

# **Melvin Jacobson: New Brunswick in the Microliterary and Multicultural Perspective**

**by Olena Vdovyna**

## **Abstract**

*The article is dedicated to an underresearched New Brunswick author Melvin Jacobson (1926-1977), who is not represented in any of the existing collections and canons of New Brunswick literature. It attempts at reconstructing Jacobson's biography and gives an overview of his literary legacy that consists of a published novel, various short articles, newspaper articles, an unpublished novel and several poems. As an author of Jewish heritage, he often wrote about Jewish Canadians living in a small Maritime town. Hence, his writing is regarded as an example of a small literary form and a representation of an immigrants' experience in Canada which creates a unique cultural landscape of the Atlantic region.*

**Key words:** *Jewish Canadian writer, Jewish immigrants to Canada, New Brunswick, small town, unpublished works.*

It is always very exciting to look through the archival materials, because it gives one a direct glimpse into long forgotten events in people's lives and awakens a genuine interest in them. The individual stories appear not like mere facts but rather as a revelation, surrounded by subtle meaning and extra-layers of context, while being personalized and unique. Coming across Melvin Jacobson's collection, I was actually looking for something else, but after immersing myself into the material, I was captivated by the life of a local author, who was not always very successful, but very human and relatable. That is why I feel compelled to write about him and weave his story into the fabric of the literary history of New Brunswick and, wider, Canada<sup>1</sup>.

## **Biography**

Melvin Joseph Jacobson was probably born on September 10, 1926 in Chatham, New Brunswick, to a Jewish family. The only document where his date of birth appears is the graduate

transcript from Syracuse University, where it is indicated as 9/10/1926. Given that the document was issued in the United States, it is probably September 10<sup>th</sup> rather than October 9<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup> However, his place of birth could have been in Nova Scotia, considering his elder brother Robert was born in Whitney Pier, NS, and his younger sister Irene was born in Sydney, NS; only later on the family moved to Chatham, NS.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult at the moment to verify his family history due to the inaccessibility of necessary information on the vital statistics, but the most probable reconstruction according to the data available to date suggests that his father, Abraham David Jacobson, was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA; Abraham's father, Isaac Jacobson, came from Russia (his place of birth is indicated as Dorbian or Derbitz and is the town of Darbenai in modern Lithuania), and his mother was Rosie Cantor. Melvin's mother, Annie (nee Rich), was born in Chatham, NB. Her father, Charles Rich, was originally from Poland (Austrian Hungarian Empire), and her mother was Catherine Rich (nee Shapiro). Abraham moved to Sydney, NS, and then to Chatham, where he had married Annie and worked as a dealer of dry goods.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Melvin grew up together with his siblings in a small town in New Brunswick, which was a central and symbolic place to his creative writing.

Throughout 1943-1948 Jacobson studied at the University of New Brunswick for his BA and during 1948-1949 he attended Syracuse University in the United States for his MA in Journalism. At UNB he was a Beaverbrook scholar, and this fact had a certain impact on his life. Among Jacobson's documents there is a manuscript of a two-page article about the Beaverbrook scholarship, which states that Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1964) established the funding to support young talented men from all areas of New Brunswick, so that seven male candidates were able to enter UNB (one of them was selected from Newcastle, Beaverbrook's home town) and ten of the UNB graduates were endowed the opportunity to finish their education at the University of London.<sup>5</sup> Later on Jacobson used his status as a scholar to correspond shortly with Lord Beaverbrook, most likely in relation to a job opportunity in the United Kingdom. For example, in his letter of June 16, 1948 from St. John, NB, Beaverbrook wrote to Melvin Jacobson in Hamilton, ON, in response to his June

9, 1948 letter expressing his strong desire to help Jacobson but he had retired from the newspapers and suggested contacting Mr. E.J. Robertson, the manager of *Daily Express* in England. In his letter of October 1, 1959, Beaverbrook wrote Jacobson to thank him for the gift of the hi-fidelity machine (the gramophone) from the Beaverbrook Scholars and the New Brunswick Teachers' Association for his eightieth birthday, which he passed to the UNB's Art Gallery.<sup>6</sup> During his studies, Jacobson was also interested in sports: he regularly wrote articles on sports for *The Brunswickan* and apparently in 1946 participated in the twenty-four-mile “Mississippi Swim.”<sup>7</sup>

