

## Tracing Issues of the Deferred/Differed Contemporary Australian Jewish Identity: Bavati's Dancing in the Dark and Brous' I Am Max Lamm under the Deconstructive Lens

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### ABSTRACT

This study attempts to deconstruct Bavati's *Dancing in the Dark* (2010) and Brous' *I Am Max Lamm* (2011) to discuss the contemporary social-psychological identity features portrayed within the overall ethno-religious Australian Jewish identity perspective in these texts. Highlighting the bidirectional relationship between the social-psychological identity perspective (Breakwell, 1986), at the narrower level, and the overall ethno-religious Australian Jewish identity aspect (Landau, 2015 and Elazar, 1995) reveal significant aspects of Jewish identity features in the selected novels which have not previously received scholarly attention. Derrida's *différance* is the chief theoretical analytic perspective to be employed through the textual analysis which relies on the elicited traces - beyond binaries, rhetorical expressions, semantic and morphosyntactic tell-tale textual moments. In the two novels, the ethno-religious perspective is explicit, in that Ditty and Lamm are trying to prove their Jewish selves confronting their ethnic and religious burden. This is shown through close analysis of the novels. Ditty's final dance in the light and Lamm's laughter at the end do not indicate the striking of a balance in their social-psychological identities, but instead marks a case of Jews in the postmodern era; their identity constantly deferred in the in-between, carrying the thousands-of-years' heritage yet simultaneously, struggling to be recognised for outstanding personal achievements.

**Keywords:** Australian Jewish; identity; *Dancing in the Dark*; *différance*; *I Am Max Lamm*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the field of contemporary identity studies, fluidity of identity is a widely accepted key concept: Reddy (2019) states, “Identity is fluid, and can be conceptualised as positions that are taken up on a continuum, rather than as static points that one achieves.” In the field of contemporary identity studies, the enigmatic essence of contemporary identity originates from the diverse components/ aspects of the “Self,” for example, physical, psychological, social, ethnic, religious, cultural aspects, among others (Lawler, 2019; Rosner & Ruskay, 2016; Lindholm, 2007; and Bauman, 2000). By focusing on the idea of a mosaic (heterogeneous and discordant) nature of identity, various dimensions of identity may be explored. In this article, the scope is limited to the Australian Jewish identity context which is marked by ethno-religious tendency and the bidirectional influence of this tendency (which is itself fluid) on the social-psychological identity dimension of the focal characters in the selected novels: Robyn Bavati’s *Dancing in the Dark* (2010) and Raphael Brous’ *I Am Max Lamm* (2011). Australian Jewish identity is peculiar due to its context of a multicultural Australian nation which “celebrates and values the benefits of cultural diversity for all Australians” (Department of Immigration, 2011). Australian Jews are thus (presumably) free to be their Jewish selves without reprisal or any adverse consequences (from the state or the multicultural communities); as such, their works of fiction may be studied to explore features of contemporary Jewish identity from this unique perspective. As indicated above and with a special reference to the Australian Jewish context, the Jews as an ethnic minority within the Australian nation, observe their religiosity as well as their ethnic peculiarity within the overall fluid Jewish identity (Graham and Markus, 2018). The ethno-religious fluidity, between isolation and assimilation or orthodoxy and secularism influences their social-psychological perspective of the self (Creese, 2019a) with a special lingering transgenerational traumatic impact (Cohn and Morrison, 2017). These factors bestow the Australian Jewish context a remarkable significance over other Anglophone Jewish contexts in other locations.

In their literary productions, the Australian Jewish writers reflect on pain and exile, wandering between isolation and assimilation, and the persistent impact of the Holocaust (La Vall, 2007; Monash University Report, 2018). La Vall (2007) and Liberman (2014) assert that Australian Jewish literature has been developing to address more complex and aesthetic issues. Australian Jewish literature, as a part of the overall panoramic perspective of Australian literature, highlights a wide variety of identity issues; of which, and through linguistic and aesthetic means, the psychological depths are remarkable within the social-psychological perspective of the ethno-religious Jewish identity. Stähler (2007) commenting on La Vall's accounts of the Australian Jewish writers notes that La Vall observes the influence of previous Yiddish writers such as Pinchas Goldhar and Herz Bergner on later generations of Anglophone (read: not only Australian) Jewish writers. Of note was the persistent shift from the sole major Holocaust influence to other Jewish issues (Stähler, 2007).

As an important factor in shaping contemporary Jewish identity within the collective Jewish memory, the Holocaust is viewed from a variety of angles: a struggle between binaries of dark and light with an attempt to search for a satisfying reconciliation (Varga, 2002), an influential social-psychological factor on portraying Australian Jewish writers’ lives (Freadman, 2007), and as a matter of naivety (Shield, 2016).

21<sup>st</sup>-century Australian-Jewish literature faces a real scarcity of scholarly investigation, as is the case of all Jewish literature in general (Levy and Schachter, 2015) and Anglophone Jewish literature specifically (Brauner and Stähler, 2014; Stähler, 2007 and Rosenfeld, 2008). There have

been attempts to highlight and attract attention to the Australian Jewish works as witnessed from the Sydney Jewish Writers' Festival, held since 2008, and the Melbourne Jewish Writers' Festival, held only in 2014 and 2016. Generally, both festivals covered Jewish issues, such as the Holocaust, Israel, memory, survival, adversity, and the complexity of the Jewish life be it in literature or in general as faced by Jews and non-Jews. Liberman (2014) has compiled a bibliography on Australian Jewish literature, indicating their distinguished rich and intellectual works. Previously, Freadman (2007) discussed the representations of Jewishness in an anthology of autobiographies written by Australian Jews focusing on their Holocaust experiences. He indicated that these accounts represent a variety of perspectives (the ethnic, religious, political and linguistic) in the development of the Australian Jewish community. In his earlier comparison between old and new Australian Jewish generations' accounts of the Holocaust memory, Freadman (2004) argued that the major difference between the two is that the earlier generation provided descriptive accounts whereas the new generations' reflections are more psychological.

