
Judíos y gauchos:
The Search for Identity in
Argentine-Jewish Literature

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In spite of their relative prosperity and the freedom with which they have practiced their religious and communal affairs, Argentine Jews have often found themselves to be in an estranged or at least problematical relationship with their country. Argentina is a Roman Catholic—if anticlerical—country, with a strong consciousness of its Hispanic origins.¹ Over the years there has been almost incessant anti-Semitic activity. The attacks have sometimes been violent. In recent years, Jewish intellectuals, businessmen, and students have been kidnapped and murdered. Jews have variously tried to ignore or oppose these outrages. It is important to remember, however, that for the most part, these anti-Semitic activities only indirectly affect the daily lives of most Jews, causing apprehension but little more. Whether because they believe that Argentina is not basically an anti-Semitic country or because they employ an elaborate denial system, many Argentine Jews downplay the importance of anti-Semitic incidents. Nevertheless, they worry about them.

For many Jews, the question of national identity is a far more ticklish problem. In Argentina, the pressure for conformity and assimilation into the dominant culture is fierce. Argentineans tend to be intensely nationalistic and proud of their traditions, many of which have Christian underpinnings. Argentine Jews share in the nationalism, strongly identifying themselves with the nation. But often they find this attachment to be in conflict with their sense of themselves as Jews. Many experience an intolerable contradiction. Some make *aliyah* to Israel. Many more assimilate, ceasing to identify themselves as Jews. Most remain troubled, but assume, with an optimism that is typically Argentinean, that, with time, things will improve.

Not surprisingly, the difficulty of living as both a Jew and an Argentinean has been a theme of consuming interest for Jewish writers in Argentina. Writing in Spanish, rather than the Yiddish of some of their

contemporaries,² writers such as Alberto Gerchunoff, Max Dickmann, Manuel Kirshenbaum, Luisa Sopovich, Bernardo Kordón, Lázaro Liacho, Eliahu Toker, José Isaacson, Gregorio Scheines, and Bernardo Verbitsky see themselves as the product of Argentine reality. Most, if not all, have produced "Argentine literature," that is, works in which Jewish characters and themes do not occur. But these writers and others like them have not assimilated. Many have also written on Jewish themes for Jewish-sponsored journals such as *Comentario* and *Davar*.³ A significant number have chosen to produce fiction, poetry, and drama in which they examine closely the position of the Jew in Argentine society.

Saul Sosnowski has argued correctly that any discussion of Argentine-Jewish literature "has to be undertaken from a position that recognizes the two basic components of the authors: their Jewish background and their Argentine citizenship."⁴ Sosnowski himself has studied a number of Argentine-Jewish writers, including Gerchunoff, Germán Rozenmacher, and Gerardo Mario Goloboff, and has come to bleak conclusions. His interpretation of Argentine-Jewish literature is affected by his analysis of Argentine society. He criticizes optimistic writers for being misguided and for having misinterpreted the position of the Jews in Argentina. He favors those writers who are most critical of Argentine-Jewish life. Sosnowski's stress on biographical and historical material leads to an overemphasis on the somber quality of the literature. However, when extraliterary considerations are downplayed, a different view is possible. Argentine-Jewish literature is quite varied in tone. Celebration and desperation coexist. There is warm-hearted laughter as well as bitter recrimination. Argentine-Jewish writers taken together present a tapestry of views about what it means to be both Argentinean and Jewish.

Alberto Gerchunoff

Significantly, the first important novel written by a Jew in Argentina was entitled *Los gauchos judíos* [The Jewish gauchos].⁵ Published in 1910 as a celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Argentine independence, *Los gauchos judíos* is a highly romanticized reconstruction of life in the Jewish agricultural settlements in the pampas province of Entre Ríos.⁶ It was the first novel of Alberto Gerchunoff, later to be-

come editor of the influential daily *La Nación*. Gerchunoff's father, one of the earliest Russian-Jewish settlers in Entre Ríos, had been murdered by an indigenous herdsman. Yet Gerchunoff, in what may have been an exercise in wish fulfillment, created a series of nostalgic scenes of rural Jewish life. In a collection of interrelated short stories rather than a tightly constructed novel, Gerchunoff presents Jews encountering problems in adjusting to a new life-style and a sometimes antagonistic surrounding culture. But while the severity of these difficulties is not minimized, the novel is suffused with optimism. These are only temporary aberrations which the essentially benign Argentine culture will soon remedy.⁷

