

3

Jewish Character?

Stereotype and Identity in Fiction from Israel
by Aharon Appelfeld and Sayed Kashua

NAOMI B. SOKOLOFF

In a story called “Transformation” (1968), celebrated Hebrew author and Holocaust survivor Aharon Appelfeld imagines characters at the far edges of Jewish identity.¹ His protagonists, a man and a woman on the run during the Nazi era, undergo a sudden, Kafkaesque metamorphosis. Taking refuge in a forest, they become unrecognizable as Jews, turn into peasants in appearance, and meld into nature. This tale can usefully be read in tandem with another story, from a later era, that similarly features a startling metamorphosis as it explores vexed boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. The story’s author, Sayed Kashua, is a Palestinian citizen of Israel who has published widely in the Hebrew press, and in “Herzl Disappears at Midnight” (2005) he imagines a young man who awakes each morning as a Jew and each night becomes an Arab.²

These two texts invite comparison, despite their significant thematic and artistic differences, for both carry their protagonists back and forth across ethnic lines to embody non-Jews and Jews and thereby pose the question of what those boundaries demarcate. What are the differences between Jews and others? What constitutes Jewishness, and what are its limits? Does something of it remain after the metamorphoses these characters endure? In both stories, the deployment of stereotype is one of the primary narrative techniques that the authors engage as they wrestle with such questions. Stereotyping depends on and stipulates rigid identity boundaries, yet fiction can use it to richly and creatively address issues of shifting self-definition. Here it serves as a productive tool of representation that contributes to Kashua’s and Appelfeld’s explorations of Jewish characters and Jewish character.

To be sure, stereotype has suffered a bad reputation. Countless literary and cultural studies have dismissed it as essentialist and reductive or condemned it as downright racist. Some scholars, however, have begun to weary of the stereotyping of stereotype as “always bad, simplistic idiotic, and rigid.”³ The salient question, they say, is how literature has appropriated stereotype and how writers use it. Do authors endorse stereotypes, parody them, flaunt them defiantly, or otherwise transform them when addressing a particular audience?⁴ Has the writer struggled with the problem of how to represent groups and how to use markers of identity or simply reinscribed negative clichés? Recognizing that stereotypes are always “already heard”—that is, they are received ideas that have been repeated and rehearsed many times previously—literary investigations have shifted to a model of intertextuality. A variety of studies consider how stereotypes flow and circulate and what their protean instability reveals about those who perpetrate them.⁵ Critics advocate asking not if any particular generalization about a collective population is true or plausible but whether such generalizations are endorsed (and by whom) and to what line of previous texts and statements they relate. Furthermore, there has been a call for more literary analysis that is audience-oriented and pragmatic.⁶ We might ask, what is the reception accorded to the use of stereotype in literature? Does this material have an impact socially? There is no doubt that the images promoted in literature have played a crucial role over many centuries in shaping cultural identities, fostering ethnic awareness, and even spurring nationalist movements. Therefore, it is important to assess not only how writers deploy stereotype but also how their work functions for and is received by their readership.

In the stories I discuss, Kashua and Appelfeld turn to stereotypes in a way that does not simply reinscribe denigrating images or renounce them but rather forces the reader to confront a conflict—between a world of limitless possibility and one where familiar typologies foreclose a choice about identity. The primary quality the stories share is that each combines two kinds of characterization. Starting with a mode of narration that fosters open-endedness, uncertainty of motive, and complexity of character, each text then switches to a reliance on stereotype that shuts down complexity. Rigid, pejorative imagery,

contrasting with the richness of narrative possibility, produces central tensions that animate each story. The result is oscillating interpretations; one demarcates and reconfirms schematic, inflexible boundaries of identity, while the other circumvents, disrupts, or transforms such boundaries in significant ways.

Appelfeld puzzles over perplexities of Jewish identity in an anti-semitic Europe, where Jews are both alien others and fully capable of assimilating into the surroundings. He asks readers to ponder whether Jewishness is predetermined and fixed or mutable and as easy to shed as old skin. Is it physically marked or something spiritual, a source of pride or stigma? These are the sorts of conundrums, of course, that Zionism proposed to resolve through a unity of language, people, and territory. Kashua's story, set in Israel decades after the founding of the Jewish state, complicates and challenges any such vision of unity: his writing even puts into question the Jewishness of the Hebrew language, and while the plot delves into the inner world of a Jewish character, it simultaneously asks readers to think about the status of Arabs in contemporary Israel.

Significantly, the two authors invite comparison, precisely because their grappling with the question of "who is a Jew" catapults them into the "who is an Israeli" debates. Both Appelfeld and Kashua represent voices that were once on the margins of Israeli letters, and each moves those voices closer to the center of the canon. Appelfeld has been instrumental since the 1960s in bringing the experiences of Holocaust survivors into Hebrew literature and earning empathy for them. His writing is widely recognized for broadening conceptions of Jewishness in Israeli culture at a time when sabras and Holocaust survivors were often seen as opposites, the former as heroes and the latter as pitiful and even contemptible victims. Kashua, for his part, has been one of the most popular and successful authors to bring Arab voices to a wide Israeli public, through his journalism, novels, short fiction, and television script writing.

