is less an artificially con-

structed unified single voice, than a litany of voices that includes the dead and the living, the poet and the mourners, Jews, Gentiles, Indians, and the children of Nazis, to name just a few. This technique is especially interesting in Agosín's most recent work *La felicidad* (*Happiness*; 1991) and *Sagrada memoria*, in which the history of Latin American Jews is more deliberately and openly engaged. She has thus moved beyond the lamentation for the missing, to celebrate the victorious men and women of the past, of Chile's tiny minority of Jews (some 20,000 in 14 million) who survived, often alongside and within the atmosphere that was during the Second World War strongly pro-German. If there is anyone whose language is capable of expressing the tremendous daily paradox involved when those whose parents escaped the Holocaust find that their neighbors are followers of Adolf Hitler, Augusto Pinochet, or Jorge R. Videla, it is Marjorie Agosín.

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Elizabeth Rosa Horan

AGUINIS, MARCOS (Argentina; 1935)

A versatile man accomplished in music and medicine as well as literature, Marcos Aguinis has written everything from novels and short stories to essays on art, psychology, sociology, and literary criticism. He has also lectured on these various topics in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Córdoba, and Mendoza in Argentina; Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, and Málaga in Spain, and Frankfurt and Bonn in Germany. A concert class pianist, a sometime composer, and eventually a medical doctor, psychoanalyst, and neurosurgeon by training, Aguinis, was born in Córdoba, Argentina where he grew up, excelling in both music and art during his adolescent years. At the National University in Córdoba, however, drawn to medicine because of its humanistic value, he elected to study medicine and graduated in 1958 with degrees in Medicine and Surgery. Aguinis's intense interest in the ancient physician and humanist Maimónides led him to research and write *Maimónides, un sabio avanzado* (Maimónides, a Prescient Scholar; 1963) and *Maimónides, sacerdote de los oprimidos* (Maimónides, Priest of the Oppressed; 1963), well received biographical studies about the ancient scholar whom he considered an enduring model of humanity and inspiration for scientists and scholars.

Interested in psychiatry but appalled at the way patients suffering mental illnesses were treated, Aguinis turned to the newer studies of neurology and neurosurgery because they seemed to offer possible solutions to some mental problems. A scholarship to study neurology at the school of medicine in Buenos Aires was followed by additional scholarships for advanced training in France and Germany. In Paris, the rigors of his training eventually diverted him from his cherished musical ambitions, although not from his love of writing.

Seeing the many refugees in Germany, the young student became interested in Europe's refugee population and collected information and articles about them. From this concern for refugees grew a desire to understand Arab-Israeli differences which eventually led him to write *Los refugiados* (The Refugees; 1969), a curious novel in which he, a Jewish author, narrates the story of a Palestinian protagonist in first person. Because both Jewish and Arab sources which Aguinis researched offered nothing more than propaganda to support their views, the author sought more substantive understanding. "To find valid arguments" he told one interviewer, "I tried to put myself on the Palestinian's side, to show his emotion, his loyalty and the suffering that surely saddened his days" (Paley Francescato, "Entrevista" 121). His thoroughness as a researcher led Aguinis to study not only historical works but even the Koran to better understand and interpret the mental framework and attitudes of his characters. In preparation for several years because it encountered numerous publication delays the novel appeared shortly after the Six Days War and was met with mixed reviews. Some considered it antisemitic, some, pro-Arab and many, nonplussed, simply refused to promote it. Aguinis's justification for his approach was, quite forthrightly, that he had striven to clarify the arguments of both sides in a way that had not been done heretofore.

Refugiados is the story of a Palestinian refugee interning in neurosurgery in Germany, who meets and falls in love with Miriam, a young Jewish woman, when he operates on and saves the life of her adopted father injured in an automobile accident. Miriam, like him, a medical scholarship student, happens to be also a survivor of Auschwitz. She understands his sense of isolation and alienation and their ensuing love enables them to understand and bridge the differences separating them. Her assassination at the hands of a Nazi, who has assumed a false identity in Freiberg and fears that she may recognize and expose him brings an element of suspense and intrigue to the novel. It also brings the Palestinian protagonist to a realization of the destructive effects of hate. Although based upon some implausible coincidences, the novel effectively presents one of Aguinis's basic concerns—the problem of individual and group identity—and succeeds in conveying his intrinsic faith that humanity supersedes nationalism and that love and understanding can overcome prejudice and hate.