After graduation, Melvin Jacobson worked as a journalist, but wanted to be more a creative writer. He could have used pseudonyms. This can be concluded from the correspondence, as in his letter of April 25, 1959 to Mr. L.S. Loomer, the associate editor of *The Atlantic Advocate* in Fredericton, NB, Jacobson thanked the latter for accepting his story “Cycles” for publication and asked either to leave it unsigned or sign it “Joseph Gordon,” as he had been trying to build up a body of work under his own name that was very different from the current publication.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly enough, Joseph Gordon is the name of a boy that appears in *Minyan*, which unveils a strong interrelation between his life and his writing. As a journalist, Melvin Jacobson worked for the Parliamentary bureau of British United Press and several newspapers and magazines in Ottawa, Halifax, and Montreal.

Considering Jacobson had not had permanent employment and there were times when he did not have a job, his mother discouraged him from writing and prompted to find a “decent” job. Here are some excerpts from their correspondence.

(Wednesday, n.d.)

Dear Melvin [,]

There is nothing more I can say to you about what you are doing. If thats the way you want it—that is it. I advised you. With Bob its different [:] if I give him advise he takes it but your stubborn [.] I say give up that writing [,] you have had misery from it. What is the sense of it.

If you did as I say—a teacher—work at Newspaper work—anything but that [.] I am against it 100%. I feel I cannot say anything more. You do not listen [.] as far as Halifax is concerned its a devilish place. Montreal is a grand place [.] you can live quietly there too. Irene & Bake live nicely there—they do not stay up late only when their going some where. However Melvin do as you like. I hope you will be O.K. Thats all that matters if only you would belong to the young Jewish people it would be a help. Stubborn Melvin: Spring is in the air here. We got a freezing out yesterday [.] the motor in the store furnace gave out. I got a cold from it...Don't get upset but do as I say [.] I'd love to see you teach in Montreal and meet a nice girl—live & laugh [.] go to Europe [for] summer holiday. . . . Xmas holiday & live a little. Consider it. Love [.] Mother

May 14/56

I am just worrying myself to death about you. Never in all my life have I heard of anything so terrible. You are certainly making a nobody of yourself. For God sake [.] go back and work [.] You are killing me [.] I can't stand it. Never knew that such thing could happen to poor me who done so much for you. Does it not hurt you to hurt me. Why don't you want to work. Everyone is working—why are you the odd one. Leah and Joe are here today, going back tomorrow. Harry Rich graduates Thursday. Everyone seems to derive pleasure from their children. Oh please Melvin write me your back at work and I'll be a new person. I can't eat nor sleep. Never felt so badly over anything. Please go back—ask the man for your job [.] work in the daytime. Please Melvin & then you can go to Irene's wedding [on] June 25 [.] She wants you for a usher [.] Do that at once [.] Mother [.] I'll have to go down if you don't do ]as I say [.]

Wednesday, May 13/59

Dear Melvin [.]

I read your letter carefully. Really I hate like everything sending you money [.] I think I will ruin you—you won't go to work. Your getting older & nothing to be seen. I hate this. . . —in writing [.] I like to keep you but not ruin you [.] Its a darn shame all I spent on you to no avail. 7 or 8 months and then it will be 7 or 8 months again if you do not get on to yourself Melvin [.] I'm afraid. I have money for you but I will be afraid to give it as you show so little. Let me know what you need in money & for how long & I'll see if its right or wrong to give it. Mother<sup>9</sup>

Not easy words to hear from anybody, even one's loving mother. However, Jacobson did not seem to take her words personally. Instead, he responded with a great understanding, considering his mother was an aged person and what she actually needed was compassion, which he expressed carefully and respectfully, giving a philosophical explanation to the discussion between them in his letter of Monday, August 1960:

I wish you would tell me, Mom, what is bothering you. You know, someone said we all live lives of quiet desperation. No one is completely happy. So is the human condition, because, I think, there are some things we do not know the answer to. The solution, I think, is to keep busy and not dwell on yourself. That's the only way. Soon as a person stops working and starts brooding, he's unhappy. That's the human way.

If you're sick of the stove—give it up. That may be your trouble. You've done your work there and should move on maybe. That might be what is depressing you; you need a change. But try to find something to take its place. . . . Maybe you could build an apartment building in Chatham and oversee it. Or, if you want, move to Montreal, but keep busy and interested. We look to you, Mom, to be smart and strong. You've been wonderful so far. Don't wind it all. Love, Melvin. I'm using your money to renew my N. Y. Times' subscription. Please, Mom, don't send any more it makes me feel bad.<sup>10</sup>

As it appears from the correspondence, Jacobson's siblings were more tolerant of his ambition to become a writer, but did not fully support him, stating very clearly that their family members had always been more business oriented and down-to-earth. In particular, their parents had a family business, as well as his brother Robert, who became a quite successful businessman, and his sister Irene was a registered nurse.