Kashua's story treats the margins of Israeli society as an explicit theme, while Appelfeld's does not, but the reception of their fiction shows that both have changed the boundaries of Israeli identity through their literary role as cultural "outsiders" turned "insiders." Part of their outsider status stems from the fact that neither Appelfeld nor Kashua is

a native speaker of Hebrew. Adopting that language and writing from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor, Appelfeld reconnects Israeli identity with European Jewish continuity and tradition; in contrast, Kashua's use of Hebrew to convey an Arab voice presents Israel as a site of identity that is anything but cohesive. Both authors turn to stereotype and also to equivocations, as key elements in their art, as they ponder deep divisions between Jews and non-Jews, ill-defined boundaries of Jewish identity, and unsettled, unsettling tensions surrounding perceptions of what constitutes Jewish character.

Aharon Appelfeld's "Transformation"

One of the strengths of imaginative literature is its ability to offer dense, multilayered expression that may attempt to say what could not be said otherwise and what cannot be summarized or paraphrased without losing some of its richness. Poetic prose is known for creating "something unavailable in, and irreducible to, codified language," a description that neatly fits the lyric story "Transformation."⁷ Appelfeld's short tale compactly and economically expresses a contradictory vision—of a racist world of rigid exclusions, where boundaries are nonetheless unclear, where Jews cannot be limited to the humiliating views that others have of them, and where Jews are not different from others but still remain Jews.

This tale of Jews in disguise, hiding in a forest, relies heavily on stereotypes. Here, as in much of Appelfeld's fiction, non-Jews are imagined as peasants, associated with physical strength, coarseness, and nature. Inarticulate and narrow-minded, such characters are given to drink and violence. Such a type figure is what the protagonist of "Transformation" becomes. Although Jews in this fictional universe are equated with intellect, weakness, fear, and dishonesty, this Jewish man grows robust and brawny; loses language; learns to fish, hunt, and swim and to make fire and "listen to the wind" (58).

The opening of the narrative makes no explicit mention of Jews or gentiles. Instead, it emphasizes perplexity and abrupt change, presenting puzzling details unmoored in space and time. This beginning will be especially mystifying to an audience unfamiliar with the largely effaced, but pervasive, stereotypes that structure the text. The trans-

formation the characters undergo makes sense only if the reader is aware of the narrative assumption that these are European Jews fleeing Nazi persecution, that Jews and non-Jews are considered polar opposites, and that Jews sometimes escape destruction if they can pass as gentiles. Yet the opening paragraph offers few coordinates setting the locale. The second paragraph includes a brief and cryptic statement, that “for many days the farmers chased after them” (55). However, in order to gather the historical circumstance and external frame of reference necessary to process that information, the reader has to know something about Appelfeld’s own childhood during the Holocaust—part of which he spent hiding in forests—or take into consideration the gamut of other stories by him that feature Jews on the run, who camouflage their identities or are unsure where to turn as catastrophe looms.⁸

From the start, “Transformation” is marked by paradox and contradiction, as the plot both establishes stereotypes and undermines them. Jews here are completely different from their neighbors but become indistinguishable from them. In addition, as the tale posits a world of rigid clarities, it creates an air of vagueness and mystery. Precisely because the rigid ideas are so ingrained in the thinking of the characters that inhabit this world, the ability to transform and elude set identities seems amazing, wondrous, paradoxical. The text opens as the principal figure, startled, takes note of sudden changes he is experiencing. The title has already hinted that there will be incongruous qualities to his new circumstances, and, indeed, the original Hebrew title, “Hahishtanut,” not only implies “changing” but comes from root letters that also suggest difference and even oddity. This lexical choice points toward the character’s estrangement from self. Furthermore, *hahishtanut* is a verbal noun and so indicates that the transformation is a continuing process, not yet complete. All is so new to the man, and newly unfolding, that he finds himself in an uncertain state of mind. The Hebrew prose points to uncertainties and is filled with ambiguity. Here is one possible translation of the opening paragraph:⁹

“Why, these are not my gestures”—he said to himself and smiled. How quick were the changes—like autumn leaf-fall, and also what remained wasn’t his. An other skin grew on his face, his hands were

hairy. She too changed together with him, in a kind of mutual secret. She lost her face, her gentleness. Her throat reddened from the cold sun. The temperature did with them as it would. There was no escape from this. (55)

What is clear is that the character is glad to see that his gestures and bodily expressions have changed. An assumption that is unspoken but which comes through in a second reading is that peculiarly animated gesticulations have long been associated with negative stereotypes of Jews (this is a motif frequently found in Appelfeld's fiction), and the protagonist here is relieved to be rid of that stigma.¹⁰ More difficult to discern is whether he too looks down on "Jewish" attributes or is just glad to be unrecognizable. Ambiguities of translation include the word *giḥekh*, rendered here as "smiled" but which could instead signify "chuckled" or "smirked." That semantic range would suggest that the character feels a glee mixed with contempt, and "smirked" would bring heightened attention to a dissonance within the man himself. He feels distanced from his usual sense of self, alienated from it, even as an "other skin" grows on his face. He is definitely pleased with his metamorphosis, and he and the woman frequently laugh despite their dire circumstances, but the nuances of their laughter and their motives are open to interpretation.