On his return to Argentina after this training, the young doctor established a thriving neurosurgical practice, married, had several children, and continued to write. His persistent humanistic interests, however, led him to continue seeking to penetrate the human mind through means other than analysis or surgery. Some years later, despite the responsibilities of marriage and four children, Aguinis decided to leave his practice to study psychoanalysis in the belief that

it would synthesize his varied interests and enhance his insights as an author. This real life interest in understanding the human psyche is consistently reflected in Aguinis's writing.

Both his scientific background and natural inclination seem to have made Marcos Aguinis an avid and exact researcher, who writes with equal authenticity of his Catholic characters in *La cruz invertida* (The Inverted Cross; 1970 [a novel which earned him Spain's prestigious Premio Planeta award the same year]) as he had about his Palestinian protagonist previously. In *La cruz*, the story of an idealistic young priest turned activist by his empathy for a group of student revolutionaries, Aguinis graphically depicts the repressive measures used by both the church and an indeterminate Latin American government against the liberal cleric and his student flock. The novel struck a resounding chord in Spain, Argentina and other countries where church and state authority had historically oppressed ordinary people seeking to liberate themselves from pervasive moral and political control. The thoroughness of Aguinis's research on the structure and beliefs of the Catholic Church and his insightful observations of Argentina's predominantly catholic culture brought an authenticity to the novel that caused many critics to believe it was written by either a fallen-away priest or seminarian, or a disillusioned convert to Catholicism.

In *Cantata de los diablos* (Devils' Cantata; 1972), Aguinis describes with insight and mordant humor the frustrations besetting a young writer from Leobuco, an insignificant town of the interior, when he tries to have his historical novel about the town published in the capital. He depicts the town fathers as derided, ridiculed and rebuked for their pretentiousness in financing the book, shows how the investigation of a funding scam led to arrests of some of the town's leading citizens and the young author's falling out with his father which finally caused him to leave home.

Aguinis's intimate knowledge of abnormal psychology and the world of medicine lends almost frightful authenticity to his novel *La conspiración de los idiotas* (A Conspiracy of Idiots; 1979) as the author puts himself inside the person of Natalio Comte, a paranoid salesman for a pharmaceutical company. At first the protagonist seems normal as he denounces bad medical practice and the abuses of medication. It is only as the novel progresses and Comte accuses his long-suffering wife of infidelity with a doctor friend and sees plots in every innocent word or gesture that the reader gradually becomes aware of the existence and extent of the protagonist's psychotic paranoia. Through a tortuous web of mental processes and theories, Comte gradually arrives at the conclusion that the *homúnculos* (dwarfs, midgets, mongoloids and other mentally retarded persons) have formed a world wide conspiracy to gain control. He believes that they

talk a secret language using signs, sounds, gestures, etc. not because they are mentally retarded but because they don't want to be understood by non-members of their conspiracy. With repugnantly warped pseudo-lucidity and deviously grotesque persistence Comte first sets about forming a friendship with a small retarded boy, and then, later to seduce a retarded twenty-year-old girl to "learn their secrets." In the last chapter, the demented protagonist coldly plans to blow up part of the colony for retarded children and people. Aguinis's protagonist, sly, conniving, meticulous, apparently logical, is successfully presented from *within.* Aguinis manages to guide the reader inside the mind of his protagonist, a creation he admits inspired repugnance even in him, its author (Paley Francescato, "Entrevista" 129). Describing this work in an interview, Aguinis explained that he had written it partly as a parable of the illogical world that Argentina had become under Perón and the military, attempting to show that, like his protagonist, he too had lived in an climate of paranoid fear of persecution (Paley Francescato, "Entrevista" 130).

Less successful as a novel was *El combate perpetuo* (Perpetual Combat; 1981 [a reedition of *Brown*; 1977]), a somewhat lifeless historical novel or biography of Admiral Guillermo Brown, father of the Argentine navy, written on commission, for the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Brown's birth. Possibly because he felt compelled by history and tradition to treat Brown as a hero, Aguinis never manages to really "get inside" this character but merely describes him moving stiffly through life and a series of essentially unappreciated, heroic deeds. Carefully researched and succinctly narrated, the novel describes the sharp vicissitudes that affected the subject's life and career, but lacks dialogue, feeling, and passion. The General's personality is not sufficiently developed for him to emerge as a person. While Brown's real life abounded in conflict (war, battle, storms, disease, treachery, love, abandonment, honor and despair) all this is presented in a curiously impersonal, factual and unemotional narrative manner. Perhaps because the work was based on a historical character and historical fact and rather than emanating from the writer's own imagination, the author felt compelled to describe the life he had researched rather than to create (or recreate) the personality who had lived that life.