Jacobson died in September 1977 in Montreal at the age of about fifty one. Although some articles say “at the age of fifty,” but given his date of birth September 10, 1926 and the fact that he died in September 1977, it seems more plausible that he was fifty one.

### **The Description of the Sources**

Melvin Jacobson's collection consists of his published novel *Minyan*; handwritten notes and drafts of his writing; typescripts of the articles, short stories, poems and the unpublished novel, *From Time Immemorial* (the original title was “Gordon's Story”); his writer's notebook; correspondence with editors, publishers, family, and friends; university transcripts and academic correspondence; clippings of newspaper and magazine articles of interest; newspaper articles on Jacobson following his death; photocopies of photographs of him and his house in Chatham. The collection was donated to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick by Robert Jacobson. At the same time, Graham Galloway was the literary agent and caretaker of the donation, who suggested the title “The Melvin Jacobson Memorial Literary Collection” for it. In a cover letter to Marion Beyea of PANB, dated by April 25, 1981, Galloway says it is a gift in view of the anticipated celebration of the bicentennial of New Brunswick and expresses his hope for recognizing the multiculturalism of the province that way (however, we should state that despite Galloway's efforts, it did not seem to convince any publishers and Melvin Jacobson is still not mentioned in any literary encyclopedia of New Brunswick).<sup>11</sup> Also, he gives a thoughtful evaluation of Jacobson's literary legacy and the importance of illustrating the daily life of the community of Jewish immigrants in a small town, fictitious, but obviously Chatham. In particular, Galloway underlines the significance of

traditional values in Jacobson's writing, his stand for family, race, identity at the time when these standard social codes were assaulted by the changing society of the 1960s-1970s and summarizes Jacobson's place on the Canadian scene this way:

He died being recognized for what he always wanted to be: a writer. And in this donation of materials, below itemized, Jacobson earns a place in the provincial archives of New Brunswick—and in the hearts of all who treasure the rewarding, invigorating facets of multiculturalism, not just one or two races, but all races, all the wonderful, good people woven into the mosaic of Old World and New World that makes up today's New Brunswick and weaves well the fabric of tomorrow's picturesque mosaic, hopefully as wonderful, as kind as many of Jacobson's plain, ordinary people—a particular kind of New Brunswicker—a minority people but yet a strong, energetic, hard-working people, loving, caring and dreaming for a better tomorrow—the people in many of Jacobson's stories. With this gift, a salute to Melvin Jacobson, author, and to the people whose songs he sang: New Brunswick's Jewish-Canadians of whom so little has been written so well, until now.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, some other letters by Galloway indicate that Jacobson was not known even to the local literary milieu. In particular, his letter of October 1977 to the editor of *Daily Gleaner* in Fredericton, NB, states:

Sir: I read with interest Michael O. Nowlan's "Let's Prepare For The Bicentennial." In any list of writers who've contributed to our New Brunswick and Canadian heritage, I believe we should include the name of Chatham-born Melvin Jacobson, who died last month in Montreal at 50.

Having worked with Melvin in British United Press in the late 1940s, I can sincerely say I admire him as a craftsman: the highest possible tribute that could be awarded a writer.

In *Minyan*, a book of short stories, he produced a look at Jewish life in a small town, obviously Chatham.

I am literary agent for his estate and am currently evaluating an unpublished novel, supposedly his greatest, on Canadian unity.

Melvin Jacobson wrote for just one reason: to be remembered. Please add his name to any list of creative New Brunswickers.<sup>13</sup>

In his 10 October 1977 letter to G. Galloway, M.O. Nowlan, a chairman of the bicentennial publications committee (1984–the bicentennial of New Brunswick's partition of Nova Scotia), says:

I am very interested in Melvin Jacobson. I only heard of him a few weeks ago when he died. Since I recently published *A Literary Map of New Brunswick*, I regret not having included him. Is it possible to obtain a copy of *Minyan*? If so, where? What else has he written? Where published? Etc. Will the novel you are now evaluating eventually be published? Being a native Miramichier, I trust you will find time to drop me a line. Why hasn't Melvin Jacobson been more widely known?<sup>14</sup>

In 1981, several years after donating the collection to PANB, Galloway sent out a number of letters to local newspapers, which were published under the rubric, "Letters To The Editor." He intended to inform the general public about this new acquisition of the Archives, its content, and the value of Jacobson's writings. However, in course of my research, I have not come across any scholarly study dedicated to Jacobson.

