Series Editor

Valerie Estelle Frankel

Jewish science fiction is a monumental literary genre worldwide, with hundreds of novels and short stories along with an enormous canon of films, plays, television shows, and graphic novels. It's also strikingly popular. Not only have works of this category just won the Hugo and World Fantasy Award while dominating bestseller lists, but talks on the subject are standing room only. The Own Voices movement has led to a renaissance of Jewish fantasy, even as its authors create imaginary worlds reflecting their unique cultures. This series seeks subtopics of exploration within the massive canon, defining aspects of Jewish genre fiction and its unique qualities. It features both monographs and anthologies focused on trends, tropes, individual authors, beloved franchises, and so on. Scholars of all disciplines are welcome, especially those in Jewish Studies, Literature, and Media Studies, while interdisciplinary and international perspectives are particularly encouraged.

Titles in the series

Jewish Fantasy Worldwide: Trends in Speculative Stories from Australia to Chile, edited Valerie Estelle Frankel
Jews in Popular Science Fiction: Marginalized in the Mainstream, edited Valerie Estelle Frankel
Goliath as Gentle Giant: Sympathetic Portrayals in Popular Culture, Jonathan L. Friedmann
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Jewish Fantasy Worldwide

Trends in Speculative Stories from Australia to Chile

Edited by Valerie Estelle Frankel

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Chapter 14

Why Are Science Fiction Anthologies Ashkanormative?

Mara W. Cohen Ioannides and Valerie Estelle Frankel

This chapter is an examination of Ashkanormative verses Sephardi and Mizrahi references in science fiction through an examination of eleven sci-fi anthologies that are labeled as Jewish.[1] With the growth of Sephardi and Mizrahi studies in the last two decades because of a burst of realization that American Jewry is more than Ashkenazi, one would expect fiction to have seen this growth as well. There have been numerous memoirs about the crypto-Jewish experience, the Black Jewish experience, even the Bene Israel experience published along with fiction about the Sephardi and Mizrahi. However, whether this has expanded into the genre of science fiction is the focus of this inquiry, especially as the sci-fi writer Mark Newton reminds us that "science fiction and fantasy is a genre that effectively shows the difference between ourselves and the Other."[2] Nonetheless, it seems the idea of other refers to non-Jews, not different Jews.

ASHKENAZI VS. SEPHARDI AND MIZRAHI

The twenty-first century sparked a growth in the fields of Sephardic and Mizrahi Studies as scholars fought to erase the belief that "Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews . . . played a marginal role in the development of Jewish and Hebrew literatures."[3] Sephardic communal organizations never lasted once the Sephardic enclave left their New York ghetto. By the 1960s Sephardim were even sending their children to Ashkenazi-sponsored schools and yeshivot[4]; thus, contributing to their own cultural demise. Arielle Angel, the editor of the leftist *Jewish Currents*, is frustrated that Sephardi culture has suffered

and continues to suffer "erasure."[5] Leslie Fiedler, a novelist and former professor of literature at State University of New York—Buffalo, embodies this notion of Sephardic erasure by making such statements last century as "there is a kind of Jewish- American speech even in the second and third generations which is partly built up of memories of Yiddish words."[6] Devan Naar, however, believes that "if you enter into the literary realm in Ladino, you get a very different image of what Jewish life was like. There is no shtetl in Ladino literature and there's no sense of isolation. There are cities, a sense of connectivity, an urban fabric, movement."[7] However, by the 1990s Ladino and other Judeo languages had fallen into disuse.

JEWISH SCIENCE FICTION

While scholars may argue that science fiction dates to Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* and a series of works by Jules Verne in the mid-1800s almost everyone agrees that Hugo Gernsback's 1926 publishing of the first issue of *Amazing Stories* and his coining of the term "scientifiction" (later science fiction) was the birth of modern science-based stories.

Gernsback, the Jew from Luxemburg who grew up in New York City, more than likely participated in the café life of Jews there, much like the salons of Europe.[8] At these café meetings in New York City where science fiction was begun, Sephardic leftists tried to join the discussion with their political left-leaning Ashkenazi co-religionists, "but it became clear to the Ladino-speaking socialists that this was not their space. None of these leftist Jewish institutions made space for participation by other kinds of Jews."[9] This is not entirely unsurprising as of the 1,397,423 Jewish immigrants between 1880 and 1909, only 3,413 were Sephardim.[10] The pre-existing Sephardic community was also quite small. They were clearly a minority of the minority.