In *Profanación del amor* (Profanation of Love; 1982), Aguinis's protagonist, Felipe, is an ordinary forty-something individual for whom after a lifetime of complaint, socially acceptable behavior yields to the liberating temptations aroused by his emotional and physical desire for Tesi, his best friend's wife. Amusing at first, the author's description of Felipe's forced renunciation of Tesi subtly turns to criticism of a social structure that condemns him to a life entirely circumscribed by the expectations of others. The author almost clinically chroni-

cles Felipe's progress from initial temptation to subsequent rationalizations, guilt, anxiety, self-deception and cowardice. Felipe's Tía (Aunt) Mercedes embodies all the social and religious arguments opposing his attempt to disregard accepted mores as she brings to bear all the arms of religion and superstition to weigh upon him. Felipe's ultimate ignoble renunciation of Tesi and his resignation to the inevitable grayness of his prescribed life style are summed up in his final words: "Me siento condenado. Peor: condenado y resignado a la condena" (I feel condemned. Worse: condemned and resigned to the condemnation [324]).

Although Aguinis professed to believe that Jewish authors express themselves best when **not** explicitly writing of Jewish themes, his most recent novel, *La gesta del marrano* (Acts of a Jew; 1993), clearly shows the author's growing preoccupation with his Jewish history and heritage. A well researched historical novel, *Gesta* narrates the saga of two *marranos* (a derogatory term literally meaning "pig," but commonly used in Spanish as a synonym for "Jew") a father and son, each struggling to live according to his conscience in a world dominated by the fears and suspicions of the omnipresent and all-powerful Inquisition. Aguinis shows how historical protagonist, Francisco Maldonado da Silva, a gentle, scholarly, noble-minded sixteenth-century Portuguese Jewish physician inexorably falls into the clutches of the Inquisition despite fleeing Portugal for Brazil and then Peru. He intertwines Francisco's story with that of the work's true protagonist, Francisco's son, Diego Nuñez da Silva who defies the Inquisition by making the "gesta" or gesture of the title, a defiant acknowledgement of his Jewishness, a suicidal affirmation of his right to freedom of conscience.

While Aguinis at times overdoes his depiction of the venality, avarice, concupiscence and fanaticism of some of the religious or Inquisition characters, the over-all thoroughness of his research and understanding of both the Christian and Jewish perspectives and his evidently deep feeling for his subject results in a powerful portrayal of the indomitable human spirit. The substantive theological arguments, both Catholic and Jewish, which Aguinis develops as both Diego and selected church fathers argue their opposing causes, seem to reflect the author's own search for universal truths, as he weighs arguments for and against the beliefs and sophistries of both sides.

In addition to his novels, Aguinis has published several books of essays. *Carta esperanzada a un general* (Hopeful Letter to a General; 1983) is a book length essay. Rather than a series of letters, however, it is more of a series of observations, commentaries and personal ruminations addressed to the general, in which the author analyzes and dissects traditional military mentality up to the present day, both in a general, historical mode, and also as it has specifically affected Argentina. He observes, thoughtfully, almost gently "General, . . . usted

es un parásito. . . no es la fuerza, sino la habilidad para habernos mantenido en el engaño durante centurias, habernos inducido a metabolizar la ficción de su importancia. Pero. . . no lo culpo de esta mentira. No la inventó usted, sino que la inventamos entre nosotros. . . en nuestro desamparo, inventamos a los militares para calmar el miedo" (General. . . you are a parasite. . . it's not your power, but your ability to have continued to deceive us over the centuries, to have induced us to have metabolized the fiction of your importance. But. . . I don't blame you for this lie. You didn't invent it, but we who invented it among ourselves. . . in our forsakenness we invited the military to calm our fears [14]). He notes that the rigorous education and authoritarian training of the military preclude humor, introspection, creativity, and independence in order to inculcate such blind obedience, conformity, rigidity, and loyalty to the military clan and superiors that any observation or admission of defects are precluded. He comments that "tres profesiones mantienen una relación particularmente intensa con la muerte: . . . el médico la combate, el sacerdote la endulza, y el militar la produce" (three professions maintain a particularly intense relationship with death: . . . the doctor fights it, the priest sweetens it, and the military man produces it [139]). Comparing the military man's attachment to the service with a child's attachment to its mother, Aguinis observes that it is equally absurd to expect either dependent to criticize what nurtures it (158) and finally concludes that violence is as necessary as oxygen to perpetuate the military for "sin violencia en el mundo, no habría militares" (without violence in the world, there would be no military [127]).

