

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
Katedra Anglistiky a Amerikanistiky

Markéta Byrtusová

*Development of British Jewish Literature and Analysis of the
Novel Disobedience Representing Contemporary British Jewish
Writing*

Bakalářská práce

Vedoucí práce: Mrg. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem svou bakalářskou práci na téma Development of British Jewish Literature and Analysis of the Novel *Disobedience* Representing Contemporary British Jewish Writing vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a veškerou použitou literaturu a jiné podklady jsem řádně citovala.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis

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Introduction

*“The story of our finely tuned accommodations to English culture is a fascinating one... It is time we told it. We should be more interested into ourselves as English Jews. ENGLISH . . . JEWS.”*¹

British Jewish or Anglo-Jewish literature has received so far little attention of the academic world, even though British Jewry is probably one of the oldest continuously surviving minorities in the United Kingdom. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to look upon British-Jewish writing and trace it from its origins till present. That is the major aim of the two initial parts of this work, the second part of which shows that there exist four distinct stages of this branch of British literature. Based upon the analysis of various sources dealing with the topic, the first stage is named Privatization of Anglo-Jewish literature, since it marks its separation from English literature of the time. The second stage is called Hybridization, for the fact that in this phase, Anglo-Jewish literature stood in-between Englishness and Jewishness in terms of space, language and politics. The third stage is called Suppression of Anglo-Jewish literature, due to the period of deliberate detachment from Jewish themes. The fourth and so far the last stage is named the Revival of Anglo-Jewish literature, which is dealt with in the third and the main part of this thesis. Simultaneously, the stages of development of British Jewish literature go hand in hand with the process of self-identification of Anglo Jewry within British society, and so the identity of British Jewry will be observed in the course of this work as well.

The two initial parts of this thesis that are written in historical-descriptive approach to be the keystone of the research based on secondary sources, bear mainly the function of providing the reader with necessary background for the third and crucial part of this work. The third part is the analysis of the novel *Disobedience* by Naomi Alderman. The novel will be dealt with as a representative of the latest of the four stages of Anglo-Jewish writing. Through observation of the main characters and their quests for self-identification, there

¹ Ruth Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing: From Apology to Attitude’, *Literature Compass* 5 (2008): 398, 10 December 2012, <[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1741-4113](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1741-4113)>.

will be discussed how the work reflects contemporary Anglo-Jewry and the different strands of such identity.

It is also argued that British Jewish writing is a minor literature, since it is produced by culturally distinct minority within British society. During the above mentioned stages of its development, it gradually enhances all the key features of minor writing stated by Deleuze and Guattari. To consider Anglo-Jewish literature a minor literature is also supported by the fact that it originated as a reaction of minority of British Jewish writers upon generalized stereotypical portrayals of the Jew in English literature, as it is demonstrated further on.

Jewish Stereotypical Characters: Predecessors of British Jewish Literature

1. Major and Minor Literature, Vicious and Virtuous Jew

“... literature is the people’s concern.”²

The distinction between major and minor literature lies in the fact that minor literature is produced by a particular minority and it deals with the issues of this minority as a whole. The minority with a distinct cultural behaviour lives in an environment occupied by a majority of people with a different cultural code. As was suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, one of the three main characteristics of minor literature is that in it, “... everything takes on a collective value”.³ Therefore Jewish literature deals with Jewishness and Anglo-Jewish writer speaks, even if not precisely intentionally, for the collective of Anglo-Jewry. Obviously, this condition does not imply that every writer of Jewish origin has to deal with Jewishness, nor that this theme is excluded from the works of writers of non-Jewish origin. On the contrary, in Britain as well as in the rest of Europe, Jewish minority occurred in the works of non-Jewish authors long before British Jewish literature as such was formed and it exists in these works till present. Charles Lehrmann states: “These Jewish works by Christian authors are, to be sure, not part of Jewish literature, but a step in that direction.”⁴ Moreover, without such works, the minority of British Jews would not be provoked to produce literature dealing with Jewishness from Jewish point of view as a reaction upon them.

Lehrmann and Cheyette divide Jewish stereotypical characters in literature of non-Jewish authors into two distinct types. The first called “the Shylock type”⁵, is portrayed as a vicious character. The second is named “biblical”⁶ or “the

² Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 18.

³ Deleuze, Guattari 17.

⁴ Charles C. Lehrmann, *Jewish Influence on European Thought* (London: Associated University Press, 1976) 159.

⁵ Lehrmann 117.

⁶ Lehrmann 117.

mythic”⁷ Jew who is, on the contrary, depicted in a positive light. Lehrmann’s third, “Nathan type”⁸ will not be taken into consideration separately, because, at least with the respect to British literature, this type is derived from the “mythic” one.

1.1. The Shylock Type

*If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.*⁹

As history also informs us, the politics of the past were rather xenophobic, and suppressive towards any different or non-major cultural behaviour. This attitude towards British Jewry is reflected in literature as an image of the Jew, called “the Shylock type”. Lehrmann says: “Shakespeare had selected the figure of Jewish usurer that went back to the Middle Ages and that was very familiar to the public of the sixteenth century, ...”¹⁰ Cheyette comments upon the issue:

I can think of passages which *if written now* would be stigmatized as Antisemitism, in the works of Shakespeare, Smollett, Thackeray, Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley and various others... Anyone who wrote in that strain *now* would bring down a storm of abuse upon himself, or more probably, would find it impossible to get his writings published.¹¹

Hence from the Shakespearean point of view, *The Merchant of Venice* is the comedy describing a stereotypical character of Jewish villain who is rightfully denied his revenge. However, from the recent point of view, such play has Anti-

⁷ Bryan Cheyette, *Construction of ‘The Jew’ in English Literature and Society Racial Representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 3.

⁸ Lehrmann 117.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 84.

¹⁰ Lehrmann 126.

¹¹ Bryan Cheyette, *Construction of ‘The Jew’ in English Literature and Society 2*.

Semitic undertone that was criticised by contemporary British Jewish author Arnold Wesker. He "... wrote his play *The Merchant*, later renamed *Shylock* from Shylock's point of view"¹², as a response to the racial problem in Shakespeare's play. In Wesker's drama, Shylock and Antonio are old friends trapped in racially segregate rules of Venice of that time. Other writers, such as Humbert Wolfe worked in a similar attitude, and composed "Shylock reasons with Mr. Chesterton".

1.2. The Mythic Jew

*She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:*¹³

"The mythic Jew" in literature is considered to be ancient and admired model of Hebraism¹⁴. Hebraism is the term which stands for the culture of Jewish nation and in this work is referred to also as Jewishness. Similarly, Englishness, or Britishness is used for English cultural traits. Cynthia Ozick claims in her lecture: "The novel at its nineteenth-century pinnacle was a Judaized novel."¹⁵ It was precisely this period, when so called Philo-Semitic literature was popular. By the term Philo-Semitic, Lehrmann describes the depiction of the Jew as a literary character in favourable light. Philo-Semitism in English literature is reflected for instance, in Lord Byron's description of the pity upon the tragic destiny of the Wandering Jew in his *Hebrew Melodies*, or his admiration of the beauty of Jewish femininity in his poem "She Walks in Beauty"¹⁶. Scott's portrayal of Isaac of York and his daughter also follows this attitude.¹⁷ Philo-Semitism is thus in accordance with inspiration by the outcasts in romantic literature. Later on, in the late Victorian period, the fascination by Judaism continues with Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. The novel "... creates a sympathetic and fuller view of Jews than ever

¹² Vivian Liska, Thomas Nolden, eds. *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) 92-93.

¹³ Ernest Hartley Coleridge ed., *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: John Murray, 1905) 340.

¹⁴ Lehrmann 116-117.

¹⁵ Cynthia Ozick, *Art and Ardor* (New York: Plume, 1983) 164.

¹⁶ Coleridge 340.

¹⁷ See Lehrmann 129.

found in the English novel... The novel also shows the strain of Eliot's passionate defense. ”¹⁸ From the above mentioned works, it can be observed that the “Mythic Jew” has also a strong tradition within English literature.

The two above described stereotypes of “virtuous” and “vicious” Jew in the works of the non-Jewish writers have played considerable role in the process of self-definition in Anglo-Jewish literature ever since their origin. In fact, these very stereotypes provoked one of the first distinct responses of the Jewish authors in Victorian Age and thus gave rise to the British Jewish writing as such and defined the ambiguity of its first stage.

¹⁸ Steven M. Cohen, Paula E. Hyman, ed. *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality* (New York: Holmes&Meier Publishers, 1986) 105.

The Four Stages of British Jewish Literature

2. The First Stage: Privatization of British Jewish Literature

“... everyone knows that the British are tactful, decorous, well-mannered, prudent, prone to meaningful silences, and Jews are – well, the opposite.”¹⁹

Anglo-Jewish writing during Victorian Era, in the second half of the nineteenth century, is particularly significant, since it enters its first stage, called privatization of British Jewish literature. It means that from this period, Anglo-Jewish literature is clearly distinct from the rest of English literature of that time, even if British Jewish authors produced their works before the nineteenth century as well. The first stage of Anglo-Jewish writing also most clearly demonstrates one of the key characteristics of minor literatures. Deleuze and Guattari stated: “...that everything in them [minor literatures] is political.”²⁰ For the verification of this statement, there has to be emphasized that the term “political” is used in a broader sense, not exclusively dealing with nation’s politics as such.

2.1. Politics of Assimilation and Apologetic Attitude

“In England the price of toleration was Englishness.”²¹

According to Cheyette’s anthology, the struggle for emancipation of Anglo-Jewish literature goes hand in hand with emancipation of Victorian women’s writing.²² The authors such as Grace Aguilar, Charlotte Montefiore and Amy Levy distanced from the conventional culture, which was formed from the politics of at that time newly forming liberalism. Liberal behaviour, as stated in Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, lays in the erasure of the differences between Hebraism and Hellenism. Hellenism refers to the movement of eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, which was preoccupied with ancient Greek ideal in philosophy, politics and art.

¹⁹ Ruth Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing: From Apology to Attitude’ 398.

²⁰ Deleuze, Guattari 17.

²¹ Donald Weber, ‘Anglo-Jewish Literature Raises Its Voice’, JBooks, N.p. n.d. 2 December 2012 <http://www.jbooks.com/interviews/index/IP_Weber_English.htm>.

²² See Bryan Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) x.

The main aim of Hellenism, according to Arnold is “... to see things as they really are.”²³ Therefore, the Hellenistic “spontaneity of consciousness”²⁴ opposes moral based “strictness of conscience”²⁵ of Hebraism. This diverse and therefore anarchic reality had to be unified.²⁶ It comes with the territory that minor, anarchic Hebraism was to be assimilated into culturally major Hellenism or dominating Christianity, which was considered to be liberal at that time. In literature, it is manifested for example in the character of *Ivanhoe*’s Rebecca. She figures as a prototype of obedient “Jewish daughter” or “Jewish Princess” who is acceptable for the conversion to Christianity and therefore can be assimilated into major culture.²⁷

At the same time, there existed also the “apologetic”²⁸ attitude in literature written by Jewish authors, which agreed with the “liberal” politics of silence and assimilation and which has been also strongly represented in Anglo-Jewish literature up to present. Apologetic writers such as Israel Zangwill subduced in their works to the policy of assimilation by presenting the character of a “good Jew”²⁹ that matched the “mythic Jew” literary type. Such character was to express gratitude for the opportunity to live among English nation by abandoning Jewish cultural tradition. This character was presented to the reading public as a contrast for stereotypical Jew of “the Shylock type”. Such apologetic attitude among Anglo-Jewish writers is commented for instance by Julia Neuberger in *The Van Der Zyl* lecture. She says the following: “The Anglo-Jewish community also genuinely believed that Jews could influence the prevalence of anti-Semitism by their behaviour and shared the view that Anti-Semitism was as much their own fault as that of others”.³⁰ Cynthia Ozick also criticizes Zangwill’s submissive attitude in her somewhat radical lecture called “Toward a New Yiddish”: “Compare Chesterton and Israel Zangwill. Both were of what we now call a ‘minority faith’, they had, in a literary way, similar careers. ...Chesterton is a minor English literary figure and is noted as such among specialists. Zangwill is

²³ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: OUP, 1869) 145-146.