Even the novel's style reflects a belief in the possibilities for synergistic interaction between the Hispanic-Argentine and Jewish cultures. Gerchunoff's first language was Yiddish, but by the time he wrote this book (in his early twenties), he had perfected a Spanish prose modeled on that of Cervantes. Into his Cervantine rhythms, he infused Yiddish expressions and Hebrew benedictions. The Agadah, the Talmud, *Don Quixote*, and Cervantes' *Exemplary Novels* are all cited in the text. Unlike writers for the Yiddish press, Gerchunoff intended his novel for a Christian as well as a Jewish audience, and included explanatory comments which would have been superfluous to his Jewish readers. Also, there are frequent references to Christ and the Virgin Mary.

To the Jews of *Los gauchos judíos*, refugees from the pogroms and frigid winters of Russia, the Argentine countryside clearly represented the promised land. They saw it as a new Zion, prophesied in their prayers and far superior to contemporary Palestine, "con sus conventos, cruces, y mezquitas" ["with its convents, crosses, and mosques"] (p. 102). The land and sky of Argentina are revered as protective and nurturing forces. The difficulties of farming are not cause for doubting the wisdom of the enterprise: even a locust plague is not enough to dampen the Jews' enthusiasm for long. Unlike many of their real-life counterparts who left the land for the cities—some even returned to Europe—Gerchunoff's Jews are convinced that Entre Ríos is the best place on earth. In one anecdote, newly arrived Jews say "Amen" every time the word "Libertad" ["Liberty"] is repeated in the Argentine anthem.

Their fierce identification with the land led these Jews to be fascinated with its inhabitants: the small farmers, the shopkeepers, and, most

important, the cattle herdsmen or gauchos. Often illiterate, practicing a version of Catholicism riddled with superstition and anti-Semitism, the gauchos loomed as romantic characters worthy of imitation by Jews. They were physically strong, skillful, and possessed a straightforward sense of justice which was comprehensive if simplistic. Moreover, the Jews believed them to be representative of the dominant Argentine culture.

Gerchunoff depicts threats to communal life caused by coexistence with the native population. In one chapter, Ismael Rudman's daughter runs away with Remigio, a non-Jew, causing grief and consternation to her family. Rabbi Abrahán and Rabbi Zacarías discuss the "tragedy." They should have expected it, they say, for the girl lit a fire on the Sabbath and ate nonkosher food. The two rabbis see Rudman's daughter as a portent of things to come. "¿Ya habrá gente en la sinagoga?" ["Will there still be people in the synagogue?"] they wonder aloud (p. 27). Moisés Hintler goes so far as to say that life was better in Russia, because the youth there followed God's law. In Argentina, he complains, they become gauchos.

How much could a Jew be like a gaucho (and hence an Argentinean) without ceasing to be a Jew? Gerchunoff's tone is optimistic: an accommodation can no doubt be found.

The figure of Jacobo serves as an effective illustration of Gerchunoff's guarded optimism. Jacobo's characterization clearly is autobiographical in nature; Gerchunoff has used himself as the basis for this youth. A teenager, Jacobo has adopted the gaucho style of dress and is an adept rider, herdsman, and hunter. He is robust, self-confident, and free of any sense of inferiority. He would seem to be the prototype of a "new Argentine Jew." Jacobo is seen as a renegade by the other Jews. He cleans his horse on the Sabbath, does not know how to pray properly, and insists on speaking Spanish rather than Yiddish. Even worse, he shouts "Ave María!" When Ismael Rudman's daughter runs off with Remigio, Jacobo defends them. His neighbor Dona Raquel is shocked that Jacobo does not differentiate between Jew and Christian. Jacobo has his admirers in the community, but to most his behavior poses a threat.

Other accommodations between the Argentine and the Jewish cultures are more promising. Reb Favel Duglach, the local poet, and Dr. Nahum Yarcho (a real person) meet the approval of the Jews, the local

Christians, and the novel's narrator. Duglach was almost as well-versed in Argentine folklore as in Hebraic tradition. He admired the gauchos, regarding them as similar to the ancient Hebrews. He retold both Argentine and Jewish stories. "Soy un gaucho judío" ["I am a Jewish gaucho"] he would repeat proudly (p. 82). Dr. Yarcho refuses a lucrative practice in the city in order to treat country people, both Jewish and Christian. Though not very religious, he is praised by all as "hundamente judío" and "un gran gaucho" ["deeply Jewish and a great gaucho"] (p. 110). Duglach and Yarcho, rather than Jacobo his alter ego, are Gerchunoff's model Jews. Through them he shows his belief that a close affinity of spirit existed between the Jews and the native Argentineans. The implication is that this natural understanding can be exploited for the benefit of both groups. Gerchunoff's portrayal is upbeat, confident, and hopeful.