El valor de escribir (The Courage to Write; 1985) is a collection of some of Aguinis's published and unpublished essays in which the author discusses a variety of topics indicative of his wide-ranging interests. Some essays discuss the importance of words to articulate man's relation with the universe, the power of written words to preserve and document these concepts or the "valor de escribir" sometimes needed to overcome fear, caution, and self-interest to publish one's written words. One essay comments on the concept of so-called best sellers noting that they are produced as much by skillful marketing as by public popularity and notes that quantity should not be equated with quality. Others discuss the work of contemporary writers like Bernardo Verbitsky (1907-79) and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) or the works of a variety of classical and contemporary artists and musicians noting that genius and madness are frequently associated. Some essays may have been speeches presented to special groups (such as his fellow neurosurgeons), others deal with myths by or about Jews or Jewish traditions. He writes ironically of the "book of the year" (The National Constitution); describes the private professor-run "underground universities" that maintained education despite the official closure of established universities;

decries the ease with which public opinion can be manipulated and reminds the reader that it is not enough to be free to stop being a slave, one must begin to speak out. Finally, Aguinis expresses a note of hope: repression is giving way in Argentina, order is being restored, democracy, though imperfect, is taking hold and must be fostered dynamically, without violence, the country must learn to tolerate differences of opinion.

In *Un país de novela* (A Land of Fiction; 1988) Aguinis provides an excellent review of Argentine history from indigenous, precolonial times to the present along with insightful observations into the Argentine character from a clearly personal but insightful point of view. The melancholy fatalism and the ironic humor expressed in the tangos; the concept of "quien no es vivo es zonzo" (whoever is not clever is a dunce) resulting in a systematic violation of law; the chaotic political swings from democracy to military dictatorships; the significance of the valiant, loyal, independent gaucho, Martín Fierro, hero of the famous literary work by the same name that most Argentines recognize as representative of their collective identity—all are treated in this collection of essays. Aguinis concludes that the Argentina people carry in their hearts has, in fact, ceased to exist. It has been replaced by a new reality which he urges his readers to accept as better than their long history of oppressive political hypocrisy. Ever the optimist, Aguinis claims that Argentines now understand the causes of their crises. By correcting corruption, they are learning to resolve rather then merely confront their country's problems; they are beginning to see small successes and to be more truly free.

A fourth volume of essays, *Elogio de la culpa* (In Praise of Guilt; 1993), is an innovative text which follows the style of Erasmus's (1466-1536) *The Praise of Folly* (1509). Aguinis attempts to literally unveil the hidden meanings of guilt, following the metaphor of Salomé's Dance of the Seven Veils.

Beside these novels and essays, Aguinis also has published three volumes of short stories of uneven length and quality ranging from five to twenty pages. Although his stories are interesting and varied, they are sometimes stilted, forced, or obscure, as if the author is trying too hard to be as cerebral as Borges or is striving too hard for a surprise ending. Aguinis's tales often reflect the author's own interests in medicine, psychology, psychoanalysis, or music. *Importancia por contacto* (Importance by Contact; 1983), a book of seven short stories could well be subtitled "Variations on the Theme of Jonas." Each is preceded by a brief but appropriate quotation from the Book of Jonas hinting at the story line. All of the stories in this collection are written in a vigorous, lively style that conveys an element of suspense and makes the reader think. Their topics range from the humorous to the discomfiting, from psychological investigation to social

criticism. We read of the family hounded out of their apartment by the alarmed neighborhood consortium after they had received a threatening anonymous letter; the grave digger who helps business along with a bit of cyanide; the generous, but insecure individual who aspires to impress others with the importance of his contacts; the two friends who having parted ways after an early commitment to Zionism—one going to a kibbutz, the other into a successful business career—meet after many years, only to upbraid each other; the resentful partner of an architectural firm who plots the destruction of his erstwhile partners or the bright idealistic young aide to the director of a civic organization who quits, overwhelmed with disillusionment by the vacuous self-serving of the organization, its members and directors.