As such, the tendency to read the Australian Jews as an ethno-religious group and the resulting impact of social and psychological perspectives have been noted by Creese (2019a and 2019b). Given the scarcity of scholarship in the whole field generally and the Australian Jewish literature in particular (which are to date chiefly represented by online reviews), it emerges that Australian Jewish literature is a body of work written during the contemporary era that reflects on the overall marked ethno-religious fluid identity (considered on a continuum from isolation to assimilation, from ultra-orthodox to secularism) and its bidirectional interaction with the social-psychological perspective of identity.

In the selected novels, it should be noted that the two authors Robyn Bavati, with her Haredi upbringing and unfulfilled passion for ballet, and Raphael Brous, who inserted autobiographical touches into the character of Max Lamm, address their (21<sup>st</sup> century) generation's perspective on the unanswered question/ problem: "Who is the Jew?" They achieve this by providing moments, via Ditty and Lamm, of bewilderment over a heavy ethno-religious heritage which shapes how they (should) look at themselves, how they ought to behave and how others, within the closer Jewish circles or the wider non-Jewish ones, perceive of them.

The only available previous critique of the selected novels appears in the form of online reviews; in websites like [goodreads.com](http://goodreads.com), [robinbooks.wordpress.com](http://robinbooks.wordpress.com), and [killyourdarlings.com.au](http://killyourdarlings.com.au) in which the general consensus was that the psychological traumas are various and indicative in these novels. However, the readers' focus has been only on the psychological dimension and its influence on the main characters – without linking these aspects to identity features in general, and Jewish identity in particular. This study therefore highlights the social-psychological identity features within the ethno-religious perspective of the Australian Jewish context to foreground the extent to which the explicit ethno-religious overall context, as portrayed in the selected novels, has influenced and is influenced by the more specific social-psychological identity attributes of the main characters: Ditty and Lamm alongside the bidirectional impact of the social circles around them: family, friends, and acquaintances. In *Dancing in the Dark* (2010), Ditty struggles due to her confrontations with herself, and with members of her social circle, in pursuit of her dream: to be a ballerina. In Brous' *I Am Max Lamm* (2011), Max Lamm's genius and outstanding achievements especially in tennis and the arts do not make him happy, satisfied, or stable. He 'migrates' 'west' to New York to become a tennis champion but he is 'cursed' by a sexual scandal that causes him to relocate 'east' to London where he falls down another vortex brought about by the accidental murder of a Pakistani Muslim, and a sexual affair with the daughter of a known anti-Semitic US senator living in the U.K. Lamm suffers from ghostly memories of dead people among

his relatives and acquaintances, remembering the pogroms of the Jews in Europe and considering himself to be rejected by the Christians, pursued by Muslims and yet hated by his own tribe.

This study therefore deconstructively traces Bavati's *Dancing in the Dark* (2010) and Brous' *I Am Max Lamm* (2011) to discover the contemporary social-psychological identity features portrayed within the overall ethno-religious identity perspective in these texts. With the scarcity of scholarly investigation in the field of Anglophone Jewish literature in general and the Australian context in particular, this attempt is potentially a significant contribution to the field of identity studies. The social-psychological perspective acquires its significance as an indicator of the fluid Jewish identity previously noted by Herman, 1989; Horowitz, 2002; Budick, 2007 and Tapper 2016. Besides, highlighting the bidirectional relationship between the social-psychological identity perspective, at the narrower level, and the overall ethno-religious Australian Jewish identity aspect provides a novel dimension within the idea of fluidity in Jewish identity in general. The interaction between the vivid ethno-religious Jewish representation and its psychological impact on the major characters in the novels, and their social relationships along with their impact on representing their ethnic and religious selves reveals aspects of Jewish identity that have not previously been considered. The analysis using a deconstructive perspective is applicable due to the following reasons: the fluidity and thus complexity of Jewish identity, "the tendency of 21<sup>st</sup>-century intellectual to take apart identities to the point of nonexistence" (Tapper, 2016, 2), the point that Derrida's works reflect the spirit of the age (Royle, 2003) and the strong relationship between deconstruction and identity, with special reference to Jewish identity (Dooley and Kavanagh, 2007; Hammerschleg, 2008 and D'Cruz, 2008).

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### IDENTITY ISSUES

Identity is a complex issue and has been studied through an array of theoretical lenses. Postmodern identity has been widely theorized; for example, Shamsuddin and Bahar (2020) discussed the decentered postmodern identity ('the fluid identity') in light of Hall's identity perspectives. Their notion of contemporary disseminated identity is similar to the perspective adopted in the present article albeit this study uses a deconstructive perspective. Similarly, Yazdani and Ross (2019) have indicated that, in light of Rogers' identity and self-views, the 20th century crisis is one of isolation and inability to achieve one's self identity as planned/ dreamed of. These notions are elicited from Roger's concepts of self-actualization, the real identity, and the ideal self, the pursued self/ identity. In the present article, 'Jewish identity has been variously defined and described as a racial or ethnic identity, a religious identity, and a cultural identity, as well as combinations of some or all of these' (Creese, 2019b, p. 1). Here, Australian Jewish identity is considered a combination of ethno-religious perspectives in its relationship to the social-psychological aspects. Considering the ethno-religious perspective, the focus is on two major relative identity aspects: the ethno-religious and the social-psychological. The ethno-religious perspective is considered in light of Landau's (2015) and Elazar's (1995) models. Landau's model divides this perspective into core, middle and periphery (Figure 1). Elazar's model sets up ethno-religious fluidity along a continuum of four levels A, B, C, and D (Figure 2). Level A meets the core and represents higher observance of ethno-religious identity aspects. Level D corresponds with the periphery and stands for the other extreme, i.e., assimilation and secularism. In light of these models, in this study, the fluid Jewish identity is tackled along a continuum from ultra-orthodox to secular, and from isolation to assimilation. The present article attempts to focus on the explicit observation (that is Landau's core and middle which correspond

with Elezar's first two circles: A and B) of the chief character's (Ditty in Bavati's *Dancing in the Dark* (2010) and Lamm in Brous' *I Am Max Lamm* (2011)) ethnic and Judaic aspects and their influence on their social-psychological identity features.