Ambiguity continues in descriptions of the characters' helplessness. That these two are at the mercy of the elements is evident from the comment, "The temperature did with them as it would." Literally, however, this sentence reads, "The temperature did with them as with her own [*kivshelah*]" (emphasis added). The concept "her own" suggests belonging; the two characters have merged into the landscape and found a home there. At the same time, more ominously, the line might be better formulated in English as "the temperature toyed with them" or perhaps, evoking a sexual overtone, "had its way with them." The forest is both shelter and torment. That "there was no escape from this" reinforces the emphasis on powerlessness. But what is "this"? Is it just the temperature, the elements in general, Jewishness, or something else? Or is it the persecution this pair is experiencing that has not yet been mentioned? The vagueness is deliberate and emphatic. In view of these meanings, the first sentence—"Why,

these are not my gestures”—also takes on a new dimension. The word *tenu'ah*, translated as “gestures,” more usually signifies “motion” or “movement.” The entire story, as it unfolds, will concern the constant wandering, the relentless, forced movement of the protagonists. Does the opening sentence, with its mention of gesture, gesture toward all of that? Perhaps the intention is to express the man’s sentiment that the whole circumstance of being on the move, fleeing like a hunted animal, is not of his own doing.

As the personification of the weather demonstrates, an implied narrator is at work here, playing an interpretive role. This narrative voice mediates between the characters and the reader, creating layers of possible meaning through imagery that insists on the ambiguities and oddity of the Jews’ situation. Similar use of metaphor throughout the story suggests an assaying of elusive meaning. The implied narrator also turns to simile (e.g., the changes were as quick as “autumn leaf-fall”) to create comparisons. Most readers would find Appelfeld’s own Holocaust experiences and the characters’ plight, hiding in the forest, unimaginable. Similes here suggest approximations; they link an incommunicable reality to a more familiar world that the reader might better understand. In his mediating role, the narrator also turns frequently to the word *ke’ilu* (as if); for example, the man and woman speak little, “as if they were born without words, as if they had no words anymore” (56). This phrase suggests that the narrator is perennially looking for the right words but cannot quite articulate what is happening, even as the characters are living an “as if” situation, an extended impersonation. The conditional conveys the effort it takes to narrate the strangeness and complexity of their experience. Altogether, the narrator is never able to refer to phenomena directly or definitively and so explains them tentatively.

And yet this is the same narrator who later explicitly turns to reductive stereotype. As the plot progresses the characters take on more and more characteristics associated with non-Jews. The man is said to embrace the woman “as drunks do” (59); he begins to beat the woman, and she begs him not to hit her, saying, “after all, you’re a Jew not a goy” (60). This kind of crude referential shorthand conjoins jarringly with the elusiveness, vagueness, and emphasis on disorientation at the story’s opening. The text that evades well-worn images at first, later embraces them.

How does such stereotyping, disturbing in its crudity, operate in this work? Is Appelfeld simply repeating conventional calumny? In part, the answer is yes, but only in part. His art recreates the prevalence of such thinking within the formative world of his own life; when asked about such images, he responds that he tries to convey the brutal surroundings he knew in his youth and attitudes that were an integral part of that environment.¹¹ It is crucial to note, though, that it is the characters within the fiction who voice prejudice; they express received commonplaces that the implied author does not necessarily endorse. In “Transformation” it is the woman who says that only a “goy” would beat her. In Appelfeld’s novel *Tzili*, similar remarks are made: a gentile prostitute states, “The Jews are weak, but they’re gentle too. A Jew would never strike a woman”; a Jew hiding in a bunker insists, “All the Jews are cowards”; a Jewish woman says of her lover that he is “a goy in every sense of the word, drunk and violent.”¹² In an Appelfeld story called “The Return,” a Jew estranged from his community says of Jews that “their cleverness is used for evil”; in non-Jews, he sees a “kind of primitiveness” and creatures of nature “lacking cunning.”¹³ Such imagery comes through in many other texts by Appelfeld, including *The Age of Wonders*, *The Conversion*, *Katerina*, *All Whom I Have Loved*, and more.

That this author does not aim primarily for historicity or mimetic documentation should also be kept in mind. He sees stereotypes as a way of conveying primordial fear. He uses them, he says, because at the time of the war, “we came into contact with archaic mythical forces, a kind of dark subconscious the meaning of which we did not know, nor do we know it to this day.”¹⁴ Precisely because they are primitive and elemental devices, stereotypes suggest elemental fear and lives reduced by circumstance to primitive measures. The writer, in his fiction, magnifies these images to indicate evil forces of enormous dimension. The stereotypes ask to be taken not as plausible sociological categorizations but as archetypes that resonate collectively. In line with this thinking, some critics have read “Transformation” as a tale of mythic rather than historical orientation, one that reactivates the age-old trope of the eternally Wandering Jew.¹⁵

Altogether, Appelfeld exaggerates the exaggeratedness of the rude stereotype, the primitiveness of the image of primitive impulses, to

create his own distinctive vision of Jewish suffering in a viciously antisemitic world. In “Transformation” two very different techniques working in conjunction with each other make this effort artistically effective. On the one hand, subtle ambivalences, vagueness, and hesitations point to the puzzling oddity of the characters’ world, suggesting the complexity of their personal circumstances; on the other hand, elemental, rude minimalism intensifies the impression of a strange social reality that the author expects will exceed the grasp of the reader. This narrative sketches the imagined realm with highly simplistic, stylized contours as it insists on the base hatred and fear that dominate this environment. Together, the two techniques yield a picture that is eerie and, at once, both elusive and earthy.

