The Jewish Slant Is Flatlining In Book World

By Michael Gold

Selling an agent on work with a Jewish slant is tough, but “not impossible,” my Jewish thesis advisor at City College told me recently, as I polished the work for her final read-through. Not exactly encouraging words.

My manuscript’s main character starts off as a ten-year-old boy, precociously reading books on the Shoah, the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, and the numerous other instances of persecutions of the Jewish people. Confronted with these horrors, he seeks out comics as a temporary psychological refuge, only to compulsively return to books about Jewish tragedies, despite his mother’s pleas.

The boy grows up to become a public relations writer who fades out in middle age and begins to question the meaning of his corporate life. He learns of the hatred of a Midwestern church pastor who thinks solar power is from the devil, preaches that homosexuality is a curse upon America and not incidentally, hates Jews. The character in my novel thinks God is telling him to meet the pastor and his congregation, to try to convince them that what they’re doing isn’t righteous, in the style of the Hebrew prophets of ancient days.

It doesn’t go well.

And here is my thesis advisor, whose first novel was a loose fictionalization of her Jewish family’s experiences in Iran during the Islamic revolution, telling me how difficult it will be to convince the literary world’s gatekeepers that my manuscript might be worth a look.

She taught a course on the literature of the Jewish diaspora a few years ago. We read everything from one of the chapters in “In Search of Lost Time,” by Proust, to “Lost in Translation: A Life In A New Language,” by Eva Hoffman and “The Man In the White Sharkskin Suit,” by Lucette Lagnado.

While Proust was raised as a Catholic, his mother was Jewish. We read his work because of the Jewish themes woven throughout Proust’s writing, including assimilation and anti-Semitism in French society. In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French Army, was falsely accused of treason by the French government, and put in one of the country’s harshest prisons, until he was finally exonerated after several years in prison. Proust became a champion advocating for Dreyfus. One of Proust’s main characters was the elegant gentleman Charles Swann, who has Jewish ancestry.

Hoffman’s “Lost in Translation: A Life In A New Language,” a memoir, focuses on the author’s generally happy Polish childhood. But the family leaves for Canada when Hoffman is 13 years

old, because of continuing anti-Semitism in Poland, and she finds herself adrift and struggling in her new country, both with a new language and social mores.

“The Man in The White Sharkskin Suit,” another memoir, concerns an Egyptian Jewish family that enjoyed relative wealth in Cairo, only to be thrown out of the country in 1952, when King Farouk was overthrown by Gamal Abdel Nasser. The author’s family was allowed to leave the country with just $200. They moved to Paris, then New York, and found little but poverty and misery.

These books capture an essential, unfortunate constant in Jewish life – what it means to live as a minority in societies that veer between acceptance and hostility to the idea that Jews continue to exist.

Hoffman’s book was published in 1989, Lagnado’s in 2007. The paths to publishing these books would be considerably tougher today. Consider as evidence the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), a major incubator and influencer in developing creative writing programs in U.S. colleges and universities.

The 2026 Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), held this past March in Baltimore, featured one panel, called “Writing Jewish Stories For Today,” sponsored by the Jewish Book Council, which discussed “the unique challenges and responsibilities – and inspiring possibilities – of writing Jewish fiction today.”

In contrast, AWP had two panels on Palestine, with language that sets up the Jews and Israel as oppressors and murderers. One, titled “Toward A Liberatory Literature,“ invited attendees to the panel by stating, “the struggle for liberation in Palestine and the genocide in Gaza have galvanized the world and reignited long-standing conversations around the global struggle for liberation” and “how literature can disrupt narratives of empire and colonialism.”

The second panel on Palestine, called “Translating Gaza, Problematizing Translation,” featured a discussion on “Gazan genocide.”

Of course, the multitude of voices in the writing world deserve to be heard. But the language of the Palestinian seminars set up Zionism as an imperialist, colonialist, genocidal entity that must be eliminated for Palestinians to live and thrive. The Jewish writing seminar didn’t target Palestinians or Muslims. The Palestinian seminars didn’t mention Hamas’ October 7th mass slaughter of Israeli civilians but simply focused on what they labeled as the massive, irredeemable crimes of Zionism. Their emphasis is tribal and exclusionary. There’s no room for Israel and the Jews in their mental world, except as enemies.