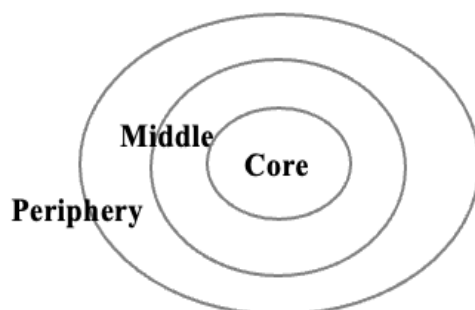


FIGURE 1. Landau's Model (2015) (By the authors)

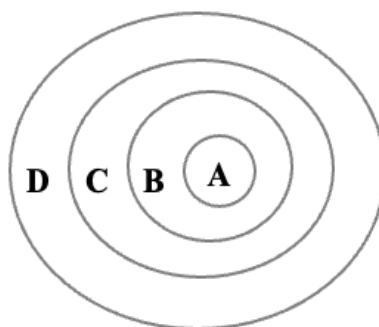


FIGURE 2. Elazar's Model (1995) (Creese, 2019b)

These social-psychological features are theoretically framed within Breakwell's Identity Process Theory (1986). Breakwell's model is selected because it basically examines the threat and coping strategies in shaping identity, i.e., psychological distress experienced by individuals when their identity is under threat, as the characters in these novel encounter. As such, identity is a totality of interconnected yet distinguishable psychological phenomena that depend on the dialectic psychological interaction of the individuals (the "I," the way the individuals consider themselves) and their relation to the social context with all its components (the "Me," the way the individuals perceive themselves in relation to society). Australian Jewish identity as such is considered, in this study, as a process of persistent interaction between the ethno-religious and the social-psychological perspectives which are highlighted as influential factors in shaping contemporary Jewish identity.

#### THE DECONSTRUCTION LENS: DERRIDA'S DIFFÉRANCE

Previous studies have established the significance of employing deconstructive axioms in literary criticism (Shah & Abahussain, 2019 and Pulido, 2011). The perspective of identity in this article is to be analysed adopting Derrida's conception of *différance* (Derrida, 1978 and 1982) which

posits that meaning is postponed continuously by being differed each time. This process is supplemented by a play of traces that link the different, deferred meaning with the past, present, and future and the ambivalent movement continues repeatedly. Différance here therefore works to elicit a possibility of meaning. The persistent process of meaning generation that occurs between the word and its binary leads to a restless progress of presence and absence (of possible meanings) and provides a supplement for the expression under erasure, i.e., the expression put under the deconstructive lens to prove the impossibility of one and only one meaning. This process creates traces which are inscribed and represented by different and deferred polysemous concepts.

In its relationship to identity, analysing the process of meaning generation via différance provides for open-ended identity interpretations, especially in the case of the highly fluid Jewish identity. Besides, according to Graafsma, et al. (1994), identity, in general, can be deconstructively interpreted as a process of deferred and differed indications and their relationships to factors of general orientation (the ethnic-religious ones in this article), and of specific influence (the social-psychological ones). Peter Redman (2000, p. 12) explains, “identities take their meaning from signifying practices: that is, from relations of difference internal to language and other cultural codes.” The theoretical arguments mentioned are realized by the textual analysis depending on the elicited traces beyond binaries, rhetorical expressions, and occasionally semantic and morphosyntactic tell-tale textual moments (Pulido's (2011) way of analysis is generally similar to the way employed in this article; however, the adopted way here is more linguistically specific).

The major complex theoretical concepts in this article, “social-psychological identity,” “ethno-religious fluid identity,” and “Derrida's différance”, are clearly applied in the course of the selected textual analysis. To elaborate further, here are some examples to reveal insight on how the adopted way of analysis provides evidence on deconstructing the ethno-religious and social-psychological aspects of identity. The persistent state of suspension between being Jews, an ethno-religious group, and their attempts to normalize their lives in the bigger host society is signified through the question put forth by Ditty which also echoes in Lamm's life, “why should my future depend on the past?” with the marked morpho-syntactic employment of the two words: the possessive personal pronoun “my,” modifying “future,” and the definite article “the,” modifying “past.” Max Lamm rhetorically questions the true values of happiness and freedom within/among the suffocating and unfair social boundaries along with the implications of his name “Max Lamm.” The following analyses and discussions will elaborate these and other points.

The deconstructive analysis of the texts is divided into subsections. The subsections' headings are either binaries or loaded expressions (such as: “Judaism: a privilege or a burden?” “Hyde Park Exile,”). These themes are deconstructed in the elaborations that follow the sub-headings. They trace the play between the binaries, and undo the rhetorical (such as “Happiness,” “Lamentation,” “Jew”), semantic (such as “Pang,” “Clue,”), and morphosyntactic (such as “wait,” “timeless shmutz,” and the indications of pronouns) expressions of the selected tell-tale moments. These tell-tale moments are selected based on the psychological and social elements (in their relation to the ethno-religious perspective) that influence the internal stability of the four characters/ moments.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *DANCING IN THE DARK (2010)*

#### ‘SUSPENDED THERE, DEFYING GRAVITY:’

Ditty's stability is always delayed by being persistently suspended between her commitment to her family, community, and the religious rituals (the past), on one side, and her personal goals to be a ballerina (my future), on the other. This persistent suspension between the social chains and her future dreams leads her present situation to be always absent and torture-ridden with pangs of pain and feverish quest for clues to escape this maze, albeit in vain.