As the Yiddish culture of New York in the 1920s fell apart with the assimilation of European Jews into mainstream American culture, Yiddish radio and professional Klezmer bands were created, as was *Amazing Stories*, to provide Yiddish culture to those who no longer lived in Ashkenazi neighborhood.[11] The Ladino-speaking communities were feeling the same stresses but did not feel as a community that preserving their language would be an economic or social advantage,[12] and so they did not create radio shows or newspapers. The Sephardim created enclaves of small communities to support their fellow Old Country neighbors, but never did create a cohesive multi-cultural Sephardic organization to bind all these subgroups.[13]

JEWS IN SCIENCE FICTION

Jewish science fiction is hard to define, as is any other Jewish type of literature. Steven H. Silver, a winner of multiple Hugo Awards, believes that Jewish sci-fi "look[s] at the survival of the religion and culture."[14] Michael Burstein, an award-winning sci-fi writer, and Valerie Estelle Frankel, perhaps the most published scholar on Jewish sci-fi, agree that there are three ways to categorize Jewish sci-fi: 1. A Jewish story that is sci-fi, 2. A sci-fi story that explores Jewish themes, and 3. "I'll know it when I see it."[15] In an effort to uncover if there are any non-Ashkenazi science fiction in these anthologies, I have divided this Jewish science fiction into three categories: 1. Those with obvious Yiddishkite references (i.e., Yiddish words, Ashkenazi names, etc.), 2. Those with obvious Sephardi, Israeli or Mizrahi references (i.e., Ladino words, references to Sephardi or Mizrahi practices, etc.), 3. Those that make reference to Jewish customs or holidays or use Hebrew, but are neutral in their cultural content.

One of the reasons Jewish characters were so hard to locate in early science fiction was because John W. Campbell, Jr., Gernsback's successor, claimed overtly Jewish names would dissuade readers. He preferred white Northern European heroes.[16] As the editor of *the* magazine of science fiction, his biases held sway for many years. Horace L. Gold became Clyde Crane Campbell and Philip Klass became William Tenn, for example, and Jewish characters were almost entirely absent.[17] Only postwar, in a sixties boom of Jewish-American literature, did these Jewish authors begin writing themselves into the stories.

ANTHOLOGIES

Anthologies, reprinting the most beloved and seminal texts, are prime sources for samples of any genre. To date, there are eleven Jewish science fiction anthologies. In publication order they are: Jack Dann's 1974 *Wandering Stars* and *More Wandering Stars* (1981), D.J. Kessler's 1996 *The Stars of David*, Clifford Lawrence Meth and Ricia Mainhardt's 1996 *Strange Kaddish: Tales You Won't Hear from Bubbie* and its 1997 sequel *Stranger Kaddish*, edited by Jim Reeber and Clifford Lawrence Meth, Yaacov Peterseil's 1999 *Jewish Sci-Fi Stories for Kids*, Rachel Swirksy and Sean Wallace's 2010 *People of the Book*, Lavie Tidhar and Rebecca Levene's 2015 *Jews vs Aliens* and *Jews vs Zombies*, and Sheldon Teitelbaum and Emanuel Lottem's 2018 *Zion's Fiction: A Treasury of Israeli Speculative Literature* and 2021 *More Zion's Fiction*. This highlights the slow acceptance of Jewish science fiction as a

subgenre worthy of consideration in a compendium. In his introduction to *Wandering Stars*, Isaac Asimov remarks that "there was a time . . . when you didn't associate Jews with science fiction and fantasy."[18] Moshe P. wrote in his "Introduction" to Kessler's anthology that he "laughed" when asked to write the introduction because "when's the last time you were browsing in the local book store and came across the sign on the wall indicating the Jewish Science Fiction Department?"[19] In fact, Peterseil has as a dedication: "To the birth of a new genre! Jewish Science Fiction."[20] The lack of context for each succeeding anthology shows the disparate worlds in which they were produced. Each anthology editor believed that they were stepping out into a new subgenre of a relatively new genre in the world of literature.

UNPACKING OUR ANTHOLOGIES

Jack Dann's *Wandering Stars* is the very first sci-fi anthology that focuses on Jewish themes, but it's particularly Eurocentric. One critic complained that "these master writers generally project American/Eastern European Jewish culture forward as the quintessential one."[21] The very first story in *Wandering Stars* by William Tenn is titled "On Venus, Have We Got a Rabbi" that rings with Yiddish inflection as it parodies the Tevye stories.[22] In fact, every story in this first anthology has some Yiddish reference. Authors like Avram Davidson and Robert Silverberg used Ashkenazi folk creatures, of the golem[23] and the dybbuk.[24] Asimov and Gold used Jewish names, like "Levkovich," "Greenberg," and "Katz."[25] Carol Carr's "Look, You Think You've Got Troubles" is very subtle in its Ashkenormative nature. Carr uses "skull cap"—the English word for a *yarmulke* or *kipah* but hidden in the dialogue is one telling word: "bris."[26] This is the Eastern European pronunciation of Hebrew. Avram Davidson also titles his story "Goslin Day,"[27] after a European Jewish demon that plays on the Yiddish *gozlin*, or thief. In Bernard Malamud's famous story of embarrassment about immigrant relatives "Jewbird" refers to traditional Ashkenazi foods: herring, schmaltz, and rye bread.[28] George Alec Effinger in "Paradise Lost" includes Yiddish words like "yontif" and "yekl."[29] While the authors were all transmitting their own families' cultures, this Ashkanormative theme is not lost on reviewers. However, song-writer Paul Levinson explains that "Jack Dann's anthology . . . rekindled a passion for science fiction (soon as a writer as well as a reader) that would never leave me. And it also deepened my interest in Judaism—my religion—at least a little."[30]