### **An Overview of Melvin Jacobson's Literary Legacy**

Although Jacobson's creative writing was not his major professional activity, it was important to him considering he did not have a family. Besides his journalistic job, writing seemed to fill a void for him and was not just a means to earn money. From this point of view, we can only

partly agree with Galloway who stressed that Melvin Jacobson wrote only to be remembered. However, the analysis of Jacobson's writing also suggests that it was a medium in which he found his life's purpose through reconsidering his own biography and that of his native community, given his stories are autobiographical. He dedicated himself to picturing the life of New Brunswick instead of big cities that were popular among publishers and the reading public. From this point of view, the unsigned article "A boy meets a girl in Winnipeg and who cares?" among Jacobson's materials is especially indicative. It describes a conversation between a Canadian writer and a representative of a Hollywood studio, where the latter explains what difference the place of a story makes: "Well, take Paris," he said, "that's okay for one kind of story. Take London—that's okay for another kind. But take Canada—that's not okay because what do Americans think when they hear that word 'Canada' except cold weather and Mounties, or maybe when they hear it they don't know what to think. Now this is not the way it ought to be and it's tough, but look at it like this. A boy meets a girl in Paris, one thing leads to another and they—well, it's interesting. But a boy meets a girl in Winnipeg and they swing into the same routine and who cares?"<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, the genre of a short story about life in a small town that Jacobson chose is obviously related to his newspaper and magazine articles as a short form of writing. Some of the latter are complementary to his favourite topics like Jewishness, immigrants to Canada, writing in Canada, a writer from Atlantic Canada, etc. Therefore, in order to define Jacobson's approach in his literary activity I am using the term microliterature as the one coined on the pattern of microhistory, rather than being understood literally as a very short piece of writing.

### **A Short Analysis of *Minyan*<sup>16</sup>**

The novel *Minyan* has a dedication "To my mother" and consists of ten stories and an epilogue. The first story, "Minyan," which gave the book its title, illustrates what the word *minyan* signifies: in Judaism, it means the quorum of ten adults required for certain religious obligations, such as a public prayer. The reader encounters the names of the characters for the first time in this story and they reappear in the subsequent stories. The second one, "You'll be a Gentile!," tells of a

Jewish boy who studies Hebrew with a Rabbi but prefers English. It is followed by a separate one-page story entitled “A Jewish Mayor,” which describes an old woman's reaction to the fact that in America (perhaps it means North America) out of the scattered Jewish people a mayor of a small Canadian town has arisen. Galloway wrote in his notes that this short piece is based on a real story about Bernie Flam, a mayor of Chatham.<sup>17</sup> The third one, “Out-of-Season,” comes across as a crime story about a suspicious purchase of beaver skins by Mr. Arlan. The fourth one, “Fish Eaters,” brings us to a family supper, while a son comes to visit his parents and sister. The fifth story, “The Collector,” relates the story of a fraud who came to Matthew Sobel asking for money for the orphans. The sixth piece, “Tricycles And Bicycles,” depicts two neighbouring boys, whose parents bought them tricycles and bicycles as a sort of rivalry. The seventh story, “The Way It Finishes,” recounts the problems of the old Sobels and their conversation with their grandson, Joseph Gordon, about his career choices. The eighth one, “I Try To Write,” is especially autobiographical, as it gives us an account of a boy telling a man how he wants to write, while his mother wants him to work in her store. The ninth story, “One Thing I Can't Stand,” is set in a bar as a drunken half-Jewish man's remembers his childhood with other Jewish children, which has fed his dislike for Jews. The final piece, “A Black River,” illustrates the issues of living in a small Maritime town through the perspective of a traveller, Nathan Grosman, who visits Jewish families in town. The book concludes with the text, “Epilogue. The New Messiah,” relates an allusion of an author's meeting with his audience and discussing religious issues pertaining to Judaism and Christianity.