While practising gymnastics, Ditty thinks, ‘From my upside-down position, the world looked weird, but in a good way’ (Bavati, 2010, p. 27). This is the perspective she has followed all her young life as she opposes her community’s principles and suspends her belonging for a while before settling into this new position ‘upside-down’ but in ‘a good way.’ The ‘right’ position is what her father once preached, that being a true Jew is to work for the hereafter ‘Olam Haba,’ not to ‘run around standing on your head and playing games’ (p. 28). As such, Ditty’s existence is suspended in an abyss between her apparent obedience to her ethno-religious rituals and her dreams; struggling in vain to balance them. Ultimately, the gravity of in-between (between dark and light) suspends her stability. Therefore, the notion of suspension (which dominates Ditty's life) implies being deferred/ delayed in an undecidable space. This leads to “sharp pang[s] of loneliness because the people I loved, the people who had raised and nurtured me, didn’t have a clue who I really was.” (p. 160). In addition, the indications of the two words ‘pang’ and ‘clue’ reveal her bewilderment. According to the Online Oxford Learner's Dictionary, ‘pang’ refers to a sudden feeling of pain, more like an explosion/ eruption, and ‘clue’ literally means ‘evidence to detect a crime or to solve a problem’ whilst etymologically it refers to a variant of ‘clew’ which is a piece of thread to guide a person out of a maze. Here, Ditty’s bewilderment enhanced by her rebellious soul erupts in pain and torture. She is overwhelmed with a comprehensive emotion of loss and estrangement from who she really is.

#### JUDAISM VS BALLET

The repeated contrast between Judaism and ballet reflects both elements as two opposite ends. Whereas the Cohens’ home is the place where Haredi Judaism is applied strictly, the National Theatre is Ditty’s refuge for dancing. Ditty’s situation reflects being here and there. Being at home within the Haredi community, she expresses a persistent detachment and a widening gulf between herself and the members of her household and what they represent. But the National is her haven of freedom and happiness in which she sheds the burdens of being a Jew, “[w]hen I entered the National, my body felt light with a sense of relief, a sense of freedom” (p. 148). However, within both settings, there are strict rules. There are strict instructions to adhere to in observing the religious rituals and also to master ballet. But, for Ditty, she is willing to comply with both sets of demands although they are opposite extremes. Ditty applies her disciplined nature acquired through being religiously accustomed to adhere to rules to excel at ballet classes especially with Miss Moskowicz, a strict ballet teacher. “[Y]ou could hurt yourself if you worked incorrectly” (p. 149) in religious rituals by being punished and banished, and in dancing, by, say, breaking a bone. Here, both actions, the punishment and the physical injury, lead to psychological pain i.e. being

sinful or unable to continue dancing, and a social failure – rejected by the congregation or having to leave the ballet class. But, to Ditty, she is willing and it is her individual choice to reject religious restrictions in favour of the discipline of ballet.

A binary relationship can be traced within the overall binary of Haredi/ ballet, between Ditty's father and Ditty. The father defends his sect of Judaism and works hard to bequeath it to his children while Ditty is sneaking away gradually from this atmosphere to a more liberal/ secular, then finally, assimilated version of the Jew. In the novel, whenever the father refers to his tribe, he uses the noun "Jew" whereas Ditty uses the adjective "Jewish" to identify herself in the goyim community isolating herself emotionally from the central concept of the Jew. This again implies the binary superior (the father, the Jew)/ Inferior (the daughter/ Jewish) (stated by Oppenheimer, as cited in Dreher, 2017). As her father is a real incarnation of the Haredi dogma, his presence invites everything strict and religious, and as Ditty is detaching herself from her sect, she is consequently separated from her father. Also, as Ditty grows hardened against her sect, her heart is hardened against her father especially when she finds out that he forbade her mother from contacting her, "[a]ny shred of remorse I may have felt for the pain I've caused my father evaporates in a burst of anger" (p. 282). Towards the end, Ditty clarifies her attitude to being Jewish by explaining to her Christian friends that she is Jewish but not religious as they are Christians but not religious, "[w]ell, I was born Jewish, so as far as I'm concerned, I always will be. For me, it is not a question of belief. It's just a fact." (p. 299).

#### LONELINESS AND INVISIBILITY

As she lives between two contradictory worlds, Ditty's loneliness is intensified. In the theatre full of spectators, on stage for the first time, where other ballerinas are expecting their relatives to be in the audience, Ditty expects no one. She feels how lonely she is, '[...] I pictured my parents, and tears of self-pity stung my tired eyes' (p. 176). Her need for her family's 'impossible' support widens the distance that separates her from them: '[...] I grew more distant from the family' (p. 185).

At home (which is not home any more), Ditty wonders, 'The house is as familiar as an old pair of gloves, but it's unfamiliar, too' (p. 295); 'How quickly this room has forgotten me' (p. 295). This feeling of estrangement prevails to the end, to the stage after she leaves her family and community. When shown photos of her taken during the big performance, Ditty looks and comments, 'Most of the photos have me in them, but it's like looking at a stranger' (p. 287); 'I'm staring at them outright because I realize that no one is looking at me anyway. In fact, I don't think I've ever felt more invisible' (p. 290). This is a moment of self-estrangement in which the mirror-like reflection and impact of the photo widens the void within her. The main reason for this internal abyss is the absence of her family and her community who did not come to watch her dance, and support her.

The more Ditty is involved in dancing and hiding her rebellion by lies, the more she feels suspended. The Haredi rituals, like observing Sabbath, eating Kosher and avoiding the Goyim, become strange for her

Now, it [all] looked a little ridiculous. And I was starting to feel like I was an imposter, like I didn't belong. There was a nostalgic part of me that longed to become again the little girl I used to be. There was something unbearably sad about knowing I couldn't. (p. 140)



Ditty tries to soothe her conscience by finding ruses: to compromise the religious obligation by dancing, and her loyalty to the family by her deceptive lies – and dancing. She finds a refuge in Zvi, her sister's fiancé who seems like a replica of her father's views. Zvi pontificates on telling lies as an acceptable ploy to keep the peace at home. Ditty convinces herself that 'If peace in the home was more important than truth, I might finally have found a way to ease my conscience. If truth was not the ultimate value, maybe it was okay to lie' (p. 167). Between truth and peace, Ditty prefers to sacrifice the former to gain the latter.