Dann does break with the Ashkenazi theme in his second anthology *More Wandering Stars*. Admittedly, the majority of these authors use Ashkenazi mythological creatures like Phyllis Gotlieb's golem[31] or Yiddish as seen with

Barry N. Malzberg,[32] Harvey Jacobs who uses "*schtik*" and "*chazzerai*,"[33] and Isaac Bashevis Singer uses the term "*yarmulke*."[34] Likewise, Mel Gilden references Estonia,[35] Isaac Bashevis Singer's character is from Lubin,[36] and Hugh Nissenson discusses Litvaks (Jews from Lithuania).[37] There are even more subtle Ashkenazi-American experiences like Malzberg's reference to American Reform Judaism.[38] On the other extreme is Harlan Ellison's "Mom" with the ghost played by the Ashkenazi stereotype of a smothering Jewish mother—a story that gleefully hurls in so many Yiddishisms that a glossary follows.[39] Still, two authors do not. Joe W. Haldmen in "The Mazel Tov Revolution" writes about more universal Jews still wandering, this time the stars.[40] Woody Allen's "The Scrolls" parodies the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, nodding back to the original Middle Eastern texts. This stretches the range of Jewish science fiction, traveling other places than European-influenced America.

D.J. Kessler's anthology contains two novellas: Joe Sampliner's "Can Androids Be Jewish?" and Sol Weiss's "Miriam's World." Both of these are Ashkenazi-centric. Sampliner sprinkles his work with Yiddish words, like "Oy-vey," "Shabbes," and "boychik."[41] Weiss's main character is "of Russo-Polish descent," has another character named "Goldberg," and references "Manivitz wine," and he includes the Yiddish lullaby "Tum-valalyka."[42] Kessler teases his readers with a future volume, which never came to fruition, that was to include other novellas: "A Time Traveling Kibitzer," "It's Food for Thought—a family gathers on a space station at Goldfarb's Deli," and "Mitzvah Dome" about a boy and his *zayde* (grandfather).[43] All are Ashkenazi focused.

In his introduction to *Strange Kaddish*, Meth admits the anthology is "an unorthodox ensemble of carefully chosen authors."[44] He also sets the tone in the very first sentence of his introduction with "a bearded, black-hatter" and continues with Yiddish words like "shul" and "landsmen."[45] Clearly, to him and Ricia Mainhardt, Jews are Ashkenazi. There are seven stories in this thin seventy-page anthology. Harlan Ellison's "Go Toward the Light" is first, and from the start, it is obvious this is an Ashkenormative story by such words as "orthodox," "*frum*," "*Chassid*," and "*tuchis*."[46] Meth's story, "I, Gezheh," follows Ellison's lead by placing an extraterrestrial in a Chassidic community[47] and Sid Gevurah in "Last of the Mo Greenbuams" uses numerous Yiddish words, like "*meshuginah*" and "*mensch*."[48] Bill Messner-Loebs's "Homeland"[49] is set in Baveria, the heart of Ashkenazi world, The other three stories, Shira Deamon's "Under Cover of Night,"[50] Mike Pascale's "A L'Chiam with Bru-Hed,"[51] and Neil Gaiman's "In the End,"[52] are neutrally Jewish without any cultural references. The sequel, *Stranger Kaddish* republishes Ellison's "Mom" with its Yiddish glossary. Bill Messner-Loebs's

"Ellen" explores multiple kinds of prejudice as a mute young suburban woman is herded from her home. She fondly recalls being defended by her Yiddish-speaking father who survived the camps. Her adversary, Greta Breen-Keldorf and her lawyer, Lilian Hayes, both have Ashkenazi names. Clifford Lawrence Meth's "A Passover Carol" mentions veal and kugel alongside the matzah. Walter Cummins's "Treasure" takes place entirely in Zurich. Likewise, Neil Gaiman's British story "One Life, Furnished in Early Moorcock" includes the phrase "frummer than frum."[53] While Ilan Stavans's "The Death of Yankos" takes place in Caracas, the title character's name is still Ashkenazi, echoing the Mexican-Ashkenazi author. "Kiss of the Spider Yenta" by Mike Pascale of course has Yiddish slang in the title. It stars Bob Derschewitz, who uses yiddishisms like "shmendrik" and various dirty words.[54]

The stories in Yaacov Peterseil's book follow the same themes as did the previous anthologies. Stephanie Burgis in "Breath of Clay" and Eliot Fintushel in "A Dybbuk in North Tonawanda" both focus on the Ashkenazi mythological creatures. Yaacov Peterseil's "Lip Service" is about the *Shalom Zachor*, "the special ceremony that occurs on the first Friday night after the Jewish newborn boy enters this world"[55] that actually is particularly Ashkenazi.[56] Miriam Biskin in "My Clone and I" uses Yiddish words like *mensch* and *yarmulkas*[57] as does Mark Blackman in "The Night of the Leavened Bread" with words like "*yontif*" and "*bissel*" and Ashkenazi foods like mandel broit and hamantashen.[58] A combination of Yiddish words and Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew words like "Shabbos," "*Godforsaken Drozh*," and "*shul*" along with a "little hassidic village" define "Medizinmann" by Dan Pearlman.[59]