²⁴ Arnold 147.

²⁵ Arnold 147.

²⁶ Cheyette, *Construction of ‘the Jew’ in English Literature and Society*, 4-5.

²⁷ See Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxxviii.

²⁸ Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xvi.

²⁹ Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xvi.

³⁰ Neuberger, ‘The Van der Zyl Lecture’, *European Judaism* 43 (Spring 2010): 97, 14 November 2012, < <http://www.ingentaconnect.com>>.

only a Jew who lived in England.”³¹ Therefore, the apologetic attitude in literature cannot be taken as a contributor to the further development of British Jewish literature, as it promotes abandonment of Jewish themes in such writings and assimilation of British Jewry.

Hence, the first stage of Anglo-Jewish writing or the “privatization of Jewish identity”³² did not emerge from Zangwill’s apologetic writings, but from the works of Aguilar, Montefiore, Levy and other authors of the first half of the nineteenth century who responded to the stereotypes of “the mythic Jew” and “the Shylock type”, which were described earlier on, by distancing from them. They presented their own point of view, dealing mainly with a position of Jewish woman in English society. Amy Levy, the key figure of so called first stage of British Jewish literature demonstrates the privatization of Anglo-Jewish identity by the opening verses from her poem “*Captivity*”:

I cannot remember my country,
The land whence I came;
Whence they brought me and chained me and made me
Nor wild thing nor tame.³³

The emphasised sense of extraterritoriality and exclusion from the majority in this poem shows the awareness of the fact that British Jew does not fully belong among Brits and occupies marginalized position. Such awareness gives way to the realisation of a minor identity. That is an identity which occupies the space of major culture, but shares the legacy with a different culture.

³¹ Ozick 166.

³² Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xv.

³³ Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

3. The Second Stage: Hybridization of British Jewish Literature

*“Am I Jewish or English? ...”*³⁴

According to Deleuze and Guattari’s claim, the most important feature of minor literature is “deterritorialization”³⁵ or the diasporic sense of not belonging. The deterritorialization occurs when a particular nation lives outside of the country of their origin, which is called homeland. Simultaneously, this nation is strongly tight to its homeland. Such deterritorialization is also likely to be accompanied by the language deterritorialization. The extraterritoriality of Anglo-Jewish minority occurred largely at the turn of the twentieth century: “The Anglo-Jewish community grew to approximately 35,000 by the 1850s. This was a large increase over 6,000-8,000 Jews who had lived in England in 1760, which was itself twelve times more than the number in 1690.”³⁶ However, the most significant wave of immigration, which brought the element of both territorial and linguistic detachment from Englishness into the second stage of Anglo-Jewish literature, was so called “great Jewish migration”.³⁷ It brought “around 150,000 Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1914.”³⁸ This mostly penniless Ashkenazim, spoke Yiddish (mixture of Hebrew, German and Slavic languages) as their “vernacular”³⁹ language used for everyday communication and Hebrew as the “mythic”⁴⁰ language used for religious purposes. The above described social context implies that cultural, spatial and linguistic detachment characterises the second stage of Anglo-Jewish literature, called Hybridization of Anglo-Jewish literature. In this stage, the identity of British Jews was caught in between Englishness and Jewishness, as it is demonstrated further on.

Great Jewish migration brought into the English society and literature the figure of working class Jew alienated from the culture of majority not only linguistically, but also politically due to the rising Zionism. Zionism is a political movement which emerged in the late nineteenth century and promoted return of

³⁴ Weber.

³⁵ Deleuze, Guattari 16.

³⁶ Robert Michael Smith, ‘The London Jews Society and Patterns of Jewish Conversion in England 1801-1859’, *Jewish Social Studies* 43 (Summer – Autumn): JStor 8 November 2012
<<http://www.jstor.org>>.

³⁷ Neuberger 94.

³⁸ Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, 91.

³⁹ Deleuze, Guattari 23.

⁴⁰ Deleuze, Guattari 23.

the Jewish nation to its homeland, Palestine. This movement emphasized the sense of in-betweenness, since the true homeland or the “motherland”⁴¹ was, historically speaking, considered to be Palestine. Britain was thus “only” the “fatherland”⁴² or the host country. There has to be mentioned that political Zionism did not appear out of the blue, but followed so called “proto-Zionism” based more on the religious belief, in literature partially presented for example in Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*.

Isaac Rosenberg is the key figure of the second stage of Anglo-Jewish writing. The following poem demonstrates the political and linguistic detachment, which was described above:

Awake! Ye joyful strains, awake!
 In silence sleep no more;
 Disperse the gloom that ever lies
 O’er Judah’s barren shore.
 (...)
 O! when again shall Israel see
 A harp so toned with melody?⁴³

Zionist ideas are clearly presented in this poem called “Ode to David’s Harp”.⁴⁴ However, linguistic deterritorialisation is also present in the form of this poem. To justify this claim, the reader must note that Rosenberg grew up in Stepney, East London. This area was according to David Englander a place of less than two square miles where lived nine tenths of the Jewish population of late Victorian Britain.⁴⁵ It implies that even if Rosenberg’s vernacular language was English he was surrounded by the majority of Jewish immigrants. Usage of the anastrophe of the second and pre-final lines is very similar to the word order presented in Bible, wherefrom the inspiration for this poem was taken. Biblical word order bears traces of Hebrew word order even in contemporary translations. Therefore usage

⁴¹ A.S. Leoussi, A. Gall, A.D. Smith, eds. *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 56.

⁴² A.S. Leoussi, A. Gall, A.D. Smith 57.

⁴³ See Peter Lawson, *Anglo-Jewish Poetry from Isaac Rosenberg to Elaine Feinstein* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2006) 26.

⁴⁴ Lawson 26.

⁴⁵ Lawson 19.

of “mythical” language, Hebrew, is present in this poem due to the Rosenberg’s inspiration by such language, and so the linguistic deterritorialisation occurs.

The following stanza of Rosenberg’s poem “Chagrin” demonstrates the best characteristics of the Anglo-Jewish identity in the second stage of minor British Jewish writing:

From the imagined weight
Of spaces in the sky
Of mute chagrin, my thoughts
Hang like branch-clung hair
To trunks of silence swung,
With the choked soul weighing down
Into thick emptiness.
Christ! end this hanging death,
For endlessness hangs therefrom.⁴⁶

Biblical story of death of Absalom, son of Jewish King David, inspired this poem. It symbolizes Rosenberg’s identification with the roots of the Jewish nation. However, at the same time, words such as “choked soul” or “hanging death” refer to the partial alienation from Englishness. Nevertheless, Rosenberg is still linked to the England, as it is the country where he was born, and therefore he finds himself strangely caught in-between Englishness and Jewishness, exactly “like the ‘hyphenation’ in ‘Anglo-Jewish’.”⁴⁷ The term Anglo-Jewish thus describes duality of British Jewish identity, which penetrated most strongly into the second stage of Anglo-Jewish writing.

⁴⁶ Lawson 37.

⁴⁷ Lawson 37.

4. The Third Stage: Suppression of British Jewish Literature

*“I’ve lost my faith and I’ve lost my ambition.”*⁴⁸

Another trace of British Jewish writing is found only after the Second World War period of silence. “The past will not give up its old habit of putting its mark on the future”⁴⁹, and so the silence stigmatized the third stage of Anglo-Jewish writing. It can be characterized as the Suppression of the Jewish identity, as the Jewish themes almost disappeared from the works of Anglo-Jewish writers. According to Brian Cheyette’s anthology, Anglo-Jewry was the only surviving European Jewish community after the war and its literary culture was older more than a century. Nevertheless, writers such as Harold Pinter, Gabriel Josipovici or Anita Brookner haven’t dealt with Jewish subject matter explicitly.⁵⁰ David Cesarani says about this period: “I suppose we were colluding with each other to disappear into England and lose our identity.”⁵¹

Post-war scepticism brought into English literature notions of disillusionment, awareness of the social position, secularism and political identification with the left wing. This attitude gave rise to the Kitchen Sink Drama movement which was shaped also by the Anglo-Jewish authors like Bernard Kops, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker. Wesker’s trilogy *Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots* and *I am Talking about Jerusalem* is typical for the third stage of British Jewish writing. This trilogy is referred to as a step “away from the ghettos and into the suburbs; that is away from Jewishness and into the Englishness.”⁵² Even if the characters in this trilogy are distinctly Jewish, they are not concerned with their cultural traditions, but mainly with a political struggle between the right and left wing extremists. At the same time though, they are aware that such attitude will cut them from their identity: “You’ll die, you’ll die – if you don’t care, you’ll die.”⁵³ Hence, the third stage of Anglo-Jewish writing

⁴⁸ Arnold Wesker, *The Wesker Trilogy* (London: Penguin Books, 1960) 72.

⁴⁹ Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973) 32.

⁵⁰ See Liska, Nolden, eds. 92.

⁵¹ Ruth Gilbert, ‘The Stranger Within: British-Jewish Identity in Contemporary Literature’, N.p. n.d. 14 November 2012 < <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/gilbertspaper.pdf>>.

⁵² Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxix.

⁵³ Wesker 76.

returns symbolically before the first stage of privatization of British Jewish literature, the phase when Anglo-Jewish identity was not claimed.

Kitchen Sink Drama period is followed by another wave of suppression of the Jewishness in literature, still falling into the third stage of Anglo-Jewish writing. This suppression of the Jewish identity is connected to the literary “universalization”⁵⁴ or “universal sense of estrangement”⁵⁵. This means that early works of the contemporary writers, such as Howard Jacobson, express detachment from Englishness as well as from Jewishness, mocking both at once. For instance Barney Fugelman, the central Jewish character in Jacobson’s novel *Peeping Tom*, says: “Pity the poor Jew. Let him gentrify and ruralize himself all he likes ... he will never know what it is to take a turn around the garden.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, the slow movement towards the privatization of Jewish identity is once again observed. Michelene Wandor’s “Song of the Jewish Princess” comes back to the depiction of “a common myth of Jewish femininity”⁵⁷ which represents a key for liberation of the Jewish identity, exactly in a manner of her “Victorian foremothers”⁵⁸, Aguilar, Montefiore and Levy.

⁵⁴ Liska, Nolden, eds. 95.

⁵⁵ Cheyette, *Construction of ‘the Jew’ in English Literature and Society*, 275.

⁵⁶ Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxxix.

⁵⁷ Cheyette, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Britain and Ireland*, xxxviii.

⁵⁸ Liska, Nolden, eds. 91.