A second collection of short stories, published as *Operativo siesta* (Working Siesta; 1978), is noteworthy for the variety of its tales, each qualified by a parenthetical description following its title: "oddities," "romance," "nightmare," "mischief," "elegy," etc. Highly original, the stories vary from humorous or pathetic to ironic and moralistic as they describe an impotent young husband erroneously accused of attempting to cover up an incestuous relationship with his well-meaning mother-in-law when her supposed corpse surprises thieves by emerging from a catatonic state; a mischievous child who places his infant brother in a path of oncoming traffic, convinced that the magic shoe on which he rested the baby will safely waft him aloft at the onslaught of traffic; the reunion of three brothers whose dreams of glory and world travel have gone awry; the priest who announces the miracle of finding a small casketful of gold coins and gems beneath the Virgin's alter, and refuses to believe they have been stolen from the bedroom of the town's exemplary young widow; the blue-eyed mistress who arrives unannounced at the home of her fifty-year-old lover pretending to be his visiting cousin from Mexico and is dearly bought off—only to have the real cousin destroy the charade; the young couple whose gynecologist only pretends to perform three abortions in three months because his young client is so determined not to have children; the uncomprehending Jewish child who believed that local officials were planning to honor his father when in fact they had come to burn him at the stake; the aspiring writer whose supportive wife dies after reading the letter announcing that his third book of poems has been accepted for publication or the exacting piano teacher whose stellar student, obsessed with her drive for perfection, immolates herself on the day of her debut.

The stories from these two books along with two other stories that had appeared separately, "La torre de amor" (The Tower of Love) and "Sebastian" were republished in a third volume entitled *Y la rama llena de frutos* (And the Branch Full of Fruit; 1986). In "La torre" a son torches his family home after

realizing that his dying father's feverish ramblings about fertile Gods visiting his wife in the mansion's tower have revealed the questionable truth of his paternity. In "Sebastian," an autopsy reveals the intriguing discovery that the protagonist had seemed to be an incompetent idiot only because his senses were crossed: he had heard with his eyes and seen with his ears.

In addition to his literary production, Aguinis has published more than thirty-five scientific articles in professional journals in France, Austria, Spain and Argentina and served for ten years as editor of a medical journal *Anales de la Clínica Regional del Sud*, (Annals of the Southern Regional Clinic). In recent years he has become increasingly active in national affairs, serving first as Assistant Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs, then as Secretary from 1983 to 1987. As Secretary he created PRONDEC (Programa Nacional de Democratización de la Cultura), an altruistic program he headed until 1989 and whose history and achievements are recorded in a collection of essays entitled *Memorias de una siembra* (Recollection of a Seed; 1990) which he edited.

Aguinis has been honored not only with literary awards but also with the Annual Silver Plaque of the EFE Spanish World News Agency, (EFE signifies literally, the Spanish spelling for the letter "F" which was used here to represent three "F's": Franco, Faith and Falange.), for his contributions to Hispanic language and culture. He has been designated a Knight of Arts and Letters by France; won the National Prize in Sociology; been awarded the University Reform Award by Argentine universities and even been nominated for UNESCO's Award for Peace Education.

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Rita Gardiol

BARNATÁN, MARCOS RICARDO (Argentina; 1946)

Marcos Ricardo Barnatán was born in Buenos Aires in 1946 into a Sephardic family of Hispano-Syrian origin. In 1965, his family left Argentina and relocated in Madrid. Barnatán is prolific, with credentials in scholarly writing, poetry, and fiction. He has published editions on works as diverse as *Gilgamesh*, Manuel Mujica Láinez's (1910-84) novel *Bomarzo* (1962), and Jorge Luis Borges's (1899-1986) *Narraciones* (Narrations; 1988); the introduction to Bernard-Henri Lévy's (1948) *El diablo en la cabeza* (*Diable en tête*; 1985); and anthologies of the Beat Generation and Hispanic erotic poetry. His compilation of *Poesía erótica castellana (del siglo X a nuestros días)* (Erotic Castillian Poetry [from the 10th Century to the Present]; 1974) includes *jarchas* (i.e. Spanish poetry written in Hebrew or Arabic), the passage on "las dueñas chicas" (short women) from the *Libro de buen amor* (The Book of Good Love; 1343?) by Arcipreste de Hita (1283?-1350?), the Marqués de Santillana's (1398-1458) "Serranilla de la Finojosa" (Poem of the Good Woman from Finojosa), Santa Teresa's (1515-82) "Vivo sin vivir en mí" (I Live Without Living in Me), and San Juan de la Cruz's (1542-91) "Cántico espiritual" (Spiritual Canticle); in addition, there are selections from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1542-91), Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas (1580-1645), José Martí (1853-95), Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936), and Rubén Darío (1867-1916). Barnatán also included his own poem "Erótica," written in English. *Las metáforas de Eduardo Sanz* (Eduardo Sanz's Metaphors; 1976) is a study of that contemporary Spanish artist's work and is rich in pictures of the paintings and in quotations from such writers as Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Samuel Beckett (1906-89), and of course, Borges. *Fernando Savater contra el Todo* (Fernando Savater Against Everything; 1984) is an extended interview with the intellectual about his life as well as philosophy, literature, and theatre. *Acontecimientos que cambiaron la historia* (Events that Changed History; 1975) contains such diverse subjects as "Los mitos originarios" (Myths of Origin [Adam and Eve, Moses, Buddha]); "Estrellas y serpientes" (Stars and Serpents [Columbus, Copernicus]); "Los tiempos modernos" (Modern Times [American Independence, the French Revolution, Marx and Marxism]); and "El espejo del presente" (Mirror of the Present [October Revolution, 23 August 1944, Picasso, Surrealist Art]). *La Kábala: una mística del lenguaje* (Kabbalah: Mystical Language; 1974) gives the numerical equivalents of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and explains the relationship of the Hebrew letters to the plants and to the symbology of Tarot cards. In addition to the edition of *Narraciones*, Barnatán has written four books on Borges, whose influence is