My professor told me during our thesis conversation that she would no longer teach the diaspora course, at least not in the foreseeable future. She didn’t have to tell me why. The

professor, whose father had been arrested and tortured as a “Zionist spy” decades before by the Islamic regime in Iran when she was just eight years old, and whose family hired smugglers to secretly escape the country after the takeover of the Ayatollah, knew that doors were once again being closed to Jews.

This is happening in New York City, home to one million members of the tribe, the largest Jewish community in the world.

Almost forty years ago, University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom wrote “The Closing of the American Mind,” about the decline of critical thinking in higher education, with students who don’t read the books that are the foundations of Western thought and fail to deeply explore what it means to live an ethical life.

What’s happened at City College and in the literary world is the closing of the liberal mind. I define liberal in this sense, from the Oxford Dictionary as: “willing to understand and respect other people’s behavior, opinions, etc., especially when they are different from your own.”

Just as Nick Fuentes, Tucker Carlson, and Candace Owens are trying to cut Jews out of the American story, so it seems City College students are doing the same. The college’s administration is making an effort to combat various student groups’ efforts to shun and exile the Jewish students and failing.

At City College in November 2025, a young imam walked out of an interfaith event when he saw a Hillel leader on the panel, calling him a Zionist. If he’s Jewish, he must therefore be a Zionist. And Zionism is pure evil, in this guy’s mind. One hundred Muslim students followed the imam out the door. Who did he think was going to be on the panel? This would be hilarious if it weren’t so painful.

Several Muslim and pro-Palestinian groups at various CUNY colleges approved of the imam’s walkout.

“Two groups at Brooklyn College and the borough’s Muslim American Society center condemned the interfaith event and supported past disruptions of interfaith gatherings at the college,” stated a Times of Israel story.

One group, from John Jay College, released a statement saying interfaith workshops “are not genuine dialogue: instead they feel like structured attempts to manufacture political consent under the guise of coexistence. What is presented as ‘interfaith understanding’ becomes, in practice, an attempt to sanitize state violence.”

The statement went on to say that “Zionism is a racist belief system, and it has no place at our universities...The Zionist state has no ‘right to exist,’ and Palestinians should not be pressured into ‘coexisting’ with racists who call for their annihilation.”

The president of City College condemned the imam's walkout. He wrote a letter to the student body, which stated, "…one of the most distressing moments of the event, captured on tape, was the voice of a Jewish student, responding when the chaplain (CUNY student chaplain, Joshua Medina, with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a Protestant evangelical denomination, who was hired two months earlier), said he was shocked at the walkout, saying: 'We're not. This happens all the time.'"

After October 7th, I was very careful about what I said in our seminars. One of my fellow students, a queer, non-binary person, a graduate of an elite university in the Midwest, whom I considered a friend, had brought to our creative writing workshop a play that had as its premise the idea that the United States government was bringing back the draft in order to help Israel fight a future war in Gaza. The play takes place in a house in Minneapolis, with several twenty-something transgender, gay and straight characters trying to figure out how to organize and conduct a massive civil disobedience event to protest and thwart the draft.

I should have expected something like this from the non-binary student. They're a white Anglo Saxon Protestant who runs around the city wearing a keffiyeh around their neck. They've written about how proud they are to wear it. Talk about role-playing. I tried to ignore the keffiyeh when we talked before class. Yes, it was obnoxious, but I didn't want to start an argument.

The obvious anti-Semitic trope underlying the piece was the idea that Israel is secretly manipulating U.S. foreign policy, this time in order to get American soldiers to fight and die to advance the Zionist project. Israel as the puppet master of the U.S. government is the historical successor to that old dead horse idea that Jews run the world.

Our professor for the course, also my thesis advisor, said nothing about the premise of the student's work. Neither did I. The class approached the piece in a technical way – were the characters interesting and believable? Did the story keep the reader engaged?

It might have been a mistake not to bring up the anti-Semitic slur at the foundation of the student's work. Not challenging the bias signals acceptance of it.

On the other hand, the table had already been set for the kind of response the class might see from my non-binary friend. We are at school of higher learning with the ostensible goal of engaging in free inquiry, but it is being attacked with a vengeance. A radical orthodoxy is being held like a giant hammer over the campus. We're not going to have a conversation. My non-binary classmate has already made their decision not to listen to anything I have to say about Israel and Jews. The liberal idea of dialogue at City College may not be dead, but it's certainly in a deep freeze.