Does the story of Jews on the run reach resolution? Do unalterable, impermeable boundaries of identity remain entrenched, or does a vision of adaptable, fluid, complex identity prevail? The issues come to a head at the end, as winter approaches. The woman wants to take shelter with peasants; she feels that she is now unidentifiable as a Jew. The man, though, does not feel safe and wants to hold on to her in the forest. Besides, he cannot move because the frost has frozen and bound his legs. These images of binding, holding, and releasing deepen the thematic emphasis on entrapment and escape. Most pointedly, the man realizes that he must let the woman go, but he determines that, when the frost melts, he will find her and “bind her” (*ya’akod otah*; 62). In his analysis of the story, Alan Mintz notes that these words are inevitably linked in the Hebrew reader’s mind with the Akeda, the biblical tale of the binding of Isaac. Mintz interprets the allusion to mean that the character imagines a violent and stereotypically non-Jewish denouement (Jewish tradition focuses on *not* following through with the threat of human sacrifice); yet *ya’akod*, with its echoes of Jewish religious contexts, indicates that the character holds on to vestiges of his Jewishness even when he acts most like the stereotypically brutal “goy.”¹⁶

An alternative interpretation, with a somewhat different emphasis, could be that *ya’akod* is the vocabulary not of the character but of the narrator—someone who crafts the allusive richness of Hebrew in a way that conveys the character’s paradoxical, liminal identity. The phrase thereby gestures toward a potential future for the protagonist,

calling to mind the life of the author himself—someone who survived the kind of experience his characters suffer, who went on to make a rich narrative art out of his explorations of Jewish cultural tradition, and who feels intimately bound up with his heritage and connected to the past. As Appelfeld puts it, especially in the autobiographical *A Table for One* (2001), such ties to the past are life sustaining and vital to his art. He notes, “When I write, I feel bound [*meḥubar*] to a time and a place; but when the writing no longer flows, it is as if a cloud descends and my world darkens and narrows.”¹⁷

It is important, then, to keep in mind various kinds of “binding” evoked in Appelfeld’s work to understand that final paragraph of “Transformation.” For along with the negative reverberations of the word *kevulot* (that is, “bound”—the word used in the text to indicate that the character’s feet are roped in by the frost), and *ya’akod* (a verb which is fraught with potential for violence), the implied narrator, like the storyteller Appelfeld, remains bound up with the Jewish past and with tradition (*meḥubar*) in a productive and enriching way. Maybe the Jew in the forest is caught in a world of rigid dichotomies, caught between escaping and embracing his Jewish past, and can never make a full metamorphosis. But maybe Appelfeld crafts a fiction that conveys radical undecidability, such that the character’s impasse exposes the entire repertoire of stereotypes that differentiate Jew/non-Jew as constructed and untenable. At the same time, the last words of the story hold out for the value of reclaiming allegiance and identification with Jewish heritage, as the narrator builds his art by reaching out for the emotional and cultural ties that bind.

In his autobiographical essays and memoirs, Appelfeld describes his personal efforts to reach out for such bonds. In the process, he also challenges received notions of Jewish identity by exploring his own lived experience of Jewishness as a variegated and ever-evolving phenomenon. As a child he had very meager Jewish education, religious or otherwise. After the Holocaust, he forged a new life for himself through an extraordinary determination to acquire Jewish literacy. Studying the texts and traditions from the Jewish past gave him the tools for his own art and helped him create characters that run the gamut of Jewish cultural affiliation. All this attests to a more constructivist than essentialist view of identity, as does the fact that his fiction

does not limit its representation to a narrow range of Jews. Instead, it portrays a spectrum of types, from religious Jews to assimilated ones, Europeans and Israelis, Communists and faith healers, converts and apostates, Yiddishists and self-hating Jews, and a variety of mute, indecipherable figures. Moving away from rigid stereotypes, his work often includes positive, sympathetic gentile characters as well.

Yet for Appelfeld, Jewishness is not only something chosen or performed, subject to the particular creative adaptations of the individual. In his view it is also inescapable. Because of their history, their family connections, and the prejudices directed against them, Jews cannot deny that they are Jews. What is striking about his artistic techniques is that they hold in balance these multiple, seemingly contradictory definitions. In this conception, Jewishness is multiform, pluralistic, and mutable, yet given at birth, highly determined by society's forces and discourses, but also an inherited sense of self that makes fierce claims to loyalty and commands continuity.¹⁸

Sayed Kashua's "Herzl Disappears at Midnight"

Kashua's story "Herzl Disappears at Midnight" is another text marked by radical undecidability and contradiction. It features an abrupt metamorphosis that, every night, turns its Jewish protagonist into an Arab and every morning turns him back into a Jew. From the opening sentence the reader knows that there is something contradictory about this character; his name, Herzl Haliwa, indicates his dual existence, for "Herzl" is practically synonymous with Zionism, and "Haliwa" is an Arabic word, meaning "sweet" or "beautiful."¹⁹ In short, this man is named for a culture hero and for ideal qualities, but his duality will turn out to be something much less than ideal.