evident throughout the literary production of his disciple. In the works of both writers, there are labyrinths; Jewish mysticism, such as Kabbalah and Zohar; erudition in the historical and mythological allusions; the creation of not only literary characters, but of bibliographies of those characters; the use of poetry in works of prose; and Argentina as subject matter.

El horóscopo de las infantas (The Princesses' Horoscope; 1988) is a collection of stories written by Barnatán between 1980-88 and derives from his reading of Borges and Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977); the title comes from a poem by José María Eguren (1874-1942), a Peruvian poet. One of the stories is "Fragmentos del diario de David Jerusalem" (Fragments of David Jerusalem's Diary), to whom Borges makes reference in his short story "Deutsches Requiem." According to Barnatán's note, Jerusalem, a poet, was killed by the Nazis in 1943 and his work is collected in a bilingual English-Yiddish version presumably published in New York in 1957 (the only reference to David Jerusalem in bibliographical archives appears under Barnatán's name). References to Nazis already appeared in the novel *El laberinto de Sión* (The Labyrinth of Zion; 1971), which he began writing twenty years before *Horóscopo.*

Barnatán's earliest writing is in poetry. He published *Acerca de los viajes* (On Travels) in 1966. Its subject matter is largely traditional—nature, the sea—but the ideas are not. "Buenos Aires tras la niebla" (Buenos Aires Behind the Mist), begins with a quotation from Borges. Nostalgia for his native city will be a theme in the recent novel, *Con la frente marchita* (With a Wrinkled Brow; 1989). His *Tres poemas fantásticos* (Three Fantastic Poems; 1967) are "Alucinación junto al Manzanares" (Hallucination by the Manzanares River), "El anáfora funesta del divino veneno" (The Ill-fated Anaphora of Divine Poison), and "Asamblea de brujas" (Gathering of Witches); and *Muerte serena* (Serene Death; 1970) contains four poems, one with a reference to labyrinths. *El oráculo invocado. Poesía (1965-1983)* (The Oracle Invoked: Poetry; 1984) combines in a single volume the poems which appeared originally in separate collections: *Los pasos perdidos* (Lost Footsteps; 1968), *El libro del talismán* (The Book of the Talisman; 1970), *Arcana mayor* (Greater Secret; 1973), and *La escritura del vidente* (The Prophet's Writing; 1979). Some of the poems in *Los pasos perdidos* are rich in Jewish content. "Visión de Canaán" (Vision of Canaan) is a meditation on the ancient cities of Israel; Jerusalem, Jericho, Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, and Masada. "Luminarias de Janucа" (Chanukah Candles) is a reflection on the Jewish diaspora. "La ofrenda de Ahína" (The Offering of Ahina) treats the offerings in the Holy Temple; and "La casa de Dios" (The House of God) describes the Morning Service with the reading from the Torah in the synagogue: each morning is a renewal of the Covenant. The poem's refrain is "nunca desamparé al

pueblo mío" (I shall never abandon my people). "Cuando el cuerpo de Israel salió disuelto en humo" (When the Body of Israel Went Up in Smoke) offers the Jewish People the assurance that there is always light for them behind the cloud of smoke. "Oración en Venecia" (Prayer in Venice) is a plea to Hashem to hear the voice of the just after the horrors of the ovens and the crematoria. The final selection, "El oráculo invocado (1979-1983)" includes a poem called "Borges." Finally, there is *Cinco poemas de David Jerusalem* (Five Poems by David Jerusalem; 1986), composed by Barnatán.