5. The Fourth Stage: Revival of British Jewish Literature

*“I’ve been thinking about the two states of being – being gay, being Jewish. They have a lot in common... if you are only ‘a little bit gay’ or ‘a little bit Jewish’, that’s enough for you to identify yourself if you want.”*⁵⁹

Although apologetic and universalist voices in British Jewish writing have not ceased to be heard since the Second World War, the fourth stage, which is thought to be the Revival of British Jewish identity in Anglo-Jewish literature emerges. It lasts broadly from the beginning of the new millennium. In 2002, Freedland states that: “British Jews, as a whole, were in the midst of ‘an identity crisis’.”⁶⁰ From this “crisis” aroused the “revival”⁶¹ of the Jewish identity in literature. Donald Weber calls it a “creative release of a long repressed cultural identity as a British Jews”⁶². This attitude is demonstrated for instance by Mike Leigh’s highly successful drama *Two Thousand Years*, Naomi Alderman’s Orange prize winning novel *Disobedience* and Howard Jacobson’s *Kalooki Nights* that were long-listed for Man-Booker Prize.⁶³ The novel *Kalooki Nights* also shows Jacobson’s shift from universalism presented in *Peeping Tom* towards outspoken British-Jewish fiction. Jacobson opens his novel with a short tale. Two Jewish friends, rich Kahn and hunchback Wilder are having a walk. Kahn says that he used to be a Jew and Wilder replies: “Really? ...I used to be a hunchback.”⁶⁴ The tale says that Jewish identity cannot be altogether suppressed and Jacobson’s book discusses what it means to be Jewish in the post Holocaust era.

The strong inability or unwillingness to accept completely the major British culture, due to the identification with minor Jewishness, is a crucial feature of the fourth stage of Anglo-Jewish writing. For instance, Ruth Gilbert calls British Jewish identity in contemporary literature the identity of “The Stranger Within”.⁶⁵ The stranger within (its country and culture) is actually the meaning of the name Gershon that one of the post-Holocaust Anglo-Jewish writers chose as her pen name. The word “gershon” derived from Hebrew “גרש” (geresh) means to

⁵⁹ Naomi Alderman, *Disobedience* (London: Penguin Books, 2006) 255-256.

⁶⁰ Gilbert, ‘The Stranger Within’.

⁶¹ Weber.

⁶² Weber.

⁶³ See Weber.

⁶⁴ Howard Jacobson, *Kalooki Nights* (London: Vintage, 2006) 1.

⁶⁵ Gilbert, ‘The Stranger Within’.

exile or to banish. Exile of Jewish nation from their homeland or motherland into diasporic fatherland implies once again the sense of deterritorialisation and linguistic dislocation. Therefore, the fourth stage of Anglo-Jewish writing resembles the second stage of this writing in which the sense of dislocation was most strongly present.

5.1. Diasporic Transnationalism

*“... the old Jewish world of Eastern Europe, or even the Jewish East End of London, no longer exists, the diaspora is where we belong.”*⁶⁶

Contemporary British Jewish writing reflects a new way of understanding of the living in Diaspora, or the country into which the nation was forced to move from its country of origin. This attitude is called the “replacement of exilic nationalism”. Exilic nationalism stands for the loyalty towards the diasporic country and it was realized in literature for example as an above described apologetic attitude. Replacement of exilic nationalism therefore gives way to “a new diasporic transnationalism”⁶⁷, which places the loyalty of Anglo-Jewry to their homeland, Israel, above the loyalty to Britain but only in an idealized sense. According to Tölöyan, the central feature of the diasporic transnationalism is not physical return to a motherland, but motherland as an ideal centre of belonging, being no longer the supreme authority.⁶⁸ This new way of diasporic thinking enables the authors to challenge in their works also the conventions of the conservative, traditional Jewishness tight up to the homeland. Even if the globalisation brings “the decline of community”⁶⁹ contemporary Anglo-Jewish writers are according to Liska and Nolden “Jews ‘with attitude’ who disrupt all conventions”⁷⁰ and are well aware of “anarchic potential of their voice crushing the long-nourished investment in silence.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ruth Gilbert, ‘Our Own Antithesis: British Jewish Identities in Contemporary Literature’, N.p. n.d. 14 November 2012 < <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/gilbertpaper.pdf>>.

⁶⁷ A.S. Leoussi, A. Gall, A.D. Smith 28.

⁶⁸ See A.S. Leoussi, A. Gall, A.D. Smith 35.

⁶⁹ Ben Gidley, Keith Kahn-Harris, ‘Anglo-Jewish Community Leadership: Coping with Multiculturalism’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 63 (2012): 170, 5 October 2012, < <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2011.01398.x/pdf>>.

⁷⁰ Liska, Nolden, eds. 112.

⁷¹ Weber.

***Disobedience* by Naomi Alderman**

Naomi Alderman, the author of the novel *Disobedience* that won Orange prize in 2006, was born in 1974 into a Jewish family living in Hendon Orthodox Jewish community in London. Her decision to make her career as a writer and namely the success of her debut novel *Disobedience* brought her among new generation of British ethnic writers such as Zadie Smith, Monica Ali etc. However, it is precisely the theme of her novel, Orthodox Judaism in contemporary London and identity of British Jewry that makes Alderman a representative of the contemporary Anglo-Jewish writing and the fourth stage of British Jewish literature. Therefore, this section of the thesis observes British Jewish Identity and cultural legacy reflected in the novel and examines the potential of the new Anglo-Jewish writing.

6. Cohesion of the Form and the Plot

“Our words are, in a sense, real. They can create worlds and destroy them.”⁷²

The first chapter of *Disobedience* opens with a quotation from Jewish traditional text, Mishnah: “*And on the Shabbat, the priests would sing a song for the future that is to come, for that day which will be entirely Shabbat and for the repose of eternal life.* Mishnah Tamid 7:4, recited during the Saturday morning service”⁷³. Mishnah, to which the author directs the reader when she provides the reference just underneath the quotation, “... is the codification of the [Jewish] law completed during the second century CE, ...”⁷⁴. Jewish law is called halacha. It “...consists of the detailed rules, given as divine commands in the Bible and subsequently expanded in the Talmud.”⁷⁵ Mishnah is at the same time one of the two parts of the Talmud, the second one is called Gemara, “... which is the

⁷² Alderman 8.

⁷³ Alderman 1.

⁷⁴ Adrienne Baker, *The Jewish Woman in Contemporary Society Transitions and Traditions* (London: Macmillan, 1993) 45.

⁷⁵ Baker 45.

subsequent rabbinic commentary on the Mishnah.”⁷⁶ Therefore, the Bible along with Talmud contains all Jewish law. There has to be noted as well that the Bible for Judaism means exclusively Old Testament which is named Tanach. First five books of Tanach, known as Five Books of Moses are called Torah. It is thus significant for *Disobedience* to commence with such quotation, as it leads the reader’s attention immediately and intentionally towards the texts, which together embrace all the Jewish teaching. It suggests that the novel is going to deal with Jewishness deliberately on purpose.

Moreover, the key issue in the quotation, the Shabbat is a keystone of the Jewish tradition. This tradition follows different calendar, which is important to understand to grasp the timing of the Shabbat. Every day starts and ends by the dusk, instead of conventional and official midnight time in Europe. The dusk time is specified and publicized for the Jewish society for each Shabbat, so that it can be measured when precisely does it start and end. Shabbat is the last day of the week, which is Saturday. It starts on Friday dusk and ends on Saturday dusk. The first day of each week is therefore Sunday, commencing on Saturday evening. Shabbat is according to the story of origin of the world the day on which God reposed from the creation: “And on the seventh day, God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made.”⁷⁷ Therefore, Shabbat is the day on which work of all sorts is forbidden and the day is spent exclusively by relaxation and study of the Torah and other religious texts. The opening quotation is taken from such text, and so Alderman symbolically keeps the Shabbat rule of occupation with religious texts, making thus authentic entry into the Jewish world.

The opening quotation is also highly relevant and compatible with the rest of the first chapter, since the story starts by the Shabbat, the crucial day within Jewish week. Moreover in this initial chapter, the origins of Judaism, as well as the origins of the plot of the story are introduced to the reader. Rav Krushka, the leader of Jewish community in Hendon, North London, quotes Genesis, the first

⁷⁶ Baker 45.

⁷⁷ “The Hebrew Bible in English, Genesis 2:2-3”, *Mechon Mamre*, JPS 1917 Edition, N.p., 2002, 28.3.2013 <<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/>>.

of the five books of Torah. He explains to the reader that Judaism and its belief in the order of the world stands upon word, upon speech, text and learning:

In the Torah, we read that Hashem [God] created the world through speech. To create the world he spoke. ‘And God said let there be light, and there was light.’ ... Hashem could have given us a painting, or a sculpture, a forest, a creature, an idea in our minds to explain His world. But He gave us a book [Torah]. Words.⁷⁸

These words are spoken at the Saturday synagogue service that is the crucial gathering for the Jewish community of the week, which leads the reader towards significance of Jewish community life. Furthermore, Rav’s explanation of the importance of Jewish texts supports the presence of the quotation at the beginning of the first chapter.

All the main characters are introduced as well, and some of the hierarchy in Hendon Jewish community is explained too. The position of the Rav within the community is demonstrated: “... one may become a Rabbi simply through study and achievement, but the title Rav is given by a community to a beloved leader, a guiding light, a scholar of unsurpassed wisdom.”⁷⁹ Rav Krushka is such a leader and he is known as a great sage among Orthodox Jewry from around the world. However, due to his worsening illness, he has to be supported during the service by his apprentice, his nephew Dovid. Dovid is supposed to be his successor, the new Rav of the community. Yet, the reader learns that, although being a Rabbi he is not well accepted in the community: “Dovid was a Rabbi, this much was admitted, but he was not a Rav... he had none of the Rav’s spirit, none of his fire. Not a single member of the congregation, down to the tiniest child, would address Dovid Kuperman as Rabbi.”⁸⁰ Dovid’s wife Esti is presented in the synagogue as well, and just as Dovid, even she is regarded with a suspicion: “And as for his wife! It was understood, that all was not well with Esti Kuperman, that there was some problem there, some trouble.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Alderman 7.

⁷⁹ Alderman 3.

⁸⁰ Alderman 3.

⁸¹ Alderman 3.

Other leading members of the congregation, the synagogue board are also present: “There was Hartog, the president of the board, ... There was Levitsky, the synagogue treasurer, ... There was Kirschbaum, one of the executive officers, ...”⁸². The reader is therefore firstly introduced to the Jewish world formally, to understand the basic principles and then he or she is taken to the centre of the Jewish life of particular contemporary community and so the novel gets realistic realm.

It can be also observed that right in the opening of the book Hendon Jewish community is presented as an Orthodox one that is, strictly following rules of Judaism. For instance, men and women are separated during the Saturday service: “Esti Kuperman watched the service from the women’s gallery.”⁸³ Women’s gallery is the space in a synagogue placed on one side above the main, man’s gallery and it is reserved exclusively for women so that they are not seen or heard by men. “... in both Orthodox and traditionally observant synagogues, women are separated from men, usually in an upper gallery, ...”⁸⁴ On the contrary, in Reform and Liberal Judaism: “... women are permitted to become rabbis ... synagogues have mixed seating, ...”⁸⁵ Such kind of Judaism in British fiction is reflected for example in a Mendelson’s novel *When We Were Bad* as the central character is a woman “Rabbi Claudia Rubin”⁸⁶ who is the leader of Jewish Liberal community in London.

Just as in case of the first chapter, all the 13 chapters, into which the novel is divided, start by some quotation from the Jewish religious texts. These initial quotations are also highly relevant for the rest of the plot in those particular chapters. They usually introduce to the reader a term, issue or rule from the Jewish tradition, which is then further explained and dealt with. For example, the fifth chapter opens with a blessing: “*Blessed are you, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, who is wise in secrets.*”⁸⁷ Afterwards, there is explained that secret has a special position in Judaism. God is believed to be secret and concealed from its people: “... we shall only come to know [God] on our day of judgement, when

⁸² Alderman 5.

⁸³ Alderman 5.

⁸⁴ Baker 48.

⁸⁵ Baker 82.

⁸⁶ Charlotte Mendelson, *When We Were Bad* (London: Picador, 2007) 2.

⁸⁷ Alderman 78.