That this name is intended to invoke stereotype is clear from the outset, because it so closely echoes the name of another fictional character from a story by the popular Israeli writer Etgar Keret. The plot of Keret's "Arkadi Haliwa Takes the Number Five" consists of a gruesome series of non sequiturs and random events that make no claim to plausibility; the narrative aggressively flaunts the lack of psychological complexity in characters representing "disparate ethnic and political factions."²⁰ Reviled for being part Russian immigrant, part Arab, the

protagonist blows up a bus in a surreal and violent satire of contemporary Israeli life. Kashua's "Herzl Disappears at Midnight" begs to be read as response and rejoinder to Keret's narrative. Herzl Haliwa, too, is a patently textual contrivance, and the story indicates quandaries of an individual who, like Keret's protagonist, crosses ethnic lines, but Kashua presents a more humorous, sympathetic, and less violent character. His story is an attempt to defuse stereotype, unsettle rigid boundaries of identity in a deeply divided society, and yet, ultimately, acknowledge an ongoing appeal that stereotypical thinking exerts.

After the opening mention of the name, what is remarkable about Kashua's narrative is precisely the lack of explanatory exposition. The implications of the name "Herzl Haliwa" are not immediately clear. On the contrary, the story offers no explicit summary of the protagonist's situation but, instead, obfuscates reference to place and temporal setting. What the narrative emphasizes is the disorientation of the character as he awakes, startled, unaware of where he is and finding a stranger in bed with him. "Herzl Haliwa let out a cry and jerked his head from the pillow. He recovered very quickly, after all this wasn't the first time, and he stayed silent." This passage underscores a suppression of self, as Herzl stifles his voice and the sound of his movements. The word translated as "stayed silent," *ne'elam*, is a homophone of the word *ne'elam*, "disappeared," which has just appeared in the title. This character is trying to quiet himself and his pounding heart as he hastens to disappear, rushing to get away without waking "Anna von what's-her-name" beside him.

Subsequently, his breathless effort to escape is captured in a string of verbs, all in present tense: for example, he "puts on" his shirt, "picks up" his shoes, "walks on tiptoe," "pulls" slowly on the handle, "looks" one last time at the woman, "leaves" the room, and "walks" quickly through the streets, afraid. In a story that consists of only some four thousand words, one-third of the text is devoted to this account of running away. The style is marked by repetition (the word *maher*, "fast," appears three times), and a run-on sentence intensifies the focus on Herzl's anxiety ("He's almost running, some of the stores are open, he flies by them, doesn't turn his gaze to them"). This technique of characterization, built primarily on a report of actions, focuses the reader's attention on the subjective experience of the pro-

tagonist, with a particular emphasis on his uncertainties: the text sums that up clearly, stating, "He has no idea where to go." The reader does not know why Herzl perceives the surroundings to be so threatening. Perhaps he is struggling with guilt about a one-night stand, or panic at having ended up somewhere dangerous, or perhaps he suffers from a psychological disorder, or perhaps some other circumstance obtains altogether. His restlessness and alienation are patent, but his motives are open to various interpretations.

The use of many definite nouns and simple vocabulary suggests a very concrete situation, but the prose is Kafkaesque in its disorienting specificity. Only gradually does the text introduce a few details hinting at the reasons for Herzl's distress. By the end of the second paragraph it is clear that the events take place in the Old City of Jerusalem (thanks to mention of the Jaffa Gate). Though readers receive little information that would ground the action in location and historical period, they learn, a page and a half later, that Herzl is comfortable as soon as he reaches a Jewish neighborhood. Readers can conclude, therefore, that this character is a Jew who feared being alone early in the morning in an Arab area of town. Still, it is notable that the narrative avoids direct definition or classification of Herzl; readers are not told about his appearance, his origins, or his station in life. This technique is very different from standard devices of characterization such as the formal introduction or the thumbnail sketch found in, for example, nineteenth-century realist fiction. The story does not move from the general to the particular or from exposition to scene. It does not typify; rather, it focuses on observable, visible detail that nonetheless leaves the reader without much reference to an external world or set of ideas.

This extended opening is then followed by an abrupt change of emphasis. From a rather lengthy account of actions conveying panicky but ill-defined feelings, the text shifts to a straightforward, even formulaic articulation of Herzl's problem. He has one life by day, another by night. We find this out when the character, searching for a way to justify his nightly absences to his girlfriend, comes up with a pithy, simple explanation that he hopes she will accept.

What will he tell her? Of course, the truth and only the truth, but where exactly to start? Maybe from the end, which is basically that he turns

into an Arab after midnight, just like Cinderella, that is, not exactly, but his meaning is clear. It's correct, and Nogah will believe this story immediately, because after all she's completely gullible. And perhaps from the beginning instead.

In other words, he'll start from the fact that his mother, at age forty, hoped for a child and prayed for it "even if he's born half Arab." Apparently, her wish was granted.

So Herzl here invokes fairy tale, referring to a highly familiar folk character to sum up his unstable identity. What is the artistic advantage or effect of this device? First, the reference to a narrow type expeditiously focuses all the earlier anxiety into a clearer picture. The folk figure is a kind of shorthand or abbreviation, something that readers universally will grasp, and so they will get the picture with a punchy jolt of recognition. In addition, the whimsicality of the fairy tale keeps the tone of the story light, while at the same time voicing social protest. The move to typological characterization conveys to the reader that Herzl can be thought of reductively; indeed, in effect he has already been reduced to a stereotype, for the people around him see him not as an individual but as a Jew alone and vulnerable in Arab streets. At the opening, the reader is aware of Herzl as a bundle of emotional energy and unexplained but urgent inner life, perhaps a bit cartoonish in his hyperactivity yet touchingly human in his perplexing distress. Then the anxiety and potential complexity of motive disappear and are replaced by simple summary and definition in terms of others' expectations of him. (Arabs hate him for being a Jew; Jews, it is clear, hate him for the opposite reason—even his own mother has denigrated the idea of being "half Arab.")