Since the small story literary form was closer to the newspaper article form (and to the contemporary genre of a blog post), microliterature was a logical domain for Jacobson to pursue, and a natural continuation of his journalistic approach. Equally understandable in the context of Jacobson's biography were the major motifs of his writings: Jewish immigrants in Canada, Atlantic Canada in comparison to other provinces, Canada and the U.S. *Minyan* illustrates this well, particularly while the character, Nathan Grosman, is in contemplation while on a train to an eastern Canadian town:

They are Americans, going home from a fishing trip. How respectful they seem, as though they've learned a thing about this country.—Now they go back to their own; and it is such a fortunate country, having just about everything that it needs, and good land in nearly all of its parts so that nearly all parts of it are settled—not like so much of this country that is not fit for settlement—And the way that that country is situated, with all those southern countries underneath it, and this country on top of it, as though all these countries came to be just to protect that favored one. . . . And that country has so many cities, with life of all kinds in them, while this country has only one or two real cities so far. . . . But I don't begrudge them their country: I have everything here that I need for my life, without all that pushing and shoving. And this country, by watching that other one, can learn something, maybe, about how not to act and what not to do. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Upon his arrival, Grosman comes to visit Mr. Minst's family and receives an account of their everyday life. Among other things, he learns that Harold, Mr. Mint's son, likes to fight with his school fellows. Grosman asks why Harold does that and wonders whether the other children are prejudiced towards him being Jewish. His counterpart rejects this explanation:

Oh no!—I do not think that is having anything to do with it: the other children do not ask whether you are Jewish or not. Then, because Harold is showing himself to be such a good fighter and that he is able to take care of himself, he is getting in with this gang of older boys and running around with them and getting into all kinds of mischief a Jewish son would not normally get into, making worry for the mamma and me. It is not like a Jewish son to be carrying on so, Mr. Grosman; when we were children growing up, our people would not allow it. But now, whenever we try to say something to Harold to get the boy to stop it and to get the boy back on the right track again, he pays no attention and goes his own way

behind our back. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Grosman's response is: "It's a new kind of a world we're living in, Mr. Minst. You can be prepared for lots of changes."<sup>20</sup> These words do not only convey a common concern of an older generation over the changes a younger generation will inevitably undergo but a more specific anxiety regarding the ethnic identity that will be modified in the New World.

The author also reveals Maritimers' sentiments towards the other Canadian provinces. One of the character's reaction to the words about visiting an aunt in Central Province, probably Ontario, is especially eloquent: "Central Province! That we hear so much about, how much bigger and better it is than our own small, poor one, with so many more chances for a person. It's like in a different country, almost, with all those woods, and French Province, inbetween."<sup>21</sup>

Mr. Minst claimed nine Jewish families lived in their town, which impressed and surprised Mr. Grosman. Mr. Minst gave his explanation: "Maybe it is because we are beside the Sea here and the people, when they got off the ship, were so happy to be away from wherever they left, wanted only to settle down in the first good place that they could find; or else they could not afford to go any farther."<sup>22</sup>

### **Other Writings and Materials**

Jacobson's poetry, although not that skillful, is interesting contextually as being filled with erotic spirit—an aspect of his writing that is practically absent in his prose (in particular, *Minyan*). There are only eight poems in his collection: "To My Unapproached Lady," its short version "Every time I see you. . . ," "Mother and Daughter," "Why the Sky?," "Scorned," "The Statue," "New P-C M.P.," and "Autumn's End".<sup>23</sup> The following examples sound most intimate:

#### **Mother and Daughter**

Tall girl

Lying on my bed.

Long brown hair,  
Sallow skin,  
Flattened nose,  
Thin, slick-red lips,  
Big, soft breasts inside a blue sweater,  
Fat belly,  
Wide hips.

I saw your mother on the street, I said.

Where?

Near Main.

She lives near there.

Do you ever go see her?

Not much. She always says I have a lot  
of clothes, and asks where I get them and  
says to give her some, and give her  
money. She always on the street. Huh!

When she went away I went out.

When I came back I saw another man  
going to the rooming house with a woman.

Tall woman

wearing a sporty fawn raincoat buckled  
tight,

Her backsides moving against it as she  
walked,

Long brown hair flowing back.

### **Scorned**

I saw a purer and a fresher sex  
Than my adulterous love  
Walking toward the college steps.  
Her hair was black and short and flat;  
She wore a light, white dress with a slim black belt,  
And smooth blue high-heel shoes,  
And walked with such a healthy stride  
I thought, There's nothing inside there to hide.

My furtive love grows old and soft;  
Her hair is turning gray.  
Our act is now a joyless rite,  