César Tiempo

Writing in 1933, the playwright and poet César Tiempo dramatized a Jewish community in Buenos Aires that had been integrated into Argentine society. Tiempo (born Israel Zeitlin) was prominent in Jewish affairs and the author of several volumes of devotional poetry.⁸ His play *El teatro soy yo* [I am the theater] was written for a general rather than a specifically Jewish audience.⁹ What makes Tiempo's work significant is that he obviously felt secure enough in Argentina, in 1933, to present Jews to the public in an unfavorable and even burlesque manner. He creates a group of stock types. Jeremías Jobman (Tiempo is not subtle in his choice of names), for example, is depicted as a wealthy, ill-tempered miser. Myriam Sambación rose from a poor country girl in one of the Jewish settlements to become a famous and sought-after actress and playwright. Her plays, written on Jewish themes, have won her acclaim from the general public, but she is self-indulgent and overly critical of others. Dr. Lindberg is a respected physician who spends his free time working for Jewish charities. Salmonovich is an accountant. For the most part, the Jewish characters in this play have had great economic success. These upwardly mobile Jews support institutions such as the Jewish Agency and the Sociedad Hebraica.

This is not to say that the situation is perfect. Inter-marriage is

viewed by the play's Jewish characters as an ever-present threat. Jobman's daughter runs off with Ferrantini, a non-Jew. In a play written by Myriam, this act is repeated. There are occasional anti-Semitic remarks. Myriam decries the fact that a critic has written of the "Jewish nature" of her work. Rather than taking the statement as praise, she sees it as evidence of the writer's bias.

But in great measure, Tiempo's Jews are secure and successful—all the more remarkable when one thinks of the plight of the European Jews in 1933. Anti-Semitism was to increase in Argentina as the army and the Church tilted more toward the Axis, but there is no hint that Tiempo foresaw this.

The theme of *El teatro soy yo* is intolerance. But interestingly, it centers on prejudice against blacks rather than Jews. Tiempo's choice of a black playwright as a central figure in his drama is especially curious. By 1933, the black population of Buenos Aires was negligible.¹⁰ Unlike Cuba, Ecuador, or even Uruguay, where stable black populations have long existed, Argentina produced no significant corpus of black literature, though a few poems do survive. When *El teatro soy yo* opened, a white actor in blackface played the black role. Tiempo's Gaspar Liberión is a symbol for the victim of prejudice rather than a flesh-and-blood figure to whom the audience could relate.

Gaspar Liberión is a frustrated black playwright. Bias against blacks has kept his plays from being produced. He complains that he suffers daily humiliations because of his race. Gaspar asks Myriam Sambati6n for assistance. Citing Al Jolson, he speaks to her of the affinities between blacks and Jews. Gaspar says that he has learned many beautiful things from the Jews. In an extraordinary speech, he declares, "Somos los judíos modernos" ["We are the modern Jews"] (p. 123). According to Gaspar, the blacks now suffer the humiliations that in the past were reserved for the Jews. Their situation is worse, however, because unlike the Jews, they cannot choose to assimilate and lose themselves in the greater society. With Myriam's help, Gaspar's play is produced. It is an immediate success. But when the audience learns that the author is black, they boo and deride him in a most insulting manner. Not able to bear this, Gaspar Liberión shoots himself. Tiempo chastises his audience, including the Jews in it, for their prejudice. Implicitly, he warns all of them that as long as there is bias against anyone, no one is safe. That the Jews have been generally ac-

cepted into Argentine society is emphasized in this play. This is surely hopeful. But through his use of a black stand-in, Tiempo warns against complacency.

Marcos Soboleosky

Jewish writing continued unabated through the 1930's and during the ten-year rule of Juan Domingo Perón (1945–1955). Many Jewish authors, such as the novelist Max Dickmann and the playwright Samuel Eichelbaum, tended to favor general rather than specifically Jewish themes. A Jewish-oriented work was Bernardo Verbitsky's *Es difícil empezar a vivir* [Beginning to live is difficult] (1941), which describes the coming of age of one Pablo Levinson.