In this satirical moment articulating his dilemma, Herzl makes quite a point of noting that his physical being does not change with his nightly metamorphosis. There are no racial differences between a Jew and an Arab, in the sense of distinguishable bodily features that set them apart. And yet everyone can see the difference right away when he undergoes his transformation. Moreover, confirming those differences, Herzl conforms in his behavior to prevalent social stereotypes. When he is an Arab he drinks arrack, and while a Jew he drinks wine. As an Arab he does not know Hebrew. He is a proud Palestinian

nationalist and an aggressive activist for his cause. He is hostile to Jews and refuses to go to Jewish neighborhoods so as to avoid the humiliation of being regarded with suspicion. He is dominating and callous toward women. When he is a Jew, in contrast, he does not know Arabic. He is funny, intellectual, vulgar, and timid; he is callous toward women but wracked with guilt over his behavior. While caricature such as this presents absurd simplification, it can be read here not as abandoning verisimilitude so much as aptly expressing the idea that impossible circumstances render the character clownish.²¹ The society Herzl lives in suffers a paralyzing simplification, that is, the assumption that Jews and Arabs must live as a dichotomy, and this kind of thinking leaves no room for complex people or for those at the margins of either group. In actuality, Arabs and Jews live in close proximity and make claims to the same space; Kashua suggests that until Jews acknowledge and accept Arabs as occupying both a shared space and a shared history, the prevailing beliefs that leave no room for complexity will always be a source of anxiety, disturbing and disrupting lives even at the most intimate levels.

The use of fairy tale in Kashua's story also suggests that, magically, Herzl's fate could be reversed. Cinderella has a happy ending. Might the same be lurking at the close of "Herzl Disappears at Midnight"? As the conclusion approaches, Kashua makes another shift in characterization, telling the story differently, yet again, and so recasting the reader's grasp of Herzl's identity. Herzl finally takes his girlfriend with him to witness his nightly existence. They visit an Arab bar (where he is ashamed of her being Jewish), but she does not comprehend what is happening. She assumes that the whole episode is a joke, and she calls him "Ahmad," a stereotypical name that she uses in a flip manner to question the seriousness of what she has just seen. They return home, and as he wakes up in the morning, once more a Jew, she disregards the physical evidence she has witnessed. She can only accept his transformation as made up, merely an amusing game.

"So, what's gonna be with this whole Arab story?" she asked.

"For my part," he said on the way to the bathroom, "everyone can go to hell."

Nogah's formulation of the situation ("this whole Arab story") posits that Herzl's transformation is a fiction. In this way she raises the possibility that he is creatively telling and acting out his life as a wry and entertaining tale. His response to her, that "everyone can go to hell" (literally, everyone can "burn up"), could be read as confirming that understanding. In other words, now he is writing his own ending; he has acquired a voice of defiance and he has gained agency. He rejects others' views of what is Jewish and what is Arab and relies on his own opinions. Is he thereby forging a redemptive, improvisational self? Can identity become more of an intentionally and individually constructed story, still a difficult and absurd identity, but one over which he has more control because he himself defines it? Perhaps it can. Self-deprecating humor and the development of a self-conscious artistic voice have led to many successes for Kashua, the author, as he writes about painful issues of identity that beset Palestinians living in Israel. It is possible that his fictional character has a similar capacity for bitter, but comic, self-invention.

But the ending of "Herzl Disappears at Midnight" could be read in another manner as well. The way Herzl uses the word *kulam*, his last pronouncement could be translated as "they can all go to hell." However, appearing right after Nogah refers to his "Arab story," the word "they" might refer to Arabs in general. In that case, the last line would therefore mean that the Jew is simply reverting to intolerance and disrespect. This reading would reinstate the dichotomy Jew/Arab and confirm the rigid boundaries between Herzl's contradictory identities. This reading is reinforced by other evidence that indicates Kashua is holding out, at least playfully, for a kind of essentialism. When Herzl states that "basically he turns into an Arab after midnight," the word for "basically" in the original is *be'etsem*—meaning "fundamentally," "essentially," or "at the core"—"basically" in the sense of "at the very base" rather than "more or less." Furthermore, that the last line of the text has Herzl on the way to the bathroom hints that, as a bigoted Jew, he will have his comeuppance; this is because a washroom has been mentioned once before in the story, at a particularly significant juncture. At that moment, Herzl tells his girlfriend that there are no physical differences between his day self and his night self, except that, then again, maybe there are. He remarks, "When I was little I noticed

one thing, though; nights when I got up to pee I felt that it had gotten heavier down there, a little bigger than I was used to in those days.” The author wryly hints that Arabs really are manlier than Jews. Having appropriated stereotype for sophisticated artistic purposes, having pointed to the limitations of stereotypes and satirized a society for its rigid polarities, Kashua also invokes a stereotype to take a sly jab at Jews. Altogether, this very short text cleverly reaffirms schematic, fixed boundaries of identity, even as it aims to circumvent or get past them. Thus at the very end Herzl Haliwa—as a Jew, as an Arab, as both at once—reverts to preconception and so suggests the tenacious appeal of thinking in stereotypes.