In a moment of bewilderment, Ditty decides to give up dancing to clear the burden of guilt on her conscience, 'by Yom Kippur I would have said my goodbyes, and come to terms with the fact that I wasn't coming back' (p. 84). When that day comes, she feels 'I was the sinner in this congregation. They were praying for me' (p. 85). However, as the day passes, she weakens under the ruse that she has already paid the fees for the semester of dancing school as she tells herself, 'I'd made a promise, and I had every intention of keeping it. I had to stop dancing, and I would. But not just yet. I would wait until the end of the year' (p. 87) which shows a weakening resolve, and tendency to procrastinate especially through the use of the highly elliptical sentence 'But not just yet' and the verb 'wait.' Besides, her success and promising progress in ballet further wane the initial determination.

#### WHY SHOULD MY FUTURE DEPEND ON THE PAST?

The Jews are seemingly suspended in the present between their duty to the victims of the past: 'live as a Jew to avenge the deaths of our fellow Jews' (p. 150) chiefly those who perished in the Holocaust. But, for Ditty, it is not fair. 'That seemed like the worst of all reasons to live as a Jew. If anything, it made me resent my Jewishness. Why should my future depend on the past?' (p. 150). In the last rhetorical question, the deliberate syntactic distinction between the use of the first-person possessive pronoun 'my' as a determiner with 'future' and the definite article 'the' with 'past' shows how she detaches herself from these obligations and empowers herself to own her future. She rejects binding her future with another religious heritage, '[W]e were supposed to long for the past, just as we were supposed to long for the future, for the Messiah, for the World to Come' (p. 150). As for the present moment, it is a moment in-between: a source of determination and also of resentment.

#### QUESTIONS OF HAPPINESS AND FREEDOM

In a heated conversation with her father, he explains the Haredi's view of happiness that it is a heritage transformed along the generations' chain but this promised happiness through the prayers will not include the disobedient ones like Ditty Cohen. The question of happiness here is whether it is obtained via strictly following the norms of the herd or pursuing one's dreams. In addition, the weird feeling of happiness when the rules are broken is exemplified through the secret alliance between Sara and Ditty to watch TV which is forbidden in Haredi Judaism, the TV which is the secret hidden by Sara's mother in her cupboard. It provides moments of rebellion and happiness from unknown sources and it creates a 'world beyond our small community, a world we had never been allowed to enter' (p. 14); a secular world which, along with the Internet, is 'like inviting Satan right into your home' (p. 23). This incident is the first step for Ditty to search for her own happiness, at the expense of the happiness of belonging to one's family and community. And this step highlights the question of freedom.

Paradoxically, freedom reflects being free from secularism and from being restrained by ultra-orthodox dogmatism. These points are represented in a heated discussion between Cohen, Ditty's father, and Yankel, Ditty's uncle. The perspective of Ditty's father is applied to his family and explained by Ditty, 'My father was always telling me to think for myself. But after what he'd said to Uncle Yankel, I was starting to wonder whether what he means was. 'Think like me' (p. 42). Therefore, freedom, in this context means either to think for yourself or to think like others.

Ditty's father's concept of freedom is symbolised through the image of the chain. In their celebration when a girl becomes an adult, the mother tells her daughters: ' "You are a link in a chain, and it's up to you to make sure that chain is never broken" ' (224). The chain here refers to the strong tie with the tribe displaying 'an image of a pretty piece of jewelry' (224). However, as Ditty grows up, 'the phrase "chained, bound, and fettered" came to my mind' (224).

The two selves struggling within Ditty neutralise her attachment to either side, thus escalating the involvement in the vortex of nihilism; a zone of zero gravity; neither here nor there. What deepens her psychological suffering is the contradictory social influences around her.

### THE SOCIAL CIRCLES

These circles reveal a variety of perspectives for Ditty and expose her to diverse currents inside and outside her familial boundaries. These perspectives are chiefly portrayed through Ditty's relationships with her sister, Rochel, her friend, Sara, and her cousin, Linda. The three represent the major Jewish social currents surrounding Ditty that deepen her dilemma and suspension of finding the self/ a stable self. Rochel is a symbol of obedience and satisfaction with the tribe's obligations. Linda is a rebellious example, the result of the liberal tendency in a Jewish upbringing. Ditty has these two possible incarnations of her future, and she selects to be free in her choice and to pursue her dreams. Ditty's friend, Sara is another example of obedience albeit with frequent rule flouting. However, Sara's influence is not strong; on the contrary, Sara is the one who helps Ditty to pursue ballet, but it is also she who warns Ditty from continuing ballet as a way of life not to toe the line of the Haredi community.

So, the identity crisis due to the schizophrenic state Ditty lives in complicates her life. The pangs of torture intensify her dilemma that even though she gains the right of free choice, she cannot be happy and share her success with her family and friends. Another identity crisis is faced by Max Lamm, but his case is on a more macro perspective compared to Ditty. Lamm suffers as a diaspora in Australia, New York, and London due to a heritage of lamentation and a fossilised feeling of hatred sharpened by global social hypocrisy.

### I AM MAX LAMM (2011)

Raphael Brous introduces a contemporary symbol of the Jewish continuous process of diaspora. Lamm is originally from Australia. He travels first to the USA, then Britain to pursue a promising future as tennis champion. His fall from grace begins after becoming involved in a sexual scandal in the USA and subsequently murdering, by mistake, a Pakistani Muslim in Britain. Religious and ethnic factors play a major motivating role in the events. This fact is reflected through the narratorial juxtaposition. The novel's temporal setting takes place within three days: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday -7, 8, and 9 April 2005. Lamm's narration begins 24 hours after the murder as the anchor moment to which all other events are temporally identified. Suspended in a world of hatred and double standards, the young Max Lamm's self-consciousness of being a Jew intensifies the burden of his past on his social-psychological life and shatters his prosperous potential.