Barnatán has written four works which he calls novels. In her essay "Barnatán: joven, brillante novelista" (Barnatán: Young, Brilliant Novelist) in the collection *Yo amo a Columbo* (I Love Columbo; 1979) Elisa Lerner (1932) opines that one word describes *El laberinto de Sión*: "precocidad" (precociousness). She identifies not only "el universo borgiano" (Borges's universe), but also a Proustian influence. She sees, too, that "su condición de judío prefigura todo drama. Acaso define su precocidad" (his condition as a Jew prefigures every act. Perhaps defines his precociousness [328]). He also shows a profound sensitivity throughout *Laberinto* about Jewish history and Law as well as Germany and the Nazis. His second novel is *Gor* (1973). Barnatán reveals in *La escritura del vidente* that the title *Gor* has kabbalistic, numerical value. He uses as his point of departure the letters aleph, mem, and shin. Aleph=Germen primero y único (first and only germ); mem=Orgía fecunda y líquida (fecund and liquid orgy); shin=Renueva todo lo que existe (renews everything that exists). *Diano* (1982) is the third part of the trilogy which contains *Laberinto* and *Gor*. It is a story of love and death and is characterized by wordplay and contains no capital letters. Barnatán, like the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamumo (1864-1936), calls his characters *agonistas* (agonizers).

While his novelistic trilogy contains erudition and games that border on pretention (or *precocidad*), *Con la frente marchita* follows the format of a traditional novel. It is a semi-autobiographical work about a Jewish writer, who, after twenty years in Madrid returns to his native Buenos Aires. Once again there are many religious and literary references to Kabbalah; to labyrinths; to Borges and covertly to the latter's short story "Emma Zunz." The character in the story denies that the work is autobiographical and insists that it only tells the story of an author, whose obligation it is to write a great novel.

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Dennis A. Klein

BERMAN, SABINA (Mexico; 1954)

Sabina Berman, along with Angeles Mastretta (1949) and Laura Esquivel (1950), are part of a flowering of Mexican women writers which began in the 1960s. Many of Berman's literary predecessors and contemporaries—Margo Glantz (1930), Angelina Muñiz (1937), Esther Seligson (1941), Gloria Gervitz (1943)—are daughters of East European Jewish immigrants. Berman began her career as a film scriptwriter with *La tía Alejandra* (Aunt Alejandra; 1979) written with Delfina Careaga. In 1988 she published *Lunas* (Moons), an experimental collection of poetry which was lyrical and erotic in style. But even in her poetry Berman was striving for a tridimensional, theatrical effect. The poems of *Mariposa* (Butterfly; 1974) show a deliberate break in chronology, as they leap between realism and the fantastic in an attempt to follow the disorderly rhythm brought about by drug consumption.

Berman's major and most successful production is in the theater, where she examines Mexico's culture and folklore, as she strives to integrate experiences of the past to achieve a better understanding of the present. Propelled by the rebellious spirit of the sixties, she deconstructs both official history and national myths, providing her own original versions.

The successive changes in titles that Berman's plays have undergone over the years, also reflect significant thematic, stylistic, and structural revisions. Her initial monologue *Esta no es una obra de teatro* (This is Not a Play; 1975) became *Un actor se repara* (An Actor Corrects Himself). *Bill*, which won her the first Premio Nacional de Teatro (National Theatre Award) in 1979, changed to *Yankee. Un buen trabajador del piolet* (A Good Ice-Pick Worker; 1979) became *Rompecabezas* (Puzzle), and *Marranos* (1983), which also won the National Theatre Award, became *Anatema* (Anathema) and later *Herejía* (Heresy).

For Berman, theater is a social spectacle. It is also the natural stage for producing dramatic stories out of legends and real history. Such is the case of *La maravillosa historia del chiquito Pingüica* (The Marvelous Story of Little Pinguica), which was first produced in 1983—a humorous play based on the Mayan legend of the *Popol Vuh*, the Mayan Bible.

In writing *Aguila o sol: historia de la conquista del imperio azteca* (Eagle or Sun: History of the Conquest of the Aztec Empire; 1988), she attempted to chronicle Mexico's history from its origins to the destruction of the Aztec civilization. The play deals with the fear of failure that pursues all Mexicans.

Here Berman defies the European version of history and casts doubt on the myths based on patriarchal images.