The equivocation at the end of Kashua’s story, the undecidable outcome, is put into relief and reinforced by Herzl’s earlier, self-conscious statements about storytelling. The character is aware that the structure of a story affects how readers and listeners construe meanings, guiding them toward specific interpretive options. When he muses about whether to tell his story from start to finish or vice versa, he underscores how narratives work, drawing the readers’ attention to the importance of endings and beginnings—in general and in the current text in particular. The character explicitly indicates that there is no straightforward way to convey his truth. Thus when he determines to tell his girlfriend the truth, the truth is that he is just like Cinderella, but “not exactly.” And he supposes that she will accept his narrative, but perhaps only because she is “gullible.” We find an implicit parallel in Kashua’s tale, a tale that also expresses a truth that cannot be conveyed unequivocally.

One of the *raison d’être* of literature is to attempt to express that which exceeds “familiar norms”—that which could not be said otherwise.²² Literature as a way of knowing allows for ambivalence and multiple interpretations. Kashua has found a way to say something about boundaries between Jews and Arabs that could not be expressed otherwise with the same richness and ambivalence, irony, humor, and sting. The author’s use of stereotype helps him succeed in this task, as one of several modes of (sometimes conflicting) characterization. Furthermore, the prose provides aesthetic pleasure through its combination of approaches. It offers, on the one hand, an economy of style that shuts down complexity and, on the other, a profusion of detail

and uncertainties that lead to open-endedness. The reader must take an active role in a game of constructing meaning from the patterns and, in particular, in determining the protagonist's character traits. It is in this sense that, as Roland Barthes famously phrased it, "to read is to struggle to name."²³ In interpreting "Herzl Disappears at Midnight," readers must indeed decide how to assess the dual, symbolic name of the protagonist, Herzl Haliwa, and how to understand the facetious name "Ahmad" that Nogah attributes to him. It is up to readers to assign these names coherence, or to conclude that they signal irreconcilable impasse, or to imagine some kind of resolution that depends on understanding the author's play with identity as humorous performance. Whatever conclusion the reader reaches, the idealized values implied in the protagonist's name at the beginning of the story undergo complication as the story unfolds. Theodor Herzl's novel *Altneuland* (1902) gave rise to the famous slogan about the realization of the Zionist dream: "If you will it, it is not a fairy tale." Kashua's tragicomic spoof on the Cinderella fairy tale presents a highly ironic view of what actually happened when the dream was realized.

Conclusions

Not surprisingly, Kashua's writings, especially his television scripts that reach a mass audience, have met with controversial reception. Jewish journalists welcomed his sitcom *Arab Work* (2007) with great enthusiasm; Arab focus groups decried as misrepresentations of reality the stereotypes that underpin Kashua's humor, and voices in the Arab press assailed him for imagining Palestinian characters who willingly assimilate, integrating themselves into Jewish culture in Israel.²⁴

Writing in Hebrew, imagining the inner world of a Jew, and echoing Keret, Kashua situates his story "Herzl Disappears at Midnight" forthrightly in the mainstream of Israeli fiction. In the process, he also transforms Appelfeld into a kind of precursor. Whether there is any direct influence there or not, we can never read Appelfeld exactly the same way again after reading Kashua. Both authors insert themselves into a larger span of Jewish literary tradition, as they recall Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis"—a narrative that expresses the feelings of a Jewish author alienated by a world that views him with contempt.

Nonetheless, a fundamental and integral aspect of Kashua's art is that it puts a new twist on Hebrew fiction, transforming it through an Arab voice. At a time in Israel when more and more Arab Palestinians are becoming educated in Hebrew, yet growing intensely alienated politically, Kashua's "Herzl Disappears at Midnight" tells a story of Jewish identity from the inside and the outside at the same time.²⁵ As a result, this story presents its own conundrums and convolutions: the protagonist, like Appelfeld's, is a Jew on the run, but only in part from his enemies; Herzl runs also from himself and cannot quite seem to find a way to coexist with the Arab reality that is also part of him. Appelfeld, too, put a new twist on Hebrew literature when his fiction helped change broadly held attitudes toward the Holocaust. Thanks to his writing, European Jewish characters who had had a minor, even denigrated, role in Israeli literature for several decades met with new empathy and identification on the part of Hebrew readers.

Starting from the position of cultural outsiders in Israeli society, both Appelfeld and Kashua have contributed to major transformations in Hebrew fiction, reflecting and shaping a multicultural Israel. A cacophony of literary voices increasingly has questioned the boundaries that have defined what an Israeli is. Not only have these writers defied and dismantled the once ideal image of the sabra, the new Jew, that prevailed in early Zionist thinking, they have created a pluralistic vision that encompasses the perspectives of Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews as well as Ashkenazi Jews, religious as well as secular individuals, women as well as men, European-born Holocaust survivors as well as sabras, and Arabs as well as Jews.

Notes

1. The story "Transformation" appeared in the collection *Bekomat hakark'a* [On the Ground Floor], by Aharon Appelfeld (Tel Aviv: Daga, 1968), 55–62. Further citations to this story are given in the text. All of the translations are my own.