By the time Marcos Soboleosky's novel *Enfermó la vid* [The vine sickened] was published in 1957, being a Jew in Argentina had taken on new dimensions.¹¹ Soboleosky's portrait is in sharp contrast to that of his predecessors. Soboleosky's protagonist, Ezequiel Oleansky, is a Jewish intellectual, author of a book on Kafka, who despairs, first, of the difficulties of living as a Jew in a Christian society, and ultimately, of the *possibility* of living as a Jew at all.

Oleansky has committed the act decried by Gerchunoff's and Tiempo's characters: he has married a non-Jewish woman. Except for an epilogue, the novel is written in the form of a long letter from Oleansky to his wife, Ana Gómez. In it, he tells the history of their marriage and recalls his feelings, thoughts, and observations. The novel is a confession and, to a lesser extent, an account of a spiritual journey.

Oleansky admits that he married Ana less for love than in an attempt to avoid marrying a Jewish woman who would, as he puts it, asphyxiate his personality. The marriage causes repercussions in both his family and hers. Her family view him as exotic, but attractive and "digno de ser cristiano" ["worthy of being a Christian"] (p. 17). The fact that he, the son of immigrants, speaks Spanish better than many natives, impresses them greatly. Her aunts tolerate him but are deeply disappointed when the couple marries in a civil ceremony. With resignation, his mother accepts her daughter-in-law, counting it a victory that her son did not marry in church. Upon marrying, Ezequiel cuts his ties with the Jewish community.

Almost from the start, the marriage founders. Ana has no comprehension of Jewish values, customs, or traditions. Normal family events cause crises for the couple. Instead of bringing them together, having children accentuates their differences. Ana wants to name their first child after her grandmother. Following Ashkenazi Jewish tradition, Ezequiel forbids their naming the child after a living relative. Ana is confused and angered. They bring up the children without religious training. But their children encounter the intensely Christian environment of their friends, who attend Mass, take communion, go to religious schools, and have religious images in their homes. Ezequiel does not want to meet the parents of his children's friends for fear they are anti-Semites. When Ana refuses to have her son circumcised, Ezequiel is disturbed but does not insist. But when Ezequiel begins to read Dubnow's *History of the Jews*, Ana feels estranged. She retaliates by bringing an image of the Virgin and Child into their home. Seeing her as superficial, small-minded, and uncultured, Oleansky blames his wife for the deterioration of his marriage.

The overriding effect upon Oleansky of marrying a Christian and cutting his ties with his Jewish background is, ironically, that he is constantly reminded of his Jewishness. He meditates on the communal, psychological, and spiritual aspects of his Jewishness. His conclusions disturb him greatly. At times he experiences self-hatred and desperation. He believes that to be a Jew is to be different in many essential ways from all those who are not Jews. For in the Jew, there is a sense of insecurity with respect to the world in which he lives but to which he does not belong. Jews feel constantly observed but are also continuous observers. Jewish happiness is always limited, Oleansky concludes. A Jew cannot love a Christian the way he would another Jew because the world impedes it.

Oleansky eventually decides that he desires the loss of his Jewishness. He argues that he would have more in common with another Argentinean than with a Jew from another culture. Nationality is more important to him than religion. Oleansky pleads that he wants to live not as a Jew or as a Christian but only as a citizen.

Spiritually also, Oleansky flees his Judaism. He finds the local synagogue to be devoid of spirituality. In a nearby church, he meets a priest who becomes his teacher. Oleansky is attracted to the universalism of Catholicism and believes that in each Jew lies a potential convert. But

Oleanksy finds he cannot achieve the faith in Christ necessary for conversion. He blames his Jewish upbringing and "Talmudic mentality" for his inability to find spontaneous faith or tolerate Catholic symbolism. Oleanksy finds himself in a predicament. He no longer wants to follow the Jewish religion, but inner constraints keep him from becoming a Roman Catholic. He contemplates entering a Franciscan monastery. Instead, he commits suicide.

For Soboleosky's protagonist, being Jewish in Argentina (or perhaps anywhere) leads to an intolerable situation. He is constantly reminded of his Jewishness and troubled by Jewish history. He is uncomfortable in both Jewish and Christian society. The novel is, of course, the portrait of one man, who might be dismissed as neurotic. It is impossible to know the extent to which Soboleosky intended him to be symbolic. However, the mass of social detail presented suggests that Soboleosky believed that many other Jews were facing similar traumatic struggles.