He reveals Himself to us.”⁸⁸ Other issue in Judaism which is treated secretly is sexuality: “Thus it is that a woman conceals her visits to the mikvah [ritual bath visited by married women seven days after the end of their period] even from her closest friend, that her inward times and tides may remain private.”⁸⁹

In the same chapter two secrets of the two main characters are revealed. Firstly, the narrator tells the reader of the origins of Dovid’s painful headaches. When the headache and the vision happened for the first time, Dovid was a child spending his holiday at Rav Krushka’s home in Hendon, learning Torah. Rav Krushka instructs Dovid to keep such experiences secret: “You should be careful whom you tell of these experiences, Dovid. They are not to be shouted in the playground.”⁹⁰ So the first secret is connected with God and spirituality, while the second revealed secret in this chapter concerns Ronit, Rav’s daughter and her sexuality. After her return from New York to Hendon, she is invited to the Shabbat dinner at Hartogs’ place, where she bewilders all the guests when she is asked whether she is still single or not: “Actually, Rebbetzin Goldfarb, I’m a lesbian.”⁹¹ Hence the two secrets that are revealed in the fifth chapter match by their nature the initial explanation of what should be treated secretly in Judaism.

Such particular structure of the novel when each chapter starts by a quotation and explanation of some issue from Judaism was by some critics called as superimposed over the whole story.⁹² However, this structure is helpful especially for the reader, who is not familiar with the Jewish tradition and Orthodox way of live around which the story evolves. Firstly, the unknown concept from Judaism and its significance is explained and then it is used for the plot, progressing further on from the basic concepts such as the legend of origins and the Shabbat. The novel not only depicts Jewishness as it is expected of a work falling into the British Jewish literature category, but also Jewish way of life is made more understandable to the common readership by such method. It is precisely this aspect of the novel which gained it much praise, as it “... opens up

⁸⁸ Alderman 78.

⁸⁹ Alderman 79.

⁹⁰ Alderman 87.

⁹¹ Alderman 98.

⁹² See Dina Rabinovitch, “This is Hendon”, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2006: N.p. 28 March 2013, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/mar/04/featuresreviews.guardianreview20>>.

hitherto closed aspects of Jewish life to a wider British readership.”⁹³ Such attitude is specific for the recent British Jewish writing particularly among women writers: “... there is a new pluralism and diversity of self-expression and openness in Jewish women writers.”⁹⁴ (2004).

⁹³ Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing’, 403.

⁹⁴ Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing’, 403.

7. Duality in the Novel

“... neither completely marginalised nor fully mainstream, neither other nor self.”⁹⁵

The two sidedness of the novel is realised not only on the formal level of the structure, but also on more levels, namely location, narration and identity question, mostly functioning as an opposing forces.

7.1. Duality of Location

“... the experience of Diaspora can be a blessing or a curse or, more commonly, an uneasy amalgam of the two states.”⁹⁶

Disobedience is a realistic novel, reflecting real spaces of contemporary London. Hendon, situated in the north-west, is said to be one of the major ultra-Orthodox concentrations in London.⁹⁷ In fact *Disobedience* is claimed to be “... the first novel set in England’s Orthodox Jewish community since *Daniel Deronda*.”⁹⁸ Guardian review of *Disobedience* also emphasises locality significance of the story: “... Hendon is very much present; even the names of schools and shops are unchanged.”⁹⁹ Naomi Alderman, the author of *Disobedience* supports this claim: “Perhaps, it would be truth to say that while the events of the novel are invented, the backgrounds are all places I’ve been... I grew up in Hendon, and in the Orthodox way of life.”¹⁰⁰ This trend is common also in the works of other Anglo-Jewish writers. For instance, Mike Leigh situates his play *Two Thousand Years* also in “*Cricklewood, North London*”¹⁰¹ Similarly, Mendelson’s novel *When We Were Bad* is situated in Finchley around “West Finchley Liberal”¹⁰² which stands for Finchley Reform Synagogue in North London. From among other UK cities, Howard Jacobson places his novel *Kalooki Nights* in the contemporary Manchester, as the family of the main character lives

⁹⁵ Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing’, 404.

⁹⁶ Gilbert, ‘Our Own Antithesis’, 3.

⁹⁷ See Baker 103.

⁹⁸ Joel Streicker, “Disobedience”, *Shofar* (Spring 2008) N.p. Web, 28 March 2013, <<http://www.questia.com/library/1P3-1480961901/disobedience>>.

⁹⁹ Rabinovitch.

¹⁰⁰ Alderman 262.

¹⁰¹ Mike Leigh, *Two Thousand Years* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) 2.

¹⁰² Mendelson 15.

in “Jewish Crumpsall”¹⁰³. Ruth Gilbert comments on the depiction of real places in contemporary British literature which deals with Jewishness and states that the crucial feature of contemporary British Jewish writing is locally bound British Jewish experience:

Other writers such as Zadie Smith, Charlotte Mendelson, Naomi Alderman, John Cantor and Will Self have written knowingly about North London Jewish landscapes. If anything unites this diverse body of work it is this awareness of locality and an interrogation of the particular experience of British Jews in the here and now.¹⁰⁴

Donald Weber goes as far as claiming that British Jewish writing is well-received by public readership only when it is bound with familiar place within UK: “... there is a sanctioned space for Jewish writers, but only for those who remain ‘local’.”¹⁰⁵ *Disobedience* fulfils these criteria, as was described. Moreover, the fact that the story is bound to contemporary Hendon, the real London area, has given the novel much credit. However, the story has two layers even in terms of location, which undermines Weber’s statement.

Ronit, the last main character introduced in the first chapter, is Rav’s only daughter. She does not live within Hendon’s Orthodox community though, but in New York since her 18th year, when she left Hendon to study in US. Despite her Orthodox background, she is now: “... a trousers-wearing, cigarette-smoking woman.”¹⁰⁶ She works as an analyst in a corporate finance, and she claims that Orthodox Jews are not her people anymore.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, she is a Jew in New York, “... where everyone’s Jewish anyway.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the fact that she even has her own psychiatrist, Dr. Feingold, supports the stereotypical New York Jew portrayal of this character. Ronit herself makes a comic remark upon this issue: “... you belong in three places: the place you grew up, the place where you went to college and the place where the person you love is. I’d add the fourth component

¹⁰³ Jacobson 54.

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing’, 402.

¹⁰⁵ Weber.

¹⁰⁶ Alderman 71.

¹⁰⁷ See Alderman 71.

¹⁰⁸ Alderman 12.

to that: the place where you first sought professional psychological help.”¹⁰⁹ According to these criteria, Ronit says: “I now belong in New York more than I belong in London.”¹¹⁰ Real New York places such as: “Museum of Natural History on 83rd Street ...”¹¹¹ are described as well, and so the novel goes beyond Weber’s statement. It proves that even if the story is not locally and culturally bound exclusively to some familiar British place all the time, it still does not lose its high esteem and its place among contemporary British Jewish writing, which is supported by the fact that *Disobedience* won Orange Award in 2006.

Split locality of the story between New York and London reveals another aspect of the novel, characteristic for contemporary British Jewish literature. Ruth Gilbert argues that such writing is preoccupied with themes of belonging and alienation.¹¹² The fact that Ronit belongs to the two places at once, though she stays out of her place of origin, London, implies her diasporic experience. The duality of the novel is realized not only in terms of location, as was demonstrated above, but also in terms of the form and the plot.

7.2. Duality in Narration

*“In the beginning, therefore, the most important work is of separation. It is of pulling apart the tangled threads... to understand the world, one must understand the separation.”*¹¹³

As much as the story is caught between two different places, New York and Orthodox Hendon, the two types of narration are also applied. Third person narration is used when the story evolves around Esti and Dovid and point of view of their dominant culture which is Orthodox Jewishness. First person narration is applied when the story is told from the Ronit’s Americanized point of view. Therefore, by usage of the two types of narration, the confrontation between two different cultures is created.

Each chapter starts by the third person narration, including the opening quotation, and ends by first person narration. Jewish Orthodox point of view,

¹⁰⁹ Alderman 53.

¹¹⁰ Alderman 53.

¹¹¹ Alderman 16.

¹¹² See Gilbert, ‘Our Own Antithesis’, 2.

¹¹³ Alderman 43.

represented by the third person narration and by the two main characters, Esti and Dovid, is thus seemingly dominant over the first person narration point of view, since for the two out of three main characters is this culture dominant. However, the narrator in the third person narration remains impartial and does not side with Orthodox way of life. For instance, the seventh chapter starts by an explanation of the “lashon hara”, or the evil tongue that stands for gossip: “Our sages warn us often against the perils of gossip... Certainly, it is forbidden to spread false tales.”¹¹⁴ At the same time though, the narrator informs the reader that gossiping is quite common in Hendon as in every other village in the world: “Hendon is a village. It exists within a city... But it is a village. In Hendon, people know one another’s business. Woman cannot walk from one end of the high street to the other without encountering someone she knows, ...”¹¹⁵ Third person narrator thus remains uninvolved, which gives the credit to the author’s ability to stay observant towards the story which she created.

Nevertheless, Ronit is the key character of the story, as it is her, not Dovid or Esti, who is the narrator of the first person narration. At the same time, it is precisely her who becomes to be caught between the life according to the Jewish tradition and her ‘dejudaised’ New York life, as will be demonstrated further on. Such character that bears the dilemma of the split-personality is according to Ruth Gilbert once again characteristic for contemporary Anglo-Jewish writing¹¹⁶. Therefore, even if the duality in *Disobedience* is present in terms of locality and within the form of the novel, the sense of dislocation is merely emphasised by combining two types of narration and describing two places. The problem of split-personality and double sense of belonging is dealt with in the story itself and so the plot is crucial indicator of what makes *Disobedience* representative of the contemporary British Jewish literature.

¹¹⁴ Aldernam 122.

¹¹⁵ Alderman 123.

¹¹⁶ See Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing’, 403.

8. Ronit's Double Identity

“Untangling the different strands of identity... is like unfurling the double helix of personality and culture.”¹¹⁷

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Ronit is the character who most clearly represents the split-personality, the person bearing double identity. Right after claiming that she belongs to New York, she admits that she is still tied to London as well though.¹¹⁸ On one hand, she claims that she is an independent woman and that she is more or less an atheist, as she sarcastically criticises religion. This attitude is revealed when Ronit encounters a young man, Chaim Weisman, on the streets of New York, who is trying to persuade her back to the Jewish faith: “... there was a guy with a smart suit, a nearly trimmed beard and a stack of fliers, clearly out to sign up some Jews for his 100 per cent top-quality religion.”¹¹⁹ Ronit quarrels with him and wins the debate by saying: “Has it ever occurred to you, Chaim, that some of us don’t want to be brought back? ...Some of us have been in that fold and found in narrow, and limiting, and more like a prison than a safe harbour. Has it ever occurred to you that God might be *wrong?*”¹²⁰

On the other hand though, she is still unconsciously bound to some of the Orthodox Jewish manners. She wears trousers, which is forbidden for women in Orthodox Judaism¹²¹, to demonstrate her independence, but when Chaim touches her sleeve to get her attention, Ronit admits: “It was enough to freak me out slightly. It made me almost long for a Lubavitch boy, whose sweat and desperation you can smell from three feet away, and who would never touch a woman.”¹²² Lubawitch is one of the movements within Orthodox Judaism, which also believes that bringing atheist Jews back to the faith is praiseworthy activity. Orthodox Jews are also gender separated in the public¹²³ and so touching a woman who is not one’s wife is strictly forbidden for Orthodox Jewish men. Ronit’s reflex when touched by a male Jewish stranger comes straight from her

¹¹⁷ Kayla Weiner, Arinna Moon, eds. *Jewish Women Speak Out* (Seattle: Canopy Press, 1995) 152.

¹¹⁸ See Alderman 54.

¹¹⁹ Alderman 12.