Swirsky and Wallace's *People of the Book: A Decade of Jewish Science Fiction & Fantasy* was declared "a worthy successor" to Jack Dann's work by the Jewish Book Council.[60] Michael Weingrad points out that "the most common thematic thread in People of the Book, running through almost half the stories, is Jewish faith itself, both as a subject and as a problem. Some stories are antagonistic . . . Others describe, in sometimes sentimental fashion, faith abandoned and then renewed. But most trade in an ironic or indifferent agnosticism."[61] There are culturally neutral stories that have Jewish themes, like Rachel Pollack's alternative version of the Biblical story of Jacob.[62] Further, "Alienation and Love in the Hebrew Alphabet" by Israeli-born Lavie Tidhar explores this land's culture as a girl explains her new life on a *kibbutz*.[63] The inclusion of Neil Gaiman's "The Problem with Susan" makes one wonder if Weingrad is correct. The religious reference in this story is to Christmas,[64] though one could argue it is the cultural Christmas of snow and parties with no Christ overlay. One could argue that Theodora Goss's "The Wings of Meister Wilhelm" is neutral as the only cultural reference is the name of the

character and that "he's German,"[65] though these could point to a specific German-focused Jewish experience. Michael Blumlein's "Fidelity: A Primer" appears culturally neutral, until the reader notes that the main character Lydell puts on a *yarmulke*, the Yiddish term for a kippah or head covering.[66] The author has shown their Ashkenazi-centric view of Judaism.

ZION'S FICTION

Israeli fiction is its own genre. Rachel Harris, Professor of Israeli Literature and Culture at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, defines twenty-first century Israeli literature as transcultural, meaning the many minority cultures in Israel are part of the literature.[67] Further, Israel created a distinct new culture upon its founding, as it encouraged new citizens to rename themselves and adopt new practices. No longer is Israeli literature Ashkenormative.

Israeli-born author-editor Lavie Tidhar (who has also lived in Britain, South Africa, Laos, and Vanuatu) and British author-editor Rebecca Levene worked together to publish *Jews vs. Aliens* and *Jews vs. Zombies* in 2015, anthologies with fewer American contributors than the others. As the editor of the *APEX World Book of Science Fiction* series, Tidhar understands the value of sharing his unique culture with outsiders.

Jews Versus Aliens is the first anthology to have a piece that is specifically Sephardic. In American author Rachel Swirsky's "The Reluctant Jew," Joseph is reminded that "your family tree [is Jewish]. All the way back to pre-expulsion Spain."[68] However, Swirsky also used the word "*yarmulke*."[69] Thus, at best this story is a nod to non-Ashkenazi Jews.

In the same collection, "The Farm" by Elana Gomel (Israeli and American) takes place in Russia with Yiddish expressions like *Abe gezunt*![70] Likewise, "Don't Blink" by Gon Ben Ari (Israeli) stars a former Jew from New York who worked for the *Forward,* a formerly Yiddish newspaper. The alien computer he speaks with lists lore from "Maimonides, the Maharal, the Shelah HaKadosh, the Malbim"[71] The first of these was a Spanish philosopher who traveled through the Middle East. The others were from Prague and the Pale of Settlement. As such, even an alien computer imagined by an Israeli author defaults to mostly Ashkenazi scholars for its Hebrew lore. At the same time, an epigraph from a fictional Israeli rabbi starts off the story, saluting modern non-Western scholars.

Likewise, several works in *Jews vs. Zombies* are written by Israeli writers, though still with largely Ashkenazi references. "The Scapegoat Factory" by Israeli author Ofir Touche Gafla names a character Yehoshua, emphasizing the cultural mix; another wears a "*yarmulke*" and speaks with a Yiddish

accent, demanding, "Vot more do you vont? Not only am I a Jew, but I'm a dead one!"[72] He's clearly an Ashkenazi transplant who's kept his culture (a telling image as he's also scapegoated here as a relic of the old ways). "The Friday People" by South African Sarah Lotz offers a Cape Town setting but is otherwise neutral.[73] Meanwhile, "Wiseman's Terror Tales" by Australian-born Anna Tambour is set in the Bronx, with Yiddish "kreplach"[74] "zaftig"[75] and "matzo balls."[76]

Likewise clinging to the Ashkenazi-Israeli image, "Rise" by Israeli Rena Rossner introduces twelve yeshiva students in Safed, Israel. They have Ashkenazi names Yossele, Kalonymous, and Leibel and biblical ones like Yerahmiel, Asher and Bentzion. Clearly Hassidic, they use terms like *niggun* (wordless tune) and *tantz* (waltz).[77] In the story, they sleep in the graveyard and rouse righteous female scholars from history to come dance with them. These are Donia Reyna, the sister of Rabbi Chaim Vital and their friend Raichele the dreamer (Israeli), Fioretta of Modena (Italian), Hannah Rachel the "Maiden of Ludomir" (Polish), and Doña Gracia, who escaped Spain during the expulsion. Bentzion twirls with the Safed seer "Frances Sarah, a maggid dervish dressed in furs."[78] This celebration of the mystical women of Safed particularly highlights their many nationalities and forms of wisdom.