Brous' prologue, "What shall I testify for you? What shall I compare to you, O daughter of Jerusalem ... For your ruin is as vast as the sea! Who can heal you?" The title of *The Book of Eichah* (Lamentations), literally implies sorrow and weeping and alludes to the surname of the novel's major character, Max 'Lamm.' There are also implications of the author's selection of the first name 'Max' for the protagonist: in his Hyde Park diaspora (space of isolation and persecution), Max Lamm is tortured by his apocalyptic prediction comparing himself to the vagrants there, '*They're the actor behind your mask*' (Brous, 2011, p. 95). In the word 'mask,' the last sounds are switched to form the name Max. Linking the two points together, the selection of the name 'Max Lamm,' highlighted in the title of the novel signifies the overall situation of the main character's immersed life in suffering and the deception of outward appearances, masks that either Max Lamm has to hide behind, or which society around him dons. Lamm's life, as a moment in the Jewish space, is ridden with deception/pretension (masks) and lamentations, regret and sorrow. It is a circle Lamm is unable to stop or escape from in an aggressive environment which exerts its influence on his already cracked self.

#### MATTER AND ANTIMATTER

Lamm is described as a 'sports champ *and* a lover of art. A combo that typically gets annihilated in the one person the way matter and antimatter disappear in a flash of light' (p. 42). All the indicators in his early teenage life show that he has had a promising potential. However, this potential is paradoxically '[c]elebrated on the way up,' (p. 42) as a smart athlete, artist and orator to be "notorious on the way down. [...]" (p. 42) as a hate-ridden and 'oversexed degenerate whoremonger' (p. 69). In this downward route, he is accused of hating the 'human species,' (p. 69) and all positive human features as 'love, laughter, decency, celebration and solid unspectacular achievement. [...] Ultimately, his critics agreed, the ghoul hates himself;" reflecting the rabbi's words, "The kid loves to hate. But really he hates himself" (p. 69) and the narrator's comment, '[h]is force of self-destruction, emerging like a maladaptive butterfly from a poisoned cocoon' (p. 79). Another example that corresponds with the fluctuating attitude of the Jews towards the failure of some of their figures who showed great potential was when Aaron Krickstein played against Agassi in the semi-finals of a tennis championship. The Jews had hoped that they might achieve something in the tennis world with the prospects of Lamm as a potential successor. But 'Krickstein returned to his Jewish roots and lost [...], defaulting with an injured hamstring' (p. 76). By the wry comment 'returned to his Jewish roots,' an engendered self-effacing inferiority complex echoes via the case of Max Lamm. The rise and fall of Max Lamm and the Australian Jewish community's response in both cases (Krickstein and Lamm) present an insight of the Jews' feelings of inferiority. Lamm is described as a peaceful person; a vegetarian who has never killed an insect 'who had always brushed disoriented cicadas off the floodlit tennis court rather than squash the defenceless insects beneath his sneakers' (p. 13). This personality and the one portrayed after the series of accidents in New York (the sexual tape) and in London (the murder) represent a process of paradoxical destructive 'metamorphosis' (p. 13). He suffers from "descending further into the unforeseen, into the abyss he once believed would hit a rocky floor but was proving to be bottomless' (p. 14). Between the two fates: 'hitting a rocky floor' or falling endlessly, the first, though painful, becomes his best choice.

This metaphoric abyss he is descending into is accompanied by a persistently broken self-image 'It was me' (p. 22) reflected in 'a cracked mirror in a public toilet in Hyde Park' (p. 22), his place of exile. The 'cracked mirror' figuratively indicates two broken things: the mirror itself and Lamm's self-image. This is intensified in the atmosphere of Hyde Park where he hides. Besides,

in this continuous fall, he is ‘hunted, haunted’ (p. 25) by the guilt and the fifteen-second memory of the murder, both of which are transformed into a desire to ‘deconstruct, reconstruct, [...] re-live the worst fifteen seconds of his life [...] to strategize a way out through the tightening net’ (p. 24). In other words, a desire to change his past, ‘Let me change my past’ (p. 14). To change his past, here, signifies two dimensions. The first is the near past of the accidental murder among other negative incidents that ruined his present and future. He wants to come up with a satisfying scenario why he attacked the boy, Massawi. The other implication echoes Ditty’s wish/ inquiry, ‘Why should my future depend on the past?’ (Bavati, 2010, p. 150) reflecting an overwhelming sense of the burden of the Jews’ past accumulated heritage on their potential. This can be generalisable to wishing to be free from the Jewish past heritage (of lamentations) that cause a traumatic self-perspective for the Jews.

#### HYDE PARK: A SYMBOL OF EXILE

Hyde Park is paradoxically a location of wealthy apartments and at the same time an exile/ refuge for tramps and vagrants. While running from the helicopter that hovers over Hyde Park, which he thinks is chasing him, his loss and diaspora are vividly portrayed: ‘Another ten minutes Lamm stumbled left, right, left, left’ (p. 27). He is also ‘fleeing the German shepherds [...] run[ning] deeper into this labyrinthine dark of necessity!’ (p. 27). The allusion here is of a Jew stained with different crimes, abused by a global society – escaping from German dogs in the dark maze of the exiled corners of Hyde Park. This approximates a miniature of the Holocaust (Zipperstein, 2018; Winkler, 2005; & Penkower, 2004). Again, the incarnation between the past and the present and their gloomy reflections on the future are portrayed through these images – implying the full awareness of Lamm’s mosaic Jewishness and the mask of its negative heritage obscuring him.

In these exiles, there are the vagrants, the rodents, and insects. ‘Finally a clump of undergrowth thick enough for a hiding place. [...] into the bush Max crawled, [...] Who ventures here but the rats?’ (p. 27). Considering this categorisation; on the same level with non-human creatures, together with his sympathy for these creatures Lamm represents a fossilised image of the Jews in the collective Western consciousness/ memory (Rosenberg, Kafka, and Levi as cited in Cheyette, 2007). In the past, the Jews, as a persecuted people like the proletariat, the women and the blacks, are looked at as inferior species at the same level as rodents and insects, harmful and despised. For Lamm, in the 21st-century, exiled in Hyde Park, the whole situation is a replica of the Jewish past and an indicator of a moment of their present status; possibly their future too.