¹²⁰ Alderman 14.

¹²¹ See Baker 108.

¹²² Alderman 13.

¹²³ See Baker 47.

Orthodox upbringing. Moreover, she consciously follows the main Jewish tradition, keeping of the Shabbat. She does not work on Saturday and she spends her time resting until the sunset, the end of the Shabbat: "... I could have called someone, made dinner plans, gone to the movies, but I didn't. I watched the day pass by, the hours chasing each other to sunset."¹²⁴ Later on, she even admits for herself: "... while I can give up being Orthodox, I can't give up being a Jew. I am stuck with it."¹²⁵

At this point, the reader notes that the Jewishness is realized on the two levels, religious and ethnic. While Ronit boycotts the former, refusing the Orthodoxy, she simply has to accept the latter, since she was born a Jew and inherited the culture of this nation. The duality is thus realised even within Jewishness itself. All the more for that, the split personality issue appears widely in Jewish literature. Such issue has particular resonance in contemporary Jewish writing, because majority of the Jews are secular, so called unaffiliated Jews, as they are not part of any Jewish religious community. However, ethnically speaking, they still feel very much Jewish. In British Jewish literature though, characters acknowledge and even emphasise their Jewish nationality or sense of ethnic belonging only very recently which earned the forth stage of Anglo-Jewish writing name Revival. For instance, Tammy, young secular Jew in *Two Thousand Years* claims: "Well, being Jewish is just a part of who I am... It's not the whole of me... And I've got no idea what it's like not to be Jewish."¹²⁶ This is also Ronit's case.

Even if the US culture surrounding Ronit is dominant for her, it is not exclusively constructing her identity, since she cannot get rid of her Jewish habits, as was demonstrated above, even if she is an unaffiliated Jew. "... unaffiliated Jews are just as Jewish... They cannot be just cut off from their history and culture."¹²⁷ Therefore, Ronit's identity is constructed of a two components, one of which dominates over the other. Barbara Breitman comments upon such construction of identity:

¹²⁴ Alderman 16.

¹²⁵ Alderman 55.

¹²⁶ Leigh 53.

¹²⁷ Stephen Brook, *The Club: Anglo-Jewry Observed* (Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press, 1989) 427.

Most people carry both dominant and minority identities and are shaped by experiences of both privilege and oppression, at different times in their lives and within changing social contexts. Most categories of identities are themselves shifting, changing in cultural meaning within a society ...¹²⁸

According to Breitman, most identities are changing with social context. Character of Ronit undergoes such redefinition of her identity, when she is confronted with her Orthodox past. At the closing of the first chapter, Dovid calls her that her father, Rav Krushka, died during the Shabbat service. Consequently, she decides to travel back to Hendon for her father's funeral. As she learns about his death, she does not know how to react. She has not met, nor spoken with her father for some six years, and now the chance is gone. All of the sudden, she remembers:

... in my father's house, they would know what to do... they wouldn't need any magazine to tell them... the Jewish mourning ritual for close relatives – parents, children, siblings, husband or wife. In the first week you tear your clothes, you don't cut your hair or wash in hot water and you cover your mirrors. (Because this is no time for vanity.)¹²⁹

She decides to follow Orthodox Jewish mourning ritual to overcome her shock: "...I couldn't bear that anymore. I fished a pair of nail scissors and sawed through the hem of the jogging top I was wearing ...It felt like I was *doing* something, which I suppose is the point."¹³⁰ This is the first time after she left Orthodox community when she behaves according to the Orthodox Jewish ritual. Confrontation with the death of a close relative makes her to acknowledge the existence of Orthodox Jewish world and face it after returning to Hendon which is the start for redefinition of her identity.

¹²⁸ Weiner, Moon 155.

¹²⁹ Alderman 32.

¹³⁰ Alderman 32-33.

9. Roots and Roles

“Not just any tree root; the tree root. The root that is part of me.”¹³¹

By coming back to Hendon, Ronit is confronted with her past, the culture which initially constructed her identity and which she took some pain to forget, but which still persisted to be the minor part of her identity. The fact that the novel’s chapters commence by third person narration, explaining the Jewish traditions, and the first person narration from the point of view of the emancipated woman follows also underlines the impression that Orthodox Jewishness is Ronit’s initial, though minor component of identity, and Jewishness is therefore her “roots”. Britain and Hendon is not only Ronit’s home, but also her homeland, since it is the place of her origin, place where she was born, as well as the place where she acquired Jewish traditions which shaped her identity. This implies that New York is for Ronit a kind of her personal diaspora. Still, she left Hendon willingly and with an intention of never going back to live in “her homeland”, which she does not, as she returns back to New York at the end of the story. Therefore, Hendon for Ronit fulfils the criteria of a homeland according to diasporic transnationalism, which is characteristic for the fourth stage of Anglo-Jewish writing, as was stated in the opening part of this thesis. Hendon is Ronit’s ideal centre of belonging, not physical one, and so it is no longer an authority.¹³² At the same time, diaspora is understood as a “potentially positive”¹³³, even if the person still “... seeks to reconnect with the roots”¹³⁴ to keep this part of the person’s identity. As the reader observes later on, Ronit’s reconnection with her roots takes place.

Roots have particular resonance within Jewish tradition not only because of the diasporic experience of the Jewish nation, but also because they are the keystone of the nation’s identity, as it was mentioned above. This particular word represents not only in *Disobedience*, but also in British Jewish literature the origins, the sense of having something defining, something to hold on to. For example, the second drama in *The Wesker Trilogy* which deals with the self-definition of the main character is called *Roots*. The main character exclaims:

¹³¹ Alderman 72.

¹³² A.S. Leoussi, A. Gall, A.D. Smith 34-39.

¹³³ Gilbert, ‘Our Own Antithesis’, 3.

¹³⁴ A.S. Leoussi, A. Gall, A.D. Smith 34.

“Roots! The things you come from, the things that feed you. The things that make you proud of yourself – roots!”¹³⁵ Family is also seen to be “the portable homeland”¹³⁶ significance of which Jews always emphasised, to provide the roots and security they were lacking in diaspora.¹³⁷ Therefore, family is in fact the diasporic roots, the keystone of Jewish culture. Judaism is said to be “family centred religion”¹³⁸ The key roles within the family are naturally gender divided. In fact, halacha, the Jewish law is based upon the separate gender roles. “... in Orthodox communities, men perform all the liturgical roles, ... whereas Orthodox woman does not have any role in a public prayer.”¹³⁹ “Shul (synagogue) is a man’s world”¹⁴⁰ and home is a sphere of women, with her key task to raise children and prepare the weekly Shabbat. There has to be noted that Shabbat is both according to the gender of the word and Jewish mysticism feminine and it is the woman of the house who brings Shabbat by blessing pronounced over the light, the two Shabbat candles. As Shabbat is the crucial feature of Judaism, it is “practised above all within family and it is in the family that the woman’s religious role has always been crucial.”¹⁴¹ and public ceremonies are of a secondary importance.

In *Disobedience*, return to Hendon to her roots means for Ronit coming back in time and facing again the traditional principles and roles of Orthodox Judaism that she does not approve of. According to the Jewish tradition, “Time is a spiral... It may seem that time leads us on a circling path, returning us to where we begun... But although the view may be similar, it will never be identical; we should remember that there is no return”¹⁴² It seems, that for Ronit, there is no return either, as she perceives Orthodox way of life negatively according to American culture point of view, dominant component of her identity. She says: “I had a simple mission in here [in Hendon], there was no need to complicate it. All I was achieving here was to upset people’s lives.”¹⁴³ Such attitude of double identity is according to Barbara Breitman called the stage of conformity “...

¹³⁵ Wesker 145.

¹³⁶ Baker 124.

¹³⁷ See Baker 124.

¹³⁸ Baker 124.

¹³⁹ See Baker 48.

¹⁴⁰ Baker 89.

¹⁴¹ Baker 124.

¹⁴² Alderman 101-102.

¹⁴³ Alderman 71-72.

during which a person identifies with the culture and values of the dominant group and internalizes the negative attitudes toward the self [original identity] ...”¹⁴⁴ Ronit states that she is in Hendon to rebel against Orthodoxy after she learns that Esti, her former school friend and also her former lesbian lover accepted Orthodox way of life, suppressed her sexuality and is now married to her cousin, Dovid: “All these years I’d been saying how insane it is here, how abnormally these people behave, and, look, I was right.”¹⁴⁵ Ronit’s presence thus influences shifting of other characters’ identity as well.

¹⁴⁴ Weiner, Moon 154.

¹⁴⁵ Alderman 71.

10. Esti's Double Identity

*"... traditionally the Jewish ideal has always been a house full of children."*¹⁴⁶

According to Orthodox Judaism the proper position for the woman is within a marriage, moreover it is believed that "...the person is not fulfilled until he or she is married."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, when Esti had chosen to stay in Hendon, she had chosen to follow Hendon's conventions as well. However, having to conceal her sexuality, and to live with a married man Esti is unnaturally silent in a public, which causes her estrangement from the community to which she wants to belong:

They had taken notice of her uncanny stillness, of the strength of her silence. Esti was not well liked among the women of the community; she did not participate in their lives of chatter and busy-ness... They had questioned whether she was a suitable wife for one as near to being the Rav's successor as Dovid.¹⁴⁸

She wants to solve her problem by trying to conceive and raise a baby with Dovid, to be the proper wife, to fulfil her mother instinct and to be accepted by community. She is thus trying to reach the ideal of Shekhinah¹⁴⁹, or the idealized Orthodox woman who lives her life exactly according to halacha and Orthodox tradition. She muses when she sits alone at the front of the women's gallery during one of the Saturday services in the synagogue: "When, God willing, they were blessed with children, they would accompany her, as it was, she sat alone."¹⁵⁰ Children are thought to be the part of the idealized picture of the Orthodox Jewish family and childlessness is sometimes even taken as a transgression.¹⁵¹ Therefore, for Esti having a child means to be successful as a woman in the Orthodox community.

Barbara Breitman states that even the difference of sexual orientation can construct double identity: "... our lesbian self may be at war with our Catholic or

¹⁴⁶ Baker 159.

¹⁴⁷ Baker 147.

¹⁴⁸ Aldernam 146.

¹⁴⁹ See Baker 133.

¹⁵⁰ Alderman 5.

¹⁵¹ See Baker 159.

Jewish self, shaped by a religion that has taught us to hate our sexuality.”¹⁵² Therefore Esti’s identity is also double, as her sexuality goes against her Jewishness, which is the dominant component of her identity. Accordingly, Esti has to face her suppressed or minor side of identity after Ronit’s return to Hendon as well, as she is thus confronted with the woman, whom she still loves.

Both women therefore experience the clash the two components of their identities, although the dominant part of their identities is exactly the opposite. For Ronit, it is New York lifestyle, for Esti, it is Hendon way of life. There has to be pointed out though that Esti is not yet in the stage of conformity of double identity, since she does not think about Orthodox Judaism negatively, moreover, she tries to achieve her ideal role in it.

¹⁵² Weiner, Moon 152.

11. The Split-personality

“To be a Jew, a Briton and a woman means to live in a vortex of contradictory forces.”¹⁵³

Ronit and Esti are both prototypes of split-personality characters, as was described. Their struggle for self-definition, or self-identification is realised within two main layers. Firstly, the confrontation of New York and Hendon life gets a spiritual realm, which involves traditional Jewish myth about division of femininity and masculinity. Secondly, the clash gets a political significance, as it brings to the story confrontation between apologetic attitude of silence and contemporary unapologetic voices and Jewishness as an ethnic issue. Thus the novel retains its duality not only in terms of structure and plot, but also in combining political and spiritual aspects.