Pedro Schwartzman

A little book entitled *Cuentos criollos con judíos* [Creole stories with Jews], published by Pedro Schwartzman in 1967, contrasts with Soboleosky's rather dismal portrayal.¹² Totally ignoring the virulent anti-Semitism that plagued Argentina in the early 1960's, Schwartzman's work is unabashedly pro-Argentina. Like Gerchunoff's, Schwartzman's narrative is, in part, autobiographical. In a set of interrelated short stories, he revives the nostalgic tone of *Los gauchos judíos*, even mimicking its title. The stories are made up of scenes of life in the agricultural communities of Entre Ríos province. Several stories present, in a romanticized fashion, warm relations between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. The few instances of anti-Semitism are considered to be the acts of hooligans and the relics of an earlier time. Schwartzman's descriptions border on the incredible. Gauchos eat matzah and other Jewish foods; they praise the Jews' intelligence. A local Catholic butcher sells only kosher meat; a nonkosher butcher goes out of business. For their part, the Jewish immigrants adapt rapidly to the cuisine and customs of the country. They are delighted by the abundance of food. "La Argentina es un presente de Dios" ["Argentina is a gift of God"] says one (p. 11).

As portrayed in these stories, the acculturation of the Jews was not without cost. The earliest immigrants tried to keep the Sabbath, but local customs made this difficult. Many Jews protested that they were not even religious. Eventually, the practice was forgotten. By the 1930's Jewish education in the communities was on the decline, poorly funded, and staffed by poorly trained teachers. Schwartzman's narrator recalls that for the children, Yiddish, Hebrew, and most religious practices seemed anachronistic leftovers from prehistoric times.

In spite of these negative aspects, Schwartzman stresses the ease of acculturation and, in particular, the welcome the Jews received from Argentinean Christians. The latter theme is exemplified in a story entitled "Hermandad" [Brotherhood]. Fleeing Hitler, Jews come to Entre Ríos. After facing the Nazi terror, the children find it difficult to believe that they are accepted. Years later, one immigrant, now adult, becomes a taxi driver. One night his fare is Carpincho, the local drunk. Intoxicated, Carpincho shouts that the Jew is not his friend. Suddenly reexperiencing feelings of his youth, the taxi driver is terrified. Continuing, Carpincho insists that they are not friends but brothers.

In Schwartzman's work, the future of the Jews in Argentina seems assured. What is remarkable about *Cuentos criollos con judíos* is that it was written during the early days of the political crisis which continues to the present day. The government was headed by General Onganía, who, if not an overt anti-Semite, was an archconservative and identifiably a member of the military oligarchy. But Schwartzman's portrait is unequivocally positive. It strongly implies that one can be comfortable being both Jewish and Argentinean.

Bernardo Verbitsky

In *Etiquetas a los hombres* [Labels for men], written by Bernardo Verbitsky in 1972, the issue is reopened and its treatment is far more complex.¹³ Cherniacoff, the protagonist of this long novel, is an intellectual who is confronting the issue of whether a person can remain committed to Judaism while being a politically active citizen of a Third World nation. Like Oleansky, Cherniacoff probes every aspect of his problem. Like Oleansky too, he is married to a Catholic woman, in this case a psychoanalyst. But unlike Soboleosky's protagonist, Cher-

niacoff never rejects his Jewish heritage. Like Verbitsky himself, who was, for many years, the editor of *Davar*, a Jewish-sponsored journal, Cherniacoff is a writer and journalist. Like many Jews in Argentina, he is highly educated and well-versed in political theory. When the novel begins, Cherniacoff at middle age is facing a crisis of personal and political identity. A lifelong socialist, he supports anti-imperialist causes. Concurrently, he has been an ardent Zionist. The rejection of Israel by the left in the early 1960's forces him to choose between the left and Israel, a choice which he believes to be absurd and unnecessary. Believing anti-Zionist rhetoric to be thinly veiled anti-Semitism, he cannot opt for that. At the same time, he cannot bring himself to leave the left. Moreover, as a member of the "Committee for Friendship with the Arabs in the Middle East," he has alienated himself from many Jews.