In Hyde Park, Lamm uses the grate of the old barbecue pit as a hideout or a temporary grave: ‘Lamm was interred in charcoal and sausage fat, but, he recognized, the burying alive had commenced the year before... [i]n Brooklyn [...]’ (p. 41). The symbolic image of the barbecue as a miniature Holocaust is implied as “he lit the gas barbecue at ‘medium’ on the dial (Engelkin, 2022; Derkach, 2022; & Linfield, 2021). A cruel end for the spiders roasting inside (yet no crueller than being eaten by your mother, as baby spiders often are)” (p. 41). The weak spiders in the most fragile webs as their home face two cruel fates: to be burned alive in the furnace of the barbecue or to be eaten by their mother. Fragility, being burned alive during a [barbecue] party, and viciously devoured by their own species – correspond to the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust, and through their processes of self-destruction when they turn against their own kind, exemplified in the case of Max Lamm when the American Jewish lobbies push to have him banished from the sports scene; and media after his scandal, and when the Australian rabbi defined him as in love with hatred, and when the whole of Britain pursues him as the unknown murderer of Massawi.

In his encounter with the police while being charged not for Massawi's murder but by Wesson for theft, Lamm's incarnation with his whole nation and its burdens is made explicit. He thinks, 'Choose your defiant death, like the fearless Jews at Masada that your grandmother taught you about. They wouldn't surrender to the Romans' (p. 222). The allusion is to the war between the Jews and their enemies the Roman, who besieged the Jews in an area called Masada (History.com, 2019). Lamm represents the Jews, whilst the police and Wesson are the Romans to whom Lamm surrenders and is taken prisoner. There is a vivid awareness of his Jewishness and its burden and struggles, especially in his relationship with Kelly and her father, who symbolise the western/ American materialism during his state of escapism in Britain (from the German dogs).

#### FALL TO MERE PHYSICAL DESIRES IN SEARCH FOR THE SELF

Within these external and internal rejecting contexts, Lamm escapes to the mere animalistic side of humanity rendered in the three alliterated verbs, "Fight, Flee, Fuck" (p. 43). The lack of the conjunction 'and' before the last refutes any sequence or order and emphasizes a Sisyphean circularity. These three words are Lamm's major life slogan highlighted chiefly during his endless fall as if it is a process of strategic self-destruction/ hatred of the failure of this Self. An important and earlier sign of Lamm's dilemma is his attraction to the paintings of Francis Bacon, 'beautifully, truthfully pornographic in Bacon's convulsions of bones, lips, cocks, skin; revoltingly animal yet arousingly human. Bacon's orgasmic deathly eruptions spoke to Lamm, to a black cranny inside this nice Jewish boy' (44); and Francisco Goya's pieces 'when violence becomes victory's end, not its means. Disembowelment. Dismemberment. Decapitation' (44). These stark desires of hatred and destruction are portrayed through the torturing reaction of all around him, without exception, to his New York scandal and London accidental murder. The exaggeration which his mistakes have aroused makes him relate to his favourite painters completely, along with the double standards/Janus-faced humanity.

Lamm ultimately feels abandoned by everyone and descends into the abyss. 'Hopeless, anchorless Lamm! He hadn't seen enough? [...] The great artists suffered for their art; Lamm's art was to suffer' (p. 59). He thinks 'affliction is a treasure,' so it should lead him to creativity; up the ladder 'of self-improvement, resilience, artistic inspiration. . . not to *this!*' – 'an exiled Jewish failure pickled in limestone and barbeque grease' (p. 61).

#### YOU ARE A JEW

As previously explained, Lamm is haunted by the fact of being a Jew with all the negative connotations of the word, "already Lamm wore the timeless shmutz of the vagrant" (p. 67). This simple sentence is a declaration of Lamm carrying the burden of Jewish heritage of lamentation which is imposed and external. The adverb "already" indicates its existence as a matter of fact. The implication of the name "Lamm" reflects the bequeathed heritage of lamentation. The verb "wore" indicates that this heritage is external and imposed. "[T]imeless" shows that this heritage is ancient, it continues currently, and it will continue in the future. What links all these implications to the Jews is the use of "shmutz" a Yiddish word meaning "dirt." For Lamm timeless heritage is akin to dirt and a mark of the homeless/ diasporic/ lost.

Repeatedly, he has reminded himself of this collective angst during his relationship with Kelly Wesson, her father (the prominent anti-Semitic US senator famous for his role in the Iraq war), and his crime. He keeps wondering what attracted Kelly to pick such a vagrant from Hyde Park to have a sexual affair with him. 'She's staring at you. *Really* staring. Your face, hands, body.

Doesn't believe a word of your shit. Can she tell that you're nuts? That you're a murderer? A Jew?' (p. 109). Conversely, he thinks that he deserves to be with Kelly as compensation for his accidental misfortune: 'You are a blessing for a neglectful Jew who forgets the *mitzvoth* and only visits a synagogue because he killed someone.' (p. 184). Amid his fear of being discovered by the British police and the angry riot of Pakistanis and their supporters, he apprehends, '[...] wait until they identify you, until they know that you're a Jew' (p. 61).

### THE SOCIAL CIRCLES AROUND LAMM

KELLY WESSON

The opposite reflection of Lamm is Kelly Wesson. They both share 'The desire-not-to-exist, the timeless escape that feels natural as bleeding to a victim of the insurmountable' (p. 73). Here, there is noticeable parallelism between the two. Lamm has a promising potential, then he descends to his abyss due to two fatal mistakes. Kelly lives in luxury, but has no achievement or feeling of peace or satisfaction. Similar to Lamm, Kelly is ridden with a feeling of hatred, 'You love to hate.' (p. 119). Lamm meets her in Hyde Park and they have an affair. But he doubts her intentions upon discovering that she is the daughter of a famous anti-Semitic senator who was a sponsor of the Iraq war. Despite the reflection of each other, Kelly is a major factor, another 'cracked mirror' that deepens Lamm's awareness of being the other/ a Jew/ an anonymous vagrant.