The more exotically located "Like a Coin Entrusted in Faith" by Israeli Shimon Adaf takes place in Morocco, full of place names like Essaouira. Moroccan expressions like "La Yister"[79] (the evil inclination) and Moroccan phrases and songs appear, along with "Shma De-Marach Alech!"[80] (Aramaic for "The name of your master binds you"). As such, it's a blend of Middle Eastern traditions. While all these authors emphasize international Judaism, only Adaf's is strikingly non-European.

Zion's Fiction: A Treasury of Israeli Speculative Literature is a completely different experience. American science fiction arrived in Israel as movies in the 1950s. Hebrew University sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda observes that Israeli cultural commissars considered science fiction, originating in American and Western European literature, terribly culturally inauthentic for Israeli authors.[81] Only during the mid-1970s did popular science fiction's translation and marketing in Israel take off. Translated short stories along with reviews and original fiction appeared in the magazine *Fantasia 2000* (1978–1984). More Israeli science fiction short stories and novels started arriving with the twenty-first century. These were markedly different from Western literature. Dystopias were common, rooted in modern times and exploring worst case scenarios and thus offering a measure of control.[82]

Teitelbaum and Lottem remark in their introduction that Israelis prefer the term "speculative literature," which is a combination of fantasy, science fiction, and horror.[83] They prefer the term "*Zi-fi*: . . . the speculative literature written by citizens and permanent residents of Israel—Jewish, Arab, or otherwise, whether living in Israel proper or abroad, writing in Hebrew, Arabic, English, Russian or any other language spoken in the Holy Land."[84] *Zion's Fiction* has been praised by critics like Jonathan Kirsch, of the *Jewish Journal*, who believes "*Zion's Fiction* shows us . . . a way to solve our problems rather than just hiding from them."[85] Hagay HaCohen, critic for *The Tel Aviv Review of Books*, however, is sharply critical of the anthology because "with the exception of one minor character in 'My Crappy Autumn,' *Zion's Fiction* does not feature any Arab characters."[86] This negates Kirsch's high-minded praise that it offers solutions for peace and empathy.

When Israel was founded, the citizens decided to create a new lifestyle, translating or shifting Ashkenazi names into Hebrew. Thus, even recent as it is, Israeli culture and naming patterns are quite distinct. Modern Hebrew offers Israeli slang, while borrowing words from nearby Arabic-speaking countries. As such, even a casual glance reveals a story filled with the Israeli sensibility. In the anthology, Israeli names are everywhere: Yonit, Romi, Shir, Yaniv, Galia, Ossem, Sheli, and Neri among many others. Beyond these are many neutral biblical names like Daniel and David that might be found in any Jewish story. Still, their blending emphasizes how many Jews come from disparate backgrounds.

Other hallmarks like popular foods were created by geography and economic pressures as well as the urge to create a new nationality. The places themselves are also distinctive. Beginning with its title, "The Smell of Orange Groves," Lavie Tidhar's loving descriptions of Israel are mesmerizing. He begins the story with the character Boris sitting among flat roofs and solar panels, smelling the late-blooming jasmine surrounding Tidhar's futuristic invention of Central Station near Tel Aviv. Here, Tidhar shares the beauty of the land with outside readers, unsurprising as Tidhar writes many books in English for a foreign readership. His description perfectly blends the real Israel with the science fiction one:

> He loved the smell of this place, this city. The smell of the sea to the west, the wild scent of salt and open water, seaweed and tar, of suntan lotion and people. He loved to watch the solar surfers in the early morning, with spread transparent wings gliding on the winds above the Mediterranean. Loved the smell of cold conditioned air leaking out of windows, of basil when you rubbed it between your fingers; loved the smell of shawarma rising from street level with its heady mix of spices, turmeric and cumin dominating; loved the smell of vanished orange groves from far beyond the urban blocks of Tel Aviv or Jaffa.[87]

The "boxlike apartment blocks in old-style Soviet architecture crowded in with magnificent early-twentieth-century Bauhaus constructions" are now blended with a third style: "Martian-style co-op buildings with drop chutes for

lifts and small rooms divided and subdivided inside, many without any windows."[88] As such, he roots the story in what is before adding what might be.