11.1. The Split-personality in Jewish Mysticism

“... Lilith is in the form of Eve. Both of them were born in a spiritual birth as one, ...”¹⁵⁴

Fourth chapter opens up by a tale from the Jewish mysticism about division of masculinity and femininity, which informs the reader about the fourth day of creation, maintaining thus again a continuity of the story and its form: “... when God created the sun and the moon on the fourth day, he made them equal in size. (Just as, we learn, man and woman were first created in perfect equality.)”¹⁵⁵ According to the Jewish tradition, first couple was not Adam and Eve, but Adam and Lilith: “Lilith, we learn was Adam’s first wife. However, Adam and Lilith could find no happiness together, not even understanding. When Adam wished to lie with her, Lilith demurred: ‘Why should I lie beneath you,’ she asked, ‘when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust?’”¹⁵⁶ Lilith left Adam soon after she learned that he is determined to overpower her and she became a feminine demon. Later on, Lilith in the Jewish tradition represented femme fatale,

¹⁵³ Gilbert, ‘Contemporary British-Jewish Writing’, 403.

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Dan, ‘Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah’, *AJS Review*, Vol. 5 (1980): 19, 13 December 2012, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1486451>>.

¹⁵⁵ Alderman 58.

¹⁵⁶ Raphael Patai, ‘Lilith’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 77 (1964): 296, 16 November 2013, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/537379>>.

or disobedient woman. Such woman who thought to be equal with men was considered to unsettle the law of the traditional life.

The myth of the sun and the moon in the novel ends by moon being diminished by God, because she complained about the equality between her and the sun: “Two rulers may not use one crown.”¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, God gave the moon stars as a comfort.¹⁵⁸ The moon, according to this myth, represents woman, stars represent her children and the sun represents man: “One must always be lesser and one greater. And so it is between man and woman.”¹⁵⁹ This myth also supports the gender separation of the roles in Orthodox Judaism. Having been granted an ability to bear children and so dominating the domestic sphere, woman should leave, according to the tradition, her husband dominance in the public sphere. Woman striving for dominance over the man in the public sphere is like Lilith. Such woman is thus thought to be the opposite of Shekhinah, the ideal woman, mother and wife, who was first represented by Eve. Therefore, Lilith “... is the shadow side of Eve. Lilith is the woman who would not be dominated.”¹⁶⁰

In the light of the above described myth, Ronit is representing the Lilith side of the woman’s identity, woman rebelling against gender stereotype in Orthodox Judaism: “I have learned to disobey [God].”¹⁶¹ *Disobedience*, the title of the book represents such rebellion as well, matching with the unapologetic attitude of the fourth stage of British Jewish writing. Esti is on the other hand trying to achieve the Shekhinah side of the woman’s identity. Nevertheless, according to the Jung’s theory of the parts of human personality, the theory of shadow and projection, shadow is the negative side of personality whereas projection, or the ego, is the positive one. The personality cannot function properly if one of those sides is lacking: “The ego and the shadow work together as a balancing pair.”¹⁶² Therefore, neither Ronit, nor Esti can come into terms with their identity, if they refuse or suppress either side of it.

¹⁵⁷ Alderman 58.

¹⁵⁸ Alderman 58.

¹⁵⁹ Alderman 59.

¹⁶⁰ Baker 133.

¹⁶¹ Alderman 187.

¹⁶² Ruth Snowden, *Teach Yourself Jung* (London, Hodder Education, 2006) 57.

11.2. Synergy of Ronit's Double Identity

“There’s something fierce and old and tender about that life that keeps on calling me back, and I suppose it always will.”¹⁶³

Ronit is gradually coming in terms with her past, her roots and her Jewish identity when she is cleaning up her former home, the house where her father lived all his life and where he died as well. She is trying to find the candlesticks which her mother used to use for every Shabbat blessing over the light: “I held an image of the candlestick firmly in my mind. I saw them, as my mother used to use them and, later, as I used to light them every Friday night... No one else in the family had a claim to them.”¹⁶⁴ Candlesticks represent for Ronit her Orthodox childhood, her connection to the roots, as her mother died when she was a child. Bringing the light by blessing over the Shabbat candles is exclusively woman’s task and so, at the same time, when she wants the candlesticks, Ronit wants to maintain her feminine position within Jewish tradition, and so she unconsciously claims the minor side of her identity.

Being unsuccessful in finding the candlesticks, Ronit recognises that she in fact wants to reconnect with her past: “What right had my father to hide my childhood from me this way? This mess, this confusion, felt as though it had been contrived on purpose to keep me from finding what I wanted... The candlesticks weren’t here.”¹⁶⁵ She even decides to go upstairs to search for them. She wanted to avoid going there, since there is her father’s study room, the place which reminds her of him the most. Therefore, when she enters the study and her former bedroom, she symbolically overcomes the denial of her past. She admits that she would like to speak with her father again, to ask him the questions that bothered her: “Only my father could have told me, and, well, he is not around to be asked anymore.”¹⁶⁶ When she realizes that the chance to speak again to her father is gone now, just as the chance of finding the candlesticks is gone, she starts to cry: “... I was going to cry. Real, proper, huge gut wrenching, cheek rolling, superfluous, unanswerable tears.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Alderman 256.

¹⁶⁴ Alderman 134.

¹⁶⁵ Alderman 134.

¹⁶⁶ Alderman 136.

¹⁶⁷ Alderman 136-7.

When Ronit starts to cry, she symbolically breaks the silence by which means she detached from Orthodox past. She admits that due to the silence, she lost connection to her father and her roots: “We did not go out of each other’s lives in a blaze of anger. We simply fell out of the habit of speaking. We lost our common language and so lost everything.”¹⁶⁸ Their relationship was based upon word, just like Judaism, which links novel’s plot with its educative aspect and which also underlines the family importance within Judaism. Ronit admits the loss of her father and her original identity and recognises such experience as negative, since she reacts by crying.

The situation is the climax in the process of self-identification of her split-personality, and so she is able to shift from the stage of conformity to the stage of: synergy when the individual reconciles with his or her minor side of identity, and after experiencing life in the two cultures recognises that “... there is both good and bad in their own minority group, as well as in the dominant culture.”¹⁶⁹ Ronit’s conclusion about Orthodox Jewry is not deprecatory, but realistic: “We don’t condone wife-beating here, or genital mutilation, or honour killings. We don’t demand head-to-toe coverings, or cast-down eyes, or that a woman must not go in public unaccompanied. We are modern.”¹⁷⁰ At the same time, she admits that some people run away from Orthodoxy, because it was the core of their problems: “... abuse, neglect, violence – oh yes, these things happen in our community too.”¹⁷¹ These statements show that Ronit feels part of Orthodox Jewry, as she uses first person plural pronoun and refers to the community as “our”. Even though she chooses to continue her New York life: “... New York. My real life, the life I want.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Alderman 229.

¹⁶⁹ Weiner, Moon 154.

¹⁷⁰ Alderman 242.

¹⁷¹ Alderman 228.

¹⁷² Alderman 226.

11.3. Breaking Apologetic Attitude, the Policy of Silence

*“In England, whenever I’m in a public place... and somebody happens to mention the word ‘Jew’... the voice always drops just a little.”*¹⁷³

Esti’s process of self-identification reaches the stage of synergy too, except that the parts of her dual identity are opposite to the Ronit’s, Orthodox Jewishness the major one, and homosexuality the minor one. Moreover, her problem gets community significance and it reflects unapologetic attitude of contemporary British Jewry.

In order to come in terms with her minor side of identity, her lesbian orientation, Esti has to overcome the silence too, in which she was trapped as she was trying to achieve Shekhinah ideal and so trying to suppress her problem. Claim that the problem does not exist, is a typical way of dealing with a trouble in Britain: “Oh yes, when in Britain, do as the British do. Stiff upper lip. Repression. Muttering quietly under my breath and carrying on. Sticking it out. In other words, ignoring the issue.”¹⁷⁴ Moreover, such attitude is still more typical for Orthodox Jewish community in general: It is called “*Baruch Ha’Shem* Society. *Baruch Ha’Shem* means, literally, ‘*blessed be His name*’ – a response implying all is well.”¹⁷⁵ It involves a denial of the fact that all cannot be well all the time, that all cannot stay the same. Not only Esti, but all Hendon community share the *Baruch Ha’Shem* attitude. Hartog, the president of the synagogue board, suggests after the Rav’s death: “There’s nothing to fear... Everything will remain as it has been. Nothing need change.”¹⁷⁶ However, Dovid thinks for himself: “Nothing could remain the same forever.”¹⁷⁷

For the fact that he represents the policy of silence and repression of the problem, Hartog features in the story as ‘villain Jew’ stereotype. Ronit informs the reader that Hartog makes an investment in silence, to suppress progress in the direction of the modern world:

¹⁷³ Weber.

¹⁷⁴ Alderman 133.

¹⁷⁵ Baker 105.

¹⁷⁶ Alderman 20.

¹⁷⁷ Alderman 29.

In the north-west London Orthodox Jewish world, money can mean power... It can mean choosing the Rabbi of a congregation, ... It can mean giving money only to the education programmes which, though they don't say so in the glossy brochures, do not allow women to study Gemarah... All this, and more, Hartog had done¹⁷⁸

Therefore, if Esti is to come into terms with her split-personality and double identity, sooner or later, she has to step against the whole community, and the policy of silence it represents.

Interestingly, Dovid sides with Esti and Ronit, since he opposes Hartog's view, as was mentioned above. While being married to a lesbian of whom he knows that she cannot love him back: "It is a terrible, wretched thing to love someone whom you know cannot love you.", he admits that Hendon, the Orthodox Jewish community oppresses the women's way to self-identification: "He thought, this place kills women, it bleeds them dry."¹⁷⁹ He married Esti, because he wanted to protect her by the marriage from the community's malice: "I thought I could keep you safe."¹⁸⁰ However, from the start he conforms to the silence policy as much as Esti does, since he continuously refuses to speak at the hesped, the mourning feast over the Rav, avoiding to be the new leader of the community: "He would speak from the Rav's book and from his notes. He would speak *of* the Rav. He would give an illusion of unchanging continuity."¹⁸¹ Dovid believes that the change is inevitable and it is needed in Hendon, and so he refuses to be the new Rav, because he does not want to give people in Hendon that illusion of unchanging continuity. Therefore, unlike Ronit, who used silence to suppress her Jewish past and Esti, who used silence to suppress her lesbian sexuality, Dovid wants to use silence to oppose Hartog's cherished ideal of Hendon as a *Baruch Ha Shem* society. He is seemingly persuaded to have the speech at the ceremony that Hartog prepared for him.

At this point, the character of Dovid gets also a stereotypical realm when he lets himself to be Hartog's paw in the game. Dovid appears as a typical feminized male Jew, hardly able to stand his side: "Dovid was unprepossessing to

¹⁷⁸ Alderman 91.

¹⁷⁹ Alderman 198.

¹⁸⁰ Alderman 220.

¹⁸¹ Alderman 197.

the sight: short, balding, a little overweight; ...”¹⁸² On the other hand, women and especially mothers in the story figure as an impersonation of a strength, Esti’s mother, for instance is described as: “... a small, slight woman yet a person of tremendous force, ...”¹⁸³ Interestingly enough, this stereotypical portrayal is accordingly maintained through other British Jewish fiction as well. For instance, the two key parent figures from Wesker’s *Chicken Soup with Barley* are described similarly. Sarah Kahn, although being small is described as a woman of great energy and vitality whereas her husband, is described as amiable, but weak.¹⁸⁴ Similarly again, mother of the family from Mendelson’s *When We Were Bad* Rabbi Claudia Rubin is referred to as a strong and beautiful, whereas her husband, unable to provide for the family financially has only the sharp looks and the mighty nose.¹⁸⁵

Therefore, it can be observed that even British Jewish fiction makes its characters stereotypical, following thus unconsciously stereotypes of vicious and virtuous Jew that had appeared in English fiction before, written by non-Jewish authors and against which British Jewish authors wrote their pieces to distinguish themselves apart. Nevertheless, this typifying of the characters is crucial for one particular reason, let alone humorous element which it adds. It shows to the reader, what attitude or policy the particular character impersonates, and what attitude he or she stands against. In *Disobedience*, the reader therefore learns that, besides being linked to Lilith, Shekhinah and feminized male Jew characterization, all the three main characters try to overcome politics of silence and come in terms with their identity. Ronit achieved her stage of synergy when she reconciled with her father’s death, as was demonstrated before. Esti’s and Dovid’s stage of synergy marks the climax of the story, which is the hesped, mourning celebration over the Rav.