Directed to a young audience, *Aguila o sol* integrates the dramatic tradition of the farce with Indian codes, and uses linguistic anachronisms and surrealist devices. She also displays some characteristics of the comic strip—billboard titles and humorous interjections. The style is also eclectic in that it combines techniques of social realism with those of street theater and satire. The American critic Sandra Cypess does not regard this as a shortcoming (cf. *La malinche in Mexican Literature*). It is one of the work's strongest features, since it reveals the conflicts that unravel from the conquest itself. Cortés is depicted as a feeble-minded, grotesque figure, whose unintelligible Spanish requires an interpreter. Ironically, his lover, Doña Marina/La Malinche, translates Cortés's words to a Hispanic audience into a bastardized language that further stresses his limitations, and makes the public identify with the vanquished Indian: La Malinche embodies a new Mexican idiosyncracy composed of a blend of cultures. She is not depicted as a traitor, since her own people are also to blame for their defeat: the Tlazcaltecas, ancient enemies of the Aztecas take sides with the Spaniards and submit to them.

Paradoxically, Moctezuma is the main exponent of *malinchismo*, a deference to foreigners and a rejection of one's native culture. Obsessed with the theological meaning of events, he believes that Cortés is the god Quetzacoatl making his prophesied return. He welcomes the invaders, offers them the treasures of his empire, and submits without a struggle. *Aguila o sol* implies that both patriarchal systems—the Indian and the Spanish—ought to be subverted.

The confrontation of cultures and of historical periods—a constant feature in Berman's plays—is related to her own origins: a descendent of Austrian and Polish-Jewish immigrants, she was brought up in a milieu that exposed her to various languages and cultures. Her family dynamics permeates her entire work. At the same time, Berman is intent on understanding her Mexican heritage, both immediate and remote.

Berman's political theatre is also her most intimate and audacious. The tone of *Muerte súbita* (Sudden Death; 1988) is tragicomic. Ostensibly, it centers on the relationship of a couple determined to inhabit a house which is about to tumble down. Upon the arrival of a stranger, everything in the house is destroyed. The building represents Mexico in decay: there is no one there to save it.

Bill is similar to *Muerte súbita* in its treatment of the clash of cultures and the ambiguity of sexual relations. It tells of a Vietnam veteran in Mexico who believes he sees the Virgin of Guadalupe holding baby Jesus in her arms.

Pretending to be a builder, he gains entrance to the woman's house and ends up shooting her husband. On a metaphorical level, *Bill* is about the cultural clash between two bordering countries: the United States and Mexico. The Yankee, defeated in Vietnam, travels to Mexico in search of stability in a new country. He enters a stranger's house to fix it, but invades it instead.

By choosing to write about particular historical events, Berman explores her own Eastern European roots and presents them to her generation. *Rompecabezas* (Puzzle) dramatizes patricide—in a figurative sense—from several angles. It describes the gruesome assassination of Leon Trotsky who was killed in 1940 by a blow to his head with an ice pick. Berman began to write this play after being a television witness to several other assassinations: The Kennedys, Martin Luther King Jr., Anwar Sadat, and attempts on the lives of Ronald Reagan and the Pope. Berman interprets patricide as a call to action for her generation. Coming of age after the wave of student revolts of the late sixties, when the hippie age was fading, Berman found herself disenchanted with contemporary politics and ideologies. Patricide was viewed by her as a desperate gesture to fend off despair and nihilism.

Berman's defiance of authority, her skeptical view of history, and her criticism of established institutions, is best represented in her play *Herejía*, which relates to her own ancestry and to her perception of the Jew as a wanderer and a rebel. This epic play exhibits different types of Jewish identity. Jews are pulled by the temptation to submit to Catholic religion and to save their lives and property. But they are also subject to a deep-seated love of Jehovah, their own God. Set in the seventeenth century, *Herejía* depicts a situation of extreme tension, when the Holy Inquisition was at the height of its tyranny. Based on a celebrated Inquisition trial, and inspired by the autobiography of Luis de Carvajal, *Herejía* explores the causes of the exodus of the Carvajal family from Spain, their prosperity in Mexico, and finally their fall when accused of being secret Jews disguised as Catholics. In the style of the Passover Haggadah, Berman characterizes different types of Jews and explores the religious preferences of each, by placing them at a crossroads. Don Luis de Carvajal is the atheist, the individualist, whose mission is to survive during times of intolerance. Luis de Carvajal, El Mozo, is the Jew who delves deep into the words of the Torah to experience God. From this perspective, he observes the closeness of his own religion to Catholicism. Agustín de Carvajal, a Dominican friar, is the Jew brought up as a Catholic to preserve his Jewish blood, lest his family be annihilated. Finally, Jesús Baltazar is a Christian who became a Jew: "que se hizo judío por bien comerciar y por judío terminó hecho ceniza" (for succeeding in business, and for being a Jew, [he] ended up in ashes [*Teatro de Sabina Berman* 167]).