### THE GHOSTS: LEWSKI AND MOSHINSKY.

Mr. Lewski was Lamm's secondary school teacher. His ghost appears in Hyde Park which then becomes a 'posthumous classroom. His students the squirrels, his blackboard a blackberry bush.' (p. 29); the image highlights the bewilderment of Lamm and his incarnation with nature as a 'romantic' moment of escapism from reality alongside the positive memory of Mr Lewski who proposes a possible mistake of 'a' murder as in Steinback's novella, *Of Mice and Men*. At the same time, Lamm is also haunted by his grandfather, Abraham Moshinsky's ghost whose memory is linked to lamentations and the masochistic pleasure of torturing the self, "Abraham Moshinsky loved those verses evoking his own slavery under the German pharaohs" (p. 170). The reminder of Lamm's grandfather here represents the roots of the Jewish burden and suffering.

### SOCIAL INJUSTICE/ DOUBLE STANDARDS: COHESION VS CHAOS

Lamm's situation causes the reader to contrast between his crimes and a variety of global crimes and the way of their reception. He attempts to commit suicide in New York after the sex tape scandal and its tragic consequences. This attempt coincides with the fall of Baghdad where there has been a real contemporary pogrom and massive destruction. The question is why the global society condemns him as his news travels throughout three continents whereas there is no similar reaction to the casualties of Iraq? The Iraq war is only one example among others like the Lockerbie plane crash, 9/11, the Holocaust, the ancient pogroms against the Jews in Europe. The media works promptly to enhance such injustice revealing one of its negative aspects in the collective as well as individual awareness. That is the danger foreseen by his English teacher, Mr. Lewski, who attempts to create 'an ordered life' out of the chaotic information boom.

Max Lamm is a moment situated further on the ethnic-religious continuum adopted in the study. His major concern is the vivid awareness of being a committed Jew in a world/ surroundings, both within the Jewish boundaries and outside, that is rejecting and hateful because they all deal

with Lamm, including the way he looks at himself, as a heritage of lamentation, persecution, and inferiority. Lamm presents another image of suspension not through free choice or breaking the community's rules, but because of an inherent tendency of destructive global double standards. In all, this portrayal of Max Lamm is an attempt to, on the one hand, observe the accumulated Jewish identity, and, on the other universalise the experience of persecution to minimise the barriers, especially the psychological ones, between the Jews and other nations. Generally, hatred leads to hatred and deepens suffering. In the novel, the apocalyptic atmosphere is soothed by the last scene, in which Massawi's cousin saves Lamm from the police, 'His right hand grabbed in triumph by Malik Massawi's cousin, his throat stinging from the gas, eyes dazzled by flashing cameras, Lamm began to laugh' (p. 230). Lamm's laughter is paradoxically interpreted as sarcastic because he is the murderer and somehow optimistic: if humans deal with each other without lamentations, life may become better.

## CONCLUSION

In the previous arguments, the employment of the subtitles in the article reflects the binaries, like: privilege/ burden; Jew/ other; past/ future; home/exile; among others, and the loaded expressions, like: happiness; freedom and double standards, of which the persistent process of suspension takes place. Ditty oscillates between adhering to communal rules and live a stable routine and rebelling against them to pursue ones dreams whereas Lamm's adherence to his community and his attempts to excel in his field are all blown by his accidental mistakes exaggerated by the global society and considered irredeemable by his own Australian Jewish community who consider Lamm an icon of hatred and shame. Due to these circumstances, Ditty's and Lamm's loneliness force them to choose invisibility in chosen exiles: the wider society outside the Jewish community for Ditty and Hyde Park which symbolizes a miniature of the concentration camps for Lamm. Ditty's outstanding achievement in dancing does not fill the void created after leaving her family's home and Lamm's outstanding achievements in sports and arts are totally forgotten by his scandalous sexual affair and the murder. Both Ditty and Lamm are left to carry the heavy heritage of the Jewish past which is being doubled by the social and psychological burdens they have to tolerate.

Tracing the ethno-religious features of Jewish identity in the two analysed moments reveals an unstable movement along the adopted continuum. To explain further, with Ditty and Lamm who explicitly observe their being Jews, ethnically and religiously, there is a clear dissatisfaction and torturing awareness of the heavy burdens of not only the traumatic past but the coming unobtainable future with the suspended present moments in between. Ditty, and Lamm defy the distracting gravity of their belonging and their dreams to be themselves. Although each ends up suspended in a moment of in-betweenness, both, at least, manage to represent a perspective of the contemporary Jewish identity. They emphasise their observation of their Jewishness with the hope to compensate the burdens of the past heritage, remove the masks of estrangement from other nations, and mix/mingle normally in the currents of life. However, on the way to this change/metamorphosis, the great losses make them stick in that suspended position with the hope to overcome it through later attempts. The final dance of Ditty in the light and Lamm's laughter do not mean striking a balance in their social-psychological identities, these two closing incidents mark a case of the Jews in the postmodern era; it is 'going on' in the in-between carrying the thousands-of-years heritage and simultaneously struggling to reveal outstanding achievements. The complexities of the Australian Jewish identity, through the two examples of Ditty and Lamm, reflect the multilayered Jewish identity in the contemporary era. This is proved through the

inability to settle in terms of the ethno-religious identity perspective and the undecidability of their identities due to the suspended deferred/ differed recognition of the psychological 'I' and the social 'Me.'

The complexities of the Australian Jewish identity, through the two examples of Ditty and Lamm, reflect the multilayered Jewish identity in the contemporary era. This is proved through the inability to settle in terms of the ethno-religious identity perspective and the undecidability of their identities due to the suspended deferred/ differed recognition of the psychological 'I' and the social 'Me.' Therefore, the significance of being an Australian Jew here is that the cosmopolitan representations reflected through Ditty and Lamm provide a representative sample of the contemporary Jewish identity in general because of the peculiar geographical location, and hence the multicultural influences on the wide ethno-religious Australian varieties, among which are the Jews. Here, these features give studying the Australian Jewish identity an advantage over other Anglophone Jewish groups in the contemporary era.

Identity issues tackled in this article highlight the principal identity aspects of the working powers in determining Jewish identity today. Besides, analysing Jewish identity using a concept derived basically from Jewish heritage is significant as the undecidable nature of difference matches the enigmatic nature of Jewish identity and utilizes the attempts to fathom it. Moreover, the employment of textual analysis, through the linguistic and rhetorical implications, provides a novel and thorough exploratory perspective of deconstructive investigation.

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