¹⁸² Alderman 3.

¹⁸³ Alderman 23.

¹⁸⁴ See Wesker Trilogy 13.

¹⁸⁵ See Mendelson 7-8.

11.4. British Jewry

“These British Jews were British – they shuffled awkwardly, looked at their feet and drank tea.”¹⁸⁶

At the hesped, Dovid steps against Hartog’s plan and instead of reading the speech prepared by Hartog, invites his wife Esti to speak about the Rav. He also accepts to be the leader of the community, not to make an illusion of unchanging community, but to let the space for the new voice. It comes with Esti’s speech, when she finally admits to the whole community that she is a lesbian and that long ago, she had a word about the matter with the Rav, who told her that she “... should remain silent... that the community would do better if they [the matters concerning her sexuality] were never spoken of.”¹⁸⁷ After this, Esti publicly declares, that in her opinion, the Rav, the most respectable member of the community during his life, was simply wrong: “I have desired that which is forbidden to me. I continue to desire it. And yet, I am here. I obey the commandments. It is possible – ‘ Esti smiled – ‘ as long as I do not have to do so in a silence.”¹⁸⁸ By this incident, Esti comes in terms with her dual identity, when she admits that in order to live a happy life, she has to respect both sides of her identity. At the same time, she refuses the policy of silence when she speaks about the issue in front of the whole community.

Even if Ronit is presented at the hesped, her quest for self-definition is over, as was mentioned above. It has a symbolic epilogue, when she actually obtains the candlesticks from Esti, hence she obtains the symbol of her Jewishness to take with her to New York: “My mother’s silver candlesticks, which my father had given to Esti, in case I should want them.”¹⁸⁹ She does not attend the hesped to rebel anymore, as she did at the Shabbat dinner at Hartogs, but only because Dovid and Esti had asked her to come:

I’ve spend a long time insisting that no one else can tell me when to speak and when to remain silent... another me would have been at the hesped because I had a plan, some sort of a grand caper to make Hartog suffer or

¹⁸⁶ Alderman 246.

¹⁸⁷ Alderman 245.

¹⁸⁸ Alderman 246.

¹⁸⁹ Alderman 232.

to make myself more noticeable. But it wasn't that, I was there because they wanted me there.¹⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Ronit's presence at the hesped is crucial, because it is her who observes the reaction of the community to Esti's speech. She uncovers the core of British Jewish identity, when she claims that should the speech happen in New York, it would have been the end of the hesped and people would react dramatically upon it. However, in Britain, it is different:

The solid refusal to become dramatic is also the inability to respond to serious things seriously, with depth... There is a myth – many of us believe it – that we are wanderers, unaffected by the place in which we live, hearkening only to the commandments of the Lord. It's a lie. These British Jews were British – they shuffled awkwardly, looked at their feet and drank tea.¹⁹¹

Ronit's remark shows author's attitude against Britishness of Anglo-Jewry and their policy of silence: "The Jewish community there [in US] is confident and vocal. I think the Jewish community in the UK could learn a lot about the benefits of being very visible, as opposed to the dignified invisibility that it currently cultivates"¹⁹² Such opinion, categorises Alderman as one of the contemporary Jewish writers with attitude, since she not only recognises the still prevailing apologetics of contemporary British Jewry, but also feels the need to speak about this policy and to step against it through the characters of her novel.

12. The "Happy" Ending

*"Everything is just fine"*¹⁹³

Disobedience faces the problem of not keeping realistic voice in the closing of the novel. Instead, it launches for the happy ending. Esti and Dovid are having a baby that Ronit is nursing when she comes to visit them from time to

¹⁹⁰ Alderman 242.

¹⁹¹ Alderman 247.

¹⁹² Alderman 263.

¹⁹³ Alderman 252.

time from US and what is more, they are both leading the community: “Esti speaks to the congregation at the stone-setting ceremony, as she has done from time to time over the year.”¹⁹⁴ Though Ronit, Esti and Dovid are gossiped now and then in Hendon, “Everything is just fine.”¹⁹⁵ Therefore, when it comes to the solution of the plot, it is criticised not to be “wholly satisfying.”¹⁹⁶

Interestingly, Alderman states about the writing of *Disobedience*:

I was surprised by my own reluctance to write about my community. I found some sort of inner combatant pushing back at me all the time saying the things that people in my community often say; ‘this mustn’t be written about, it’s better it should be kept private’. Over time, I think, my internal arguments about that became folded into the novel.¹⁹⁷

From this quotation, it can be observed that in fact, politics of silence are still strongly encoded into the author’s mind, which underlines her British, as well as her Orthodox cultural traits of behaviour. Author’s inner reluctance to write about the problems of Orthodox British Jewish community thus clashes with her urge to open such world to the wide readership, as was proven before. The reluctance makes the novel finish with the happy ending, failing to admit that the fact that the Rabbi’s lesbian wife decides to stay within the Orthodox community and helps to lead it would be the major catalyser of the trouble, not the solution of unrest caused by temporary visit of an emancipated, rebelling lesbian.

Nevertheless, the problem with the happy ending does not diminish the fact that the novel achieved its aim to let the reader acknowledge and understand Orthodox British Jewish way of life which is in itself quite revolutionary and that is precisely what characterises the fourth stage, the revival of British-Jewish writing. Moreover, the lack of a realistic solution for the story shows that there is still a space for making the step forward and possible start of a new phase of British Jewish writing. In any case, it surely shows that Anglo-Jewish literature has a strong potential of further development.

¹⁹⁴ Alderman 253.

¹⁹⁵ Alderman 252.

¹⁹⁶ Streicker.

¹⁹⁷ Alderman 261.

Conclusion

'But they didn't really make an Englishman of you, did they?'

'Didn't they?'

*'Oh come on. You're Jew who plays cricket. That's not the same thing at all.'*¹⁹⁸

British Jewish literature is from its origins until the present day strongly tight to the identity of British Jews which is, as every identity, continuously negotiated. Anglo-Jewish writing evolved firstly as a minor literature that felt a need to detach itself from the concepts of the mythic Jew and the Shylock type, the two literary stereotypes that traditionally inhabited English literature. Particularly for the Anglo-Jewish female writers of Victorian Age, there occurred an urge to explore their own Jewishness as a different strand of identity within the English nation, and so the marginalized position of Anglo-Jewry started to be negotiated from the Jewish point of view. Ever since, there existed two self-opposing attitudes in British Jewish writing. One tried to accommodate itself within the narrow space between English and Jewish, trying to define its Jewishness and not abandon its Englishness. The other subdued to the policy of assimilation and developed apologetic Anglo-Jewish writing, which was stigmatized by silence. These two contradictory forces handed over the dominance to each other during the stages of development of Anglo-Jewish writing.

In the opening of the twentieth century, the rise of Jewish immigration increased British Jewish minority and made it culturally more distinct and community bound, especially in London. Zionist movement supported the diasporic sense of not belonging, and so these notions entered Anglo-Jewish literature. On the contrary, after the Second World War this literature slipped back into apologetics and universalism and abandoned Jewish themes and Anglo-Jewry almost lost its Jewish voice.

Nevertheless, contemporary British Jewry is, with the prevailing multiculturalism, aware of its position as an ethnic minority within the United

¹⁹⁸ Gilbert, 'Contemporary British-Jewish Writing' 404.

Kingdom, so Anglo-Jewish literature explores its Jewish potential and seeks the answer for the question, what it means to be British Jew nowadays.

Alderman's *Disobedience* represents the revival of British Jewish writing in more aspects. Most notably, after one century, since *Daniel Deronda* was written, it leads the reader back to the Orthodox Jewish community in London and explains in detail the principles of the Jewish law, halacha, upon which such life is built. This attitude gives the novel unique structure of the chapters that match accordingly the structure of the plot. However, *Disobedience* does not depict Hendon community exclusively in a favourable light, but observes its life realistically, presenting the troubles contemporary Orthodox communities have to face. The confrontation of the two distinct cultures occurs with Ronit's arrival. The resulting duality in the novel is realized in terms of space, narration and above all, identity.

Ronit and Esti are the two key characters whose identity is distinctly double, marking them as representatives of a split-personality phenomenon that is typical reoccurring theme in British Jewish literature. Their quest for self-identification goes from the stage of conformity to the stage of synergy when they acknowledge and accept both sides that construct their identity. However, during this process, the politics of silence are strongly present, being natural both for British and Orthodox Jewish culture, and so the major characters have to step against them in order to be able to reach the stage of synergy of the different strands of their identities. Hence, they symbolically find their voice and reach the happy ending.

Nevertheless, the idyllic ending affects the realistic approach of the novel since the solution itself would be the major problem. It shows that the politics of silence are still not fully overcome, as the author herself has to fight the natural reluctance to write about Orthodox Anglo-Jewry. It also proves that silence is in fact strongly encoded into British mentality and so it is a part of a British Jewish mentality as well, since every identity is both nation bound and space bound, which in fact constructs its duality that cannot be simply erased. Therefore, Anglo-Jewish identity respects its name and proves to be British and Jewish at the same time, although it retrieved its Jewish voice very recently and learns slowly how to use it, giving the British Jewish literature strong potential for further development.

Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá britskou židovskou literaturou, která je od svých počátků až do dnešního dne úzce spojená s tématem britské židovské identity. Jako každá identita určitého etnika či národa se i tato identita se stále utváří a posouvá. Anglo-židovská literatura jako taková vznikala od 19. století a vyvíjela se jako reakce vůči dvěma literárním stereotypům, které byly běžnou součástí Anglické literatury psané nežidovskými autory. Záporná postava Žida podle Shylocka z Kupce Benátského je stereotypem prvním a druhým je kladná, mytická židovská postava. Podle druhého stereotypu byla vytvořena například Rebeka z Yorku ve Scottově románu Ivanhoe. Vůči těmto stereotypům v anglické literatuře se znatelně vymezily až anglo-židovské autorky v období vlády královny Viktorie, například Charlotte Montefiorová a Amy Levyová, které si uvědomovaly obě složky své identity, a snažily se ve svých dílech prozkoumat podstatu židovské stránky této identity. Tím vznikala anglická literární díla z židovského úhlu pohledu. Tato fáze je v práci nazvaná Osvojení britské židovské literatury právě proto, že autoři, kteří do ní spadají, si začali svou židovskou identitu nejen plněji uvědomovat, ale zanášeli ji vědomě právě i do svých děl. Jako názorná ukázka anglo-židovské tvorby v této fázi je použita sloka z básně "Captivity" od Amy Levyové.

Je nutno zmínit, že již od zformování anglo-židovské literatury v ní existovaly dva odlišné proudy. Autoři prvního směru se snažili ukotvit vlastní identitu někde mezi anglickým a židovským kulturním odkazem. Druhý směr se naopak snažil o úplnou asimilaci do anglické společnosti a propagaci tohoto názoru v literatuře, což mělo zajistit ochranu vůči represím a projevům antisemitismu. Tato díla však většinou židovský kulturní odkaz nerozvíjela, a proto nejsou vnímána jako posilující prvek britské židovské literatury. Oba dva přístupy mají v anglické literatuře své zastoupení až dodnes a během jednotlivých fází vývoje britské židovské literatury si předávaly pomyslné žezlo nadvlády.