To Tidhar, Israel is all juxtaposition: "In Menashiya, Jews and Arabs and Filipinos all mingled together, the Muslim women in their long, dark clothes and the children running shrieking in their underwear; Tel Aviv girls in tiny bikinis, sunbathing placidly . . . someone had parked their car and was blaring out beats from the stereo; Somali refugees were cooking a barbecue on the promenade's grassy area; a dreadlocked white guy was playing a guitar."[89] As such, he eases the story into the future by adding more cultures even while preserving what's already there.

Even as he writes of the land's beauty, Tidhar considers Israeli immigration, even as he grounds it in the present and ages it too into the future: his very mixed-race character Zhong Weiwei considers the multiculturalism of the population: "Arab or Jew, they needed their immigrants, their foreign workers, their Thai and Filipino and Chinese, Somali and Nigerian. And they needed their buffer, that in-between zone that was Central Station, old South Tel Aviv, a poor place, a vibrant place—most of all, a liminal place."[90] Weiwei's family's Jewishness is questioned, but so is the robots' Jewishness, with the religion needing to adapt to a variety of new cultures. Nava Semel likewise describes the sea and beaches of Tel Aviv, blending love for the land into the story.[91]

Of course, the predominant issue in Israel is the "situation"—the conflict with the Palestinians. In Mordechai Sasson's "The Stern-Gerlach Mice," the lab-bred animals sneak into homes and start killing the humans. The protagonist fights off twenty in his beloved nana's house on Tisha B'Av, only to face censure on the slaughter. A clear parallel appears to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At last, the beautiful pear tree outside is destroyed, along with many of the historical heritage buildings. "Other than that, all is quiet and peaceful in the new Jerusalem," it concludes sardonically.[92] Meanwhile, Israeli street names appear, along with names Hasson, Orit, Yaffa, and Avrum. The word *meshuga* is a bit of a surprise as it's particularly Ashkenazi, now embedded in the blended culture.[93]

The only Israeli speculative story published in *The New Yorker*, Gail Hareven's "The Slows" has a scientist locking up primitive humans for study in a suggestive metaphor for Palestinian separation. Meanwhile the woman of the Slows protests, "Every few years you renege on something. When you forced us into the preserves, you promised us autonomy, and since then, you've gradually stolen everything from us."[94] The researcher is unsympathetic, creating a story that, in the best science fiction traditions, asks the tough questions.

Israeli culture is also defined by the generations of required military service, against a superior force that's trying to wipe them out. Keren Landsman

explores this metaphorically in "Burn Alexandria," a story about an alien invasion, in which the human race has basically died out, but the war continues. Nir Yaniv's "The Believers" parodies Israeli fundamentalism as a cruel God directly enforces bible laws. Likewise, Eyal Teler's "Possibilities" explores the repercussions of being a soldier. Clearly, Israeli science fiction is based in the everyday as well as dystopia.

Nitay Peretz's "My Crappy Autumn" offers names Osher Yehoshua, Mor, Azulay, Orit, Hagit, Doron, Nissim, Mali, and Naphtali Eliahu. The latter's Hebrew is described as old-fashioned, with odd stresses, translated as "You shall pay me right on the dot for being exceeding kind to you."[95] This story shows off an enormous amount of culture in the food, soccer match, addresses, cars, and expressions. Characters eat sunflower seeds, schnitzel, and tuna pizza and drink Turkish coffee and Tuborg beer. The narrator Ido Menashe visits "the Yemenite's kiosk in Cordovo Street, near the Lehi Museum."[96] On Shekin Street, corner of Ahad Ha'Am, a donkey shouts "*Alte zachen*! Old stuff!" in a magical realism moment.[97] Bringing in Arabic borrowings, when there's a car crash, Ahmed, the cart's owner, sits and cries, "I've lost everything . . . *Ya Allah*!"[98] Later the narrator tells Ahmed "*In shallah*."[99] In the midst of it, Max, a tzaddik (translated as "a saintly person") starts curing people.[100] With all this, the narrator's slobby life grounds the reader while the messiah, aliens, and a talking donkey all whizz by and are treated with magical realism's practical blasé. Smaller phrases like "Channel 1 was showing a soccer match, Maccabi Haifa v. Beitar Jerusalem" as well as mentions of the Ministry of the Interior, an Egged Line 552 bus to Ra'anna, the Wars Memorial, and the Levinstein Rehabilitation Center emphasize the Tel Aviv setting.[101] Further, the narrator buys a gun, a Jericho Magnum, and thinks, "When it comes to death, only Made in Israel will do."[102] Near the story's end there's a Jewish proselytizer with "an Ashkenazi accent," and the narrator insists he's Druze, an Israeli minority religious group, to get away, steering into his culture as he subtly rejects the old-world Jew.[103] The setting is everything here, as such startling juxtapositions mesh well with the Israeli magical realism tradition.

Elana Gomel's "Death in Jerusalem" is very grounded in land and culture. Deep descriptions of Israel appear as the narrator thinks, "The evening is almost bearable. This is the blessing of hilly Jerusalem as opposed to humid Tel Aviv, where summer heat lies on the land like a rotting corpse."[104] There's the Hebrew word for mother, "Ima." A dead body on the street, possibly from a bomb, attests to the precariousness of Israeli life. There's also discussion of how an Israeli can get a civil marriage ceremony. A more interesting cultural moment is Mor Shalev's discussion of literature in which Christian literature as the default is dismissed.