When I read the John Jay student group's statement that the Zionist state has "no right to exist," it cut right into the core of who I am, my place in the Jewish community, and what I know about the manifold catastrophes of the history of the Jews, and how we've been historically treated by both Christian and Muslim regimes.

I don't see how any Jewish person can have a reasonable discussion with this kind of radicalism. City College and CUNY Muslim groups won't sit at a table with us. They said they don't even want to co-exist. If someone brought up the concept of "two-state solution" with the authors of the statement, they'd be dismissed with contempt.

One afternoon last year, walking in the entrance to the school's biggest academic building, with the library, cafeteria and common area all nearby, a sea of hijabs planted in dozens of chairs, I heard a piano playing "Hatikvah," the Israeli national anthem. I had to walk over to the piano, genuinely concerned that the musician might be verbally attacked, or worse. I saw a young student wearing a kippah, banging away on the keys. I gave him a thumbs up. Nobody bothered him, because they didn't know what the song was. If they did, I wonder what would have happened.

It wouldn't have mattered if Israel had been more measured in its response to Hamas' October 7th massacre. The only move that would have been acceptable to the Muslim student groups is if Israel simply folded its tent, evacuated every Jew and ceased to become a country.

In this sense, they're fully aligned with the goals of the Islamic dictatorship in Iran, the main backer of Hamas and Hezbollah and other terror groups in the Middle East, a nation in which there is no freedom of speech or the press, a woman can be put in jail for not wearing her head scarf in the proper manner, and people get executed for all kinds of imagined crimes, which would be unthinkable in the United States. According to Amnesty International, these include "corruption on Earth" and something called "enmity against God."

One of the great things about the American Revolution is that it took the way we resolve conflicts from the field of brute force to that of an elected government. We exchanged combat for discussion, negotiation, give and take. If Muslims can't even sit at the table with Jews, are we all going to go to the barricades and fight it out in the streets?

As the Muslim population of New York City grows and exerts greater influence on local government and the media, the question is, what will their major cultural contributions be to the life of the city? Are they simply going to shower us with messages of hatred for Israel and the Jews? That seems to be the case so far. They don't want to hear from us. They seem far more interested in trying to bury us under a mountain of venom.

Some months ago, I submitted a piece for a reading series some of the graduate students put on every month. We meet in a restaurant back room, or bar, and share our work. Every student

gets to read their contributions for five minutes. I've read on two occasions, both before October 7th.

My latest work had nothing to do with Israel or being Jewish. The essay made the case that climate change is destroying the environment we depend on for our lives, and we all need to do much more to embrace renewable energy more rapidly. I suspect few people at City College would have a problem with my point of view. My submission didn't get a response from the organizers. I tried again. Nothing.

Did they see my name and decide I wasn't going to get a spot? Why didn't they even email back, even if just to say, "no thanks"?

I'll never know. But I suspect what I don't want to suspect.

The anti-Jewish hatred at CCNY I've experienced has infected the greater literary world. We are now pariahs. The student groups and book publishers that condemn tribalism in American life are doing the same thing to the Jews.

It feels as if much of the political left has given up on liberalism. There's no willingness to invite the world in, to learn something new. There's just an iron wall of hate. They don't want to open themselves up to listen to our stories. They don't want to tell us their stories. They don't want to try to find any common ground at all. They don't want to allow for the potential that we might even become friendly, that the way we look at each other might soften, that we could theoretically live in the world together. They've already made up their minds about who we are – we're mass murderers or accomplices to it. A terrible prejudice stalks both CUNY and the publishing industry, and it's got the teeth of a wolf.

I've frequently thought about changing my last name when submitting work. I could go from Michael Gold to Ralph Cornwood. I'm only half-kidding. I've also thought about changing the main character of my manuscript, from Stanley Greenberg to John Smith. I'm fully capable of erasing the Jewish slant in my work.

But if I did this, the question becomes, is it worth it? What will I lose?

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Michael Gold's work has been published by The Times of Israel, The Algemeiner, The Intermountain Jewish News, the New York Daily News, the Albany Times Union, The Yonkers Times, The Virginian-Pilot, The Knoxville (Iowa) Journal Express, other newspapers, and The Hardy Society Journal, a British literary magazine.