Cherniacoff commences what becomes a multination search for his identity. First, he reviews the facets of Jewish identity that he finds in Argentina. His friend Altman takes courage in the idea of a Jewish national identity. Dr. Wolf sees himself as the persecuted Jew. Dr. Isaac Faerman believes that Judaism impedes the process of communist revolution; he sees himself as an Argentine communist, totally divorced from the Jewish tradition. Cherniacoff's prospective son-in-law, Daniel Bronstein, on the other hand, has decided to emigrate to Israel.

Cherniacoff is not satisfied with the answers he receives in Argentina. None of the solutions seems adequate. When he is offered the opportunity to visit Israel as part of a delegation of Argentine-Jewish intellectuals, he readily accepts the invitation, setting out to examine Israel first-hand. The novel includes many pages which could have appeared in a travel magazine. In his letters home, Cherniacoff describes the Israeli countryside as well as his impressions of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. These passages are significant because Israel is rarely treated in Latin American fiction even by Jewish writers.¹⁴ Verbitsky treats his readers to a novelistic version of the Israel that they had read about in the Jewish press and that, by 1972, many had visited.

In Israel, Cherniacoff meets former Argentineans who have become Israeli citizens. While eager for news of Argentina, these *olim* vigorously defend their decision to leave that country. Cherniacoff is surprised by the wide variety of political views he encounters in Israel. He visits Mea Shearim and stays for a time at a kibbutz. Constantly, he

questions his Jewish identity. “¿Qué tipo de judío soy que ni conozco al Antiguo Testamento?” [“What kind of Jew am I who does not know the Old Testament?”], he asks himself. “Un judío ignorante” [“An ignorant Jew”], he replies (p. 149). He is so moved by his experiences on a kibbutz that he considers staying there, but decides that he could never adjust to kibbutz life. The example of the Hasidim interests him too, but, as an atheist, Cherniacoff cannot accept their definition of Judaism. After endless discussions with Israelis and a great deal of soul-searching, Cherniacoff leaves Israel.

After short visits to Paris, where he finds the left-wing students solidly supporting El Fatah, and Moscow, where he visits with a well-off and seemingly contented Jewish engineer, Cherniacoff returns to Buenos Aires. The voyage has not served to simplify the situation for him. His quandary remains. He has found that he cannot be only a Jew or only an Argentine leftist. Cherniacoff views his Jewishness as part of his total identity. “No quiero ghettos, y menos en mí mismo” [“I don’t want ghettos, especially not in myself”] he claims (p. 456). Deeply troubled, Cherniacoff cannot find a solution adequate to his predicament.

Faced with the same dilemma, Daniel Bronstein, a student engaged to Cherniacoff’s daughter, makes a crucial decision. After years of being active in left-wing politics and Zionist groups, Daniel decides to emigrate to Israel. Before he leaves, political turmoil, the so-called *Cordobazo*, breaks out and the Onganía regime is overthrown. Seeing a policeman beating a young protester, Daniel denounces the officer. Arrested and released, Daniel is expelled from the Zionist organization, since its leaders believe that his actions may cause the government to repress their group. By acting in accordance with his political views and his sense of morality, Daniel has done something that many Jews regard as contrary to their interests. He can no longer tolerate this contradiction. Though still feeling himself to be an Argentinean, Daniel comes to think that only in Israel can he pursue his political goals without compromising his Judaism. Loving Argentina, Daniel can no longer live there.

As the novel ends, Cherniacoff is still struggling with the ambiguities of his life. Unlike Daniel, he will remain an Argentine Jew. Most Argentine Jews would not be surprised by his decision. The number of Jews who emigrate from Argentina has remained small. In

1969, the noted poet and writer Lázaro Liacho wrote, “Soy un patriota argentino y un defensor del judaismo” [“I am an Argentine patriot and a defender of Judaism”].¹⁵ Many Argentine Jews still see this combination of roles to be desirable and possible.

As we have seen, this belief is not new. A strong pro-Argentina sentiment permeates much of Argentine-Jewish literature. Gerchunoff’s immigrants see Argentina as the new Zion. In Tiempo’s play, difficulties for the Jews seem to be over. For Schwartzman’s characters, Jews and Christians are not merely friends, they are brothers. Soboleosky’s Oleansky does find life impossible, but his problems are caused more by Jewish self-hatred than by pressure from the greater society. Verbitsky’s Cherniacoff and Daniel Bronstein are troubled precisely because they love Argentina as much as they do. Only with great regret does Daniel leave.