Druhou fází, Hybridizaci anglo-židovské literatury, přinesla na přelomu dvacátého století velká vlna imigrace židovského obyvatelstva hlavně ze střední a východní Evropy. Anglo-židovské etnikum tím mnohonásobně vzrostlo a to

zejména v Londýně. Do britské židovské literatury tak vstoupila témata jako diasporické odloučení od domovské země, kterému podléhají právě etnika, žijící v jiné zemi než v té odkud pochází, a která se kulturně odlišují od většiny obyvatelstva země, jež obývají. V případě britských Židů byla tato tendence ve druhé fázi britské židovské literatury umocněna vznikajícím hnutím politického Sionismu, které propagovalo návrat židovského národa zpátky do Palestiny a v literatuře zvýrazňovalo politický rozměr. Diasporické odloučení je často doprovázeno i jazykovým odloučením. V případě anglo-židovských přistěhovalců to znamená, že tyto obyvatelé využívají nejen svůj původní jazyk, Jidiš, nebo Hebrejštinu pro náboženské účely, ale i Angličtinu pro běžnou komunikaci mimo komunitu daného etnika. Taková komunitě se říká ghetto, které se v případě Spojeného království vytvořilo hlavně v oblasti severního Londýna. Hlavní literární osobností tohoto období byl básník Isaac Rosenberg, v jehož dílech můžeme pozorovat jak prvky odloučení nebo hybridizace identity, tak ovlivnění jazykovou různorodostí.

Další fáze, nazvaná Potlačení britské židovské literatury vzniká až po doznění obou světových válek a vzhledem k těmto historickým událostem tuto literaturu opouští téma židovské identity, vzrůstá asimilace a autoři se zabývají hlavně politickými tématy spojovanými například s vzestupem socialismu, jak je tomu zejména u divadelní trilogie Arnolda Weskera. Na tuto tendenci navazuje další vlna potlačení židovské stránky anglo-židovské identity, spojená s obecným trendem univerzalizmu v literatuře, kdy se autoři jako Harold Pinter, Howard Jacobson či Anita Brooknerová vyloženě židovským tématům nevěnovali.

Současná fáze britské židovské literatury zažívá něco, co se dá s úspěchem přirovnat k literárnímu obrození, a proto je v této práci nazývána Obnovení anglo-židovské literatury. Vzrůstající trend multikulturalismu a obecná provázanost světa dává národnostním a etnickým menšinám větší pocit bezpečí a tudíž i větší možnost sebeuvědomění a zkoumání své identity. Britští židovští spisovatelé se zejména po roce 2000 začínají znovu zabývat židovskými tématy a otevírají tak aspekty této kultury širší veřejnosti. Zároveň řeší otázkou židovské části své identity, kterou zkoumají zejména ve vztahu k britské části své identity a uvědomují si tím její dualitu. Reagují také na politické dění v souvislosti s delším fungováním státu Izrael a definují nový postoj vůči diaspoře, ve které se nachází.

Tento názorový proud je definován jako Diasporický transnacionalismus, kdy se upouští od myšlenky reálného návratu do Izraele, jenž ovšem i nadále slouží jako idealizovaná domovská země, vůči které cítí britské židovské obyvatelstvo určitou loajalitu. Zároveň však existuje loajalita vůči Británii, kterou chápou anglo-židé jako zemi, do které reálně patří. Tato situace se podobně odráží i ve vnímání anglo-židovské identity, která má dvě navzájem protichůdné složky, tedy odkaz britské a zároveň židovské kultury.

Pro ilustraci čtvrté fáze britské židovské literatury, která navazuje na předchozí přehled jako hlavní složka a předmět zkoumání této práce, byl zvolen román *Disobedience* od Naomi Aldermanové. Současná britská spisovatelka vyrůstala v prostředí doposud fungující ortodoxní židovské komunity v Londýně a fakt, že její první román *Disobedience* toto prostředí realisticky zobrazuje je počín v anglo-židovské literatuře převratný a odráží fakt, že tato kniha získala významné literární ocenění. Román dává široké čtenářské obci možnost přímo nahlédnout do ortodoxního života Židů v Británii. Zároveň řeší otázku identity a společenského začlenění tří hlavních postav, Ronit, dcery nedávno zesnulého rabína, uznávaného duchovního vůdce Hendonské komunity v Londýně, Esti, její kamarádky z dětství a Dovidy, Estina manžela a zároveň Ronitina bratrance.

Šestá kapitola uvozuje analýzu této knihy a zkoumá provázanost formální stránky románu se zápletkou. Každá z jednotlivých kapitol románu je zahájena výňatkem z některého z židovských tradičních textů, jakými jsou například Tóra, Výroky otců, Talmud nebo úryvky z každodenních modliteb. Zároveň tento výňatek pojednává o tématu, které je v rámci příběhu v dané kapitole nadále rozebíráno. Čtenář má tak možnost porovnat přístup tradičních textů k danému tématu a zároveň sledovat, jak se s tématem vypořádají hlavní postavy, zasazené do současnosti. Román tedy prolíná formu a příběh a vytváří tak dvě vzájemně propojené vrstvy.

Tato zvláštní podvojnost provází čtenáře i nadále a projevuje se třeba na úrovni míst, do kterých je příběh zasazen. Ronit opustila Hendon ve svých osmnácti letech a odjela studovat do Ameriky, kde se také trvale usadila. Po smrti svého otce, se kterým od svého odjezdu nepromluvila, se jako mladá úspěšná kariéristka vrací zpět do prostředí ortodoxní Hendonské komunity. Ronit tak

ztělesňuje myšlenku diasporického transnacionalismu, jelikož je stále částečně ideálově vázaná na Hendon, i když za svůj domov považuje New York. Zároveň se čtenář dovídá, že místa zobrazovaná v knize jsou zcela reálná, vykreslená podle jejich současné podoby. Kniha tak získává realistický aspekt, který čtenáře podporuje v myšlence spojení mezi tímto dílem a současným stavem anglo-židovského obyvatelstva.

Ronitin návrat znamená střet názorů západního světa s názory tradiční židovské komunity a oddělení těchto dvou světů je rovněž zaneseno do formy románu, který začátkem kapitoly využívá vyprávění ve třetí osobě, právě když je příběh popisován z úhlu pohledu Esti a Dovidy, Ronitinych kamarádů s dětství, kteří i v dospělosti žijí podle zvyků ortodoxního judaismu. Vyprávění v první osobě je naopak použito v druhé části kapitoly, kdy příběh vypráví Ronit ze svého úhlu pohledu.

Prvotní Ronitin záměr je dát obyvatelům Hendonu najevo, že se pravidly ortodoxního judaismu ve svém životě už nehodlá řídit, ale v průběhu čekání na hostinu na počest jejího zesnulého otce zjišťuje, že část její identity je stále s židovstvím neodmyslitelně spjata. Její identita je tudíž tvořena dvěma složkami, z nichž americká ideová složka má nadvládu nad židovskou. Ronit se tím ocitá ve fázi konformity, kdy dominantní složka identity převažuje nad minoritní. Ve stejné fázi se zprvu nachází i Esti s tím rozdílem, že dominantní složka její identity vychází z ortodoxního židovství a stojí proti její homosexualitě, kterou má potřebu realizovat právě vůči Ronit, její bývalé milence.

Během peripetií spojených s odmítavým postojem Hendonské komunity, která zastává názor, že komunita přežije jen tehdy, bude-li se přísně držet starých tradic a nebude se zviditelňovat v rámci Britské společnosti, dochází Ronit i Esti do fáze spojení dvojí identity, kdy si obě hlavní postavy uvědomí, že se nemohou oprostít ani od jedné z obou složek jejich identity. Obě se tedy musí v rámci jejich osobní krize s dualitou jejich identity vyrovnat. Esti tak učiní veřejně, tím, že promluví o své homosexualitě před celým ortodoxním židovským společenstvím, které se sešlo na hostině na počest zesnulého rabína.

V tomto momentě je nejznatelněji vykreslená i povaha anglo-židovského obyvatelstva. Komunita nijak hromadně na Estin projev nezareaguje, ikdyž je

očividně šokovaná a hostina pokračuje dále. Ronit srovnává komunitu s americkými židy a shrnuje své pozorování tím, že britská židovská komunita vykazuje znaky typické jednak pro židovskou kulturu, ale zrovna tak i pro britskou kulturu, a tedy že i anglo-židovské obyvatelstvo nese dvojí identitu, protože k němu neodmyslitelně patří jak židovské tradice, tak i typicky britské kulturní rysy.

Drobný problém představuje vyústění příběhu, kdy autorka čtenáři předkládá idylické zakončení, kdy se Dovid stane novým duchovním vůdcem komunity, nahradí tak Ronitina zesnulého otce, a Esti není za svou sexualitu komunitou odsuzována. Navíc zůstává v manželství s Dovidem, založí spolu rodinu a Ronit, která se vrátila zpátky do New Yorku, je čas od času navštěvuje. Odklon od realismu v závěru knihy je nejspíše projevem autorčina vnitřního zdráhání se o řešení problémů v ortodoxní židovské komunitě psát, jak sama přiznává. Tento postoj potvrzuje, že i anglo-židovských autorů se otázka dvojí identity úzce dotýká a ne vždy je zcela dořešena, což se pak odráží v závěrečných fázích jejich děl, jak je tomu právě u románu *Disobedience*. Nicméně už samotný fakt, že tento román po nějakých sto letech od vydání *Daniela Derondy*, zavádí čtenáře zpátky do židovského ghetta a co víc, ortodoxní židovské tradice v dnešním světě vysvětluje, je velmi přelomovým počinem.

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Synopsis:

The work deals with British Jewish literature and the shift of British Jewish identity that is reflected in it. Opening part of this thesis explains the two literary stereotypes which anticipated Anglo-Jewish writing. During the second part, the four stages of development of British Jewish literature are described and named Privatization, Hybridization, Suppression and Revival of British Jewish literature. The last part of this work chooses novel *Disobedience* by contemporary British Jewish writer Naomi Alderman as a representative of the fourth and crucial stage of Anglo-Jewish writing. The emphasis is put upon the main characters, Ronit, Esti and Dovid and their quest for self-identification and the concept of double identity that is linked to the real state of contemporary Anglo-Jewry.

Key Words:

British, Jewish, Anglo-Jewry, double identity, diaspora, assimilation, Privatization, Hybridization, Suppression, Revival of British Jewish literature.

Anotace:

Práce se zabývá britskou židovskou literaturou a posuny britské židovské identity, které jsou v ní zobrazovány. Úvodní část této práce se zabývá dvěma literárními stereotypy, které předcházely vzniku anglo-židovské literatury. Ve druhé části jsou popsány čtyři fáze vývoje této literatury, které jsou pojmenovány jako Osvojení, Hybridizace, Potlačení a Obnovení britské židovské literatury. Poslední část této práce zkoumá román *Disobedience* od současné britské židovské spisovatelky Naomi Aldermanové, který reprezentuje čtvrtou a hlavní fázi anglo-židovské literatury. Největší pozornost je věnována hlavním postavám, Ronit, Esti a Dovidovi, jejich snaze o sebeurčení a dvojí identitě, která vypovídá o reálném stavu současného anglo-židovského obyvatelstva.

Klíčová slova:

Britský, židovský, angložidé, dvojí identita, diaspora, asimilace, Osvojení, Hybridizace, Potlačení, Obnovení britské židovské literatury.