"They Had to Move" by Shimon Adaf offers the names No'am, Tehila, Aviva, Netan'el, Aviel, and Shm'on, along with many minor characters quickly listed: "Alon. Dan. Yogev. Levi. Yarpon. Yekutiel. Zvulun."[105] The "war with Lebanon" is mentioned[106] as is school culture, in which "Kids in Yehud were tougher" as they live in single family homes.[107] Finally, and fittingly for the end of the collection, this story celebrates Israeli fantasy and magazines.

In a striking contrast to the rest of the collection, Savyon Liebrecht strands his Israeli heroine Gila in Poland in "A Good Place for the Night." This explores her outsider status as no one can understand her Hebrew, and she even sings "Hatikva." Transplanting the typical Israeli "worst case scenario" story into another country shows how much the distinct genre still stands out. At the same time, even as Gila wonders why everyone expects the Israeli army to do the rescuing, she finds herself considering whether "the Arabs, the former owners," have taken back her home while as she's stranded in a foreign land.[108]

More Zion's Fiction arrived in 2021. The introduction notes that besides names and other cultural trappings, Israeli SF is distinct for its zeitgeist with the inner war between politics and religion as well as "The Situation" with the Palestinians and Arab neighbors. Stories are more literary and less commercialized, personal and realistic, often in first person. Editor Elana Gomel decides:

> I'd say that what really distinguishes Israeli SF/F is a particular relation to space and time. Space: the Promised Land/the occupied territories; and time: Israeli/Jewish history, continuity or rupture. This is very different from the unlimited space and linear time of American SF/F. The chronotope (to use Bakhtin's term) of Israeli culture is multilayered, paradoxical, and self-enclosed.[109]

As with the other collection, several stories celebrate the land itself. Gomel's "The Sea of Salt" takes place at the Dead Sea, described in vivid detail, even as it carries a protagonist to a fantastical Nazi death camp.

"The Assassination" by Guy Hasson has the narrator bring science fictional technology to interview Aryeh Shamgar about the assassination of Colonel Tanner at the King David Hotel. The story begins describing how he wears the story of his life on his face: "The fight for freedom, the struggle against the British Mandate, the wars with the Arabs, and the cruel battles against traitors within. I can see four decades on his face: The 1930s all the way through the 60s."[110] Both characters describe their effect on famous moments of Israeli history and politics. It brings in names like Zalman "Tsootsik" ("pipsqueak") Berg and Elisheva, while filling the story with the smells and sounds of cities like Jaffa and Tel Aviv.

"Life in a Movie" by Yivsam Azgad has the names Yonathan, Hava, and Yohanan, while extensively celebrating the culture. It paraphrases a lengthy quote by author Yoram Yovell. Description includes "A street corner, Dizengoff and Yirmiyahu. A field of blooming anemones near Be'eri. Some neighborhood in an unidentified locale. The windblown top of a Mediterranean cypress."[111] Rami Shalheveth's flash fiction, "Dragon Control," humorously lists all the documentation Israeli customs requires for anyone flying with a dragon, sharing culture if not language.

Galit Dahan Carlibach's "Composting," narrated by a corpse, illustrates the Israeli concerns with environmentalism and sustainability in the setting of the "ecological-communal community of Shorshon." Food and culture appear as the story adds, "My little girl Roni is very quietly burning pita bread on the gas stove. Even the cats spit out the schnitzels that I fry."[112] Names include the narrator, Netta Baraban; her husband Avishai Ben-Or; Kotchi; Yiftah Graetz; Mira Goor; Ahava Luria; and the Kadesh Barne'a composting site.

Other stories' names include Silg Goshen, Dr. Daro Oleanz, Mishi, Ayeli Gebil, Shatooli, Younar Kishinev, and Katala in Keren Landsman's chilling "Schrödinger's Gorgon," and Yoel, Orna, Yaron, Rani, Yuli, Avi, and Doron in "Five Four Three Two One" by Hila Benyovits-Hoffman. These are both stories about victims, so the long lists of characters suggest the names of a memorial wall. "Set in Stone" by Yael Furman features museum visitors Tzahi and Esty, in a story of Pimper Monish, who creates living statues in an unspecified setting.