2. Sayed Kashua, "Herzl ne'elam beḥatsot," *Ha'arets*, October 3, 2005, <http://www.haaretz.co.il> (accessed December 8, 2007). All translations are my own. An English version from 2006 by Vivian Eden appeared under the title "Cinderella" in *Words without Borders: The Online Magazine for International Literature* <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=Cinderella>

(accessed February 5, 2010). However, I use my own translations in this essay in order to capture more of the nuances I think are crucial to interpretation of the story.

3. Mireille Roelle, quoted in Carrie Tirado Bramen, "Speaking in Typeface: Characterizing Stereotypes in Gayl Jones' *Mosquito*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 1 (2003): 133.

4. For a helpful summary of how the field of literary study has shifted toward these questions, see Ruth Amossy and Anne Herschberg Pierrot, *Stéréotypes et clichés: Langue, discours, société* [Stereotypes and Clichés: Language, Speech, Society] (Paris: Nathan, 1997); Joep Leerssen, "The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey," *Poetics Today* 21, no. 2 (2000): 267–92; Leerssen, "Types, Tropes, and the Poetics of Conventionality," *Poetics Today* 22, no. 3 (2001): 691–96; and Leerssen, "The Downward Pull of Cultural Essentialism," in *Image into Identity: Constructing and Assigning Identity in a Culture of Modernity*, ed. Michael Wintle (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 31–52. On the study of stereotype from the field of social psychology, see Marco Cinnirella, "Ethnic and National Stereotypes: A Social Identity Perspective," in *Beyond Pug's Tour: National and Ethnic Stereotyping in Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 37–52. I have also found helpful a discussion of stereotype and self-writing in Juan Velasco, "Automitografías: The Border Paradigm and Chicana/o Autobiography," *Biography* 27, no. 2 (2004): 13–38.

5. See, e.g., Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of "the Jew" in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Cheyette, ed., *Between "Race" and Culture: Representations of "the Jew" in English and American Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996). Sander L. Gilman has written many studies on stereotypes of Jews and the history of those images. See, e.g., Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

6. Leerssen, "Rhetoric of National Character."

7. Benjamin Harshav, *Explorations in Poetics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 45.

8. For an overview of Appelfeld's life and writing, see, e.g., Yigal Schwartz, *Aharon Appelfeld: From Individual Lament to Tribal Eternity* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2001); and Naomi B. Sokoloff, "Aharon Appelfeld," in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 299, *Holocaust Novelists*, ed. Efraim Sicher (Detroit: Gale Research, 2004).

9. My thanks to Or Rogovin for discussing this translation with me.

10. For an illuminating discussion of public discourse on the topic of "Jewish" gestures, see Susan A. Glenn, "'Funny, You Don't Look Jewish': Visual Stereotypes and the Making of Modern Jewish Identity," in this volume.

11. Aharon Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York: Fromm International, 1994), 74–76.

12. Aharon Appelfeld, *Tzili: The Story of a Life*, trans. Dalya Bilu (New York: Dutton, 1983), 77, 51, 184.

13. Aharon Appelfeld, "Hashivah," in *Bekomat hakark'a*, 80, 75 (my translation).

14. Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair*, 66.

15. See, e.g., Gershon Shaked, "Appelfeld and His Times: Transformations of Ahashveros, the Eternal Wandering Jew," *Hebrew Studies* 36 (1995): 87–100; and Alan Mintz, *Ḥurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

16. Mintz, *Ḥurban*, 220–23.

17. Aharon Appelfeld, *'Od hayom gadol* (Jerusalem: Keter and Ben Zvi, 2001), 116 (my translation). The passage is found in a different form in Appelfeld, *A Table for One: Under the Light of Jerusalem*, trans. Aloma Halter (New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 2006), 100. For discussion of Appelfeld's life and writing and his entrance into Hebrew literary tradition, see Naomi B. Sokoloff, "Life/Writing: Appelfeld's Autobiographical Work and the Modern Jewish Canon," in *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon: Essays on Literature and Culture in Honor of Ruth R. Wisse*, ed. Justin Cammy, Dara Horn, Alyssa Quint, and Rachael Rubinstein (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Jewish Studies, Harvard University, 2008), 371–85.

18. This take on Appelfeld differs significantly from interpretations of his work by critics who emphasize his imagery of Jews and non-Jews as polar opposites. See, e.g., Gershon Shaked, *Sifrut az, kan, ve'akshav* [Literature Then, Here, and Now] (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1993), 143–51.

19. My thanks to Amal Equeiq for her input on the meaning of this name.

20. Yaron Peleg, *Israeli Culture between the Two Intifadas: A Brief Romance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 80. Keret's story appeared in the collection *Etgar Keret, Tsinorot* [Pipelines] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992).

21. Robert Alter notes that stereotypes may be "approximations rather than misrepresentations" of reality. He has in mind Dickens's comic grotesque figures that are walking embodiments of a metaphor and not "an abandonment of verisimilitude but bold stylizations that catch the terrible, absurd simplicity with which some people can reduce their lives." Robert Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 57, 64.

22. Alter, *Pleasures of Reading*, 183–84.

23. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 92, quoted in and discussed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), 36.

24. See, e.g., Ruta Kupper, "Kol yisrael 'aravim zeh lezeh" [All Israelis Are Responsible for One Another], *Ha'aretz*, November 13, 2007.

25. Arabs now make up the majority of students in many Hebrew language and literature classes in Israeli universities.