In recent years, Jews from other parts of the world have urged Argentina’s Jews to flee. Pointing to the many beatings and kidnappings of Jews, some observers have likened the situation under the present government to that in Nazi Germany. Yet, despite these warnings, the Jewish community of Argentina persists, stubbornly insisting that it is somehow possible to be both Argentinean and Jewish. Gerchunoff’s ideal of the *gaucho judío*, intensely Jewish and profoundly Argentinean, is still valued by many. Whether this is a realistic aspiration or a naive self-delusion is a question sure to be examined by Argentine-Jewish writers of the future.

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Notes

1. For background about Jews in Argentina, see, especially, Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), and Judith Laikin Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

2. Yiddish literature flourished in Argentina. Starting in 1898, the Yiddish press published the works of hundreds of writers. Among the most famous are Marcos Alpersón, A. Brodski, I. Helfman, B. Bendersky, Moisés Granitstein, José Rabinovich, and Berl Brinberg. Many of these writers maintained correspondences with other Yiddish writers in the United States and Europe. The works of some were published in American Yiddish dailies. The subjects of these writings tended to be taken from memories of Jewish life in Europe. Translations into English appear to be nonexistent. Eduardo Weinfeld has collected Spanish translations of some works of these Yiddish writers. See Eduardo Weinfeld, *Tesoros del Judaismo: América Latina* (Mexico City: Editorial

Encyclopedia Judaica Castellana, 1959).

3. *Comentario* was published by the Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información (Jewish-Argentine Institute of Culture and Information) between 1953 and 1971. *Davar* was published by the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina (Argentine Hebraic Society) between 1949 and 1970 and again between 1974 and 1976.

4. Saul Sosnowski, "Contemporary Jewish-Argentine Writers: Tradition and Politics," *Latin American Literary Review* 6 (1978): 1-14.

5. Alberto Gerchunoff, *Los gauchos judíos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1964).

6. Extensive immigration from Russia began after the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. Through the efforts of one man, the Austrian-born British-Jewish philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch, thousands of Russian and Ukrainian Jews were resettled on the farmland of the Argentine pampas. Hirsch subscribed to the contemporary theory that Jews could live properly only if they owned and worked the land. He concluded that large-scale migration of Jews to Palestine was too dangerous and too impractical. Therefore, Argentina with its immense prairies and liberal immigration policies was his choice. With Hirsch's support, fifteen agricultural communities, with names like Moisésville and Rosh Pina, were established in the provinces north and west of Buenos Aires. At their peak, these towns were home for thirty thousand people who were involved in raising cattle, wheat, and flax.

7. In comments directed to his reader, Gerchunoff laments the anti-Semitism he has encountered. He says that he wants to believe that it is passing and that by the time of the second century, admittedly one hundred years away, it will have disappeared. He advises patience. Gerchunoff, p. 81.

8. See especially César Tiempo, *Sabatión argentino* (Buenos Aires: Amigos del Libro Rioplatense, 1933).

9. César Tiempo, *El teatro soy yo* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1933).

10. Brought in as slaves, blacks were present in large numbers during the colonial period. Through the middle of the nineteenth century, they played a significant role in the national life. The black population then radically declined. It was estimated at five thousand in 1895. By 1933 blacks had almost completely disappeared. Lack of immigration, pulmonary diseases, extensive miscegenation, and emigration are cited as the causes of this change.

11. Marcos Soboleosky, *Enfermó la vid* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Reja, 1957).

12. Pablo Schwartzman, *Cuentos criollos con judíos* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de los Amigos del Libro Argentino, 1967).

13. Bernardo Verbitsky, *Etiquetas a los hombres* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1972).

14. Samuel Pecar has written several stories that treat Israel indirectly. In "Hijos ingratos" a father laments the fact that his son has made *aliyah*, leaving him to suffer old age alone. In "Nietos" three Argentine grandmothers discuss the Israeli grandchildren they have never seen. In "Treinta y tres metros" Argentine parents strain to hear a short-wave broadcast from their children's kibbutz. In "Una pregunta," Pecar comes closest to Verbitsky's treatment of the theme. In this story, Dr. Shapiro emigrates to Israel and Saúl Cohen is forced to think seriously, for the first time, about Judaism, Argentina, and Zionism. Samuel Pecar, *Los rebeldes y los perplejos* (Buenos Aires: Periplo, 1959).

15. Lázaro Liacho, *Sobre el filo de la vida* [At the edge of life] (Buenos Aires: Candalabro, 1969), p. 17. Liacho's comment comes in the introduction to this collection of short stories on Jewish themes.