"Latte, To Go" by Rotem Baruchin begins by considering the nature of Israeli cities. The narrator explains, "Jerusalem has never been my favorite. She doesn't have Eilat's youthful spirit, Kfar Saba's modesty and shyness, or even Hadera's quiet melancholy."[113] This is not just a lyrical description, but the central narrative. In fact, the narrator, a City Guardian, is questing to protect his beloved Tel Aviv. Soon, other cities' spirits come to visit, each with a distinct personality as they squabble about their places. Local and national history are mentioned as the annual Tel Aviv Marathon becomes one of many points of contention for the conservative cities, all set in their ways. Their descriptions continue as a love letter to Israeli places:

> Over the next few hours, they begin to arrive, one by one. Rehovot, in overalls, her hands dirty with soil, flowers threaded in her hair. Tiberias, with sleeves a tad longer than Bnei Brak and a skirt a tad shorter. Haifa, in jeans, flowers from the world-famous Baha'i Gardens in her hair, and a navy T-shirt. Nahariya, with her nose, lips, and eyebrows pierced, surrounded by a gang of kibbutz and moshav Spirits. Maccabim-Reut, true twins, not like Ramat Gan and Giv'ataim, in IDF officer uniforms, carrying assault rifles. Beersheba, tanned, sunburned hair under a military beret, her face constantly changing from young to very

> old and back. Netanya, a bit intimidating in her leather clothes and gold chains, despite the coquettish beret on her head. Mitzpe Ramon, with her fisherman pants, Source sandals, and sparkling eyes that reflect the stars even in broad daylight. Eilat, dressed as a hotel maid, with long, thick dreadlocks and skinny braids interspersed with corals and dolphin ankle bracelets.[114]

Tel Aviv is in danger, ever as the narrator goes on a hero quest to learn about the nature of City Guardians and better understand his duties.

For this volume, the editors deliberately sought out Arabic stories, though extensive research of published science fiction stories only yielded one—Dafna Feldman's "Askuni-Askuni." As the book's introduction notes, "And yes, though she handles the exigencies of Bedouin culture sensitively and empathically, Feldman is, when all is said and done, an Israeli Jew. But based on the quality of the story, we decided to embrace it."[115]

The story features teenage Ṭāher, his father, and uncle Fādi. "They drove fast because they had to get the minibus back to Ismā'īl by 4 A.M."[116] When Ṭāher discovers his sister, Asmahān Abu Zakut, age eleven, has committed suicide after being raped, he dreams of the *Hāmah* bird crying *"Askuni-Askuni, Askuni-Askuni!"* for vengeance each night.[117] Place names, prayers, mourning customs, and Arabic expressions are common throughout, plunging readers into the culture, with transliterated Arabic throughout. Characters wear the ḥijāb and *keffiyeh* and share dates and *qahwa mura* (bitter coffee). 'Ayisha al-'Azāzmah, his sister's friend, comes to him and says, "*Allāh yeraḥmah. Salāmāt rāsak* (God have mercy on her—you be healthy)."[118] However, Ṭāher believes her older brother Fathi is the rapist. When the need for *al-thār* (vengeance) boils, Ṭāher seeks out Sheikh Abu Nihād, who insists that Islam denies the superstitions of vengeance, even as both reflect on the politics between the Bedouin clans involved. All this sympathetically depicts Bedouin life, even as Ṭāher struggles with his cultural imperatives.

CONCLUSION

Regarding science fiction, Mark Newton reminds us that "the genre was—decades ago—dominated by straight white males. Audiences are now comfortable with characters such as Captain Jack Harkness, in *Torchwood*. . . . Likewise, Black characters and women now feature equally on film posters. . . . We've come a long way in representing certain communities, and this may be as much the influence of culture on science fiction as it is the other way around."[119] Although clearly, Jewish sci-fi has not embraced difference. Despite Silver's assertion that sci-fi "is a representation of the common bonds that exist within the Jewish community,"[120] the majority of Jewish science fiction is Ashkenazi and ignores the other Jews in the world.[121] It is true "that modern science fiction and fantasy has had a Jewish element from its earliest days,"[122] but we now need to expand the perception to include a broader understanding of Judaism.

"Enough, already. The case is convincing."[123]

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Chapter 15

Writing the Jewish Heroine's Journey

Evonne Marzouk and Patti McCarthy

Many modern and traditional stories have the hero's journey as their foundation. Less familiar may be the heroine's journey, a feminine adventure with a different story arc. The heroine's journey differs from the hero's journey, reflecting the role of women in modern Western culture and ancient traditional thought.

In this chapter, we will explore how hero and heroine stories function in literature, how they interface with character archetypes in traditional Jewish and modern Western stories, and how the blending of each of these can create a story that inspires Jewish women and teen girls to experience themselves as heroines within their own tradition and in the modern world.

STORIES OF HEROES AND HEROINES

The hero's journey is a common trope in modern literature. The story tells of a man who starts out in an ordinary world, gathers allies and tools, crosses a threshold into the unknown, sets out toward a goal, has the choice of whether to awaken to his full potential, and succeeds or fails based on this choice. A hero is subject to three main expectations of society: performing, providing and protecting. If he is victorious, he comes home changed or transformed. If he is willing to transform, he finds his authentic self. Because he knows who he is and what he's striving for, he has the courage to face the villain and is victorious. If he is not willing to transform, he rebels and fails.[1]

While the hero proves himself to the group; the archetypal heroine needs to discover her own powers and believe in herself. He is told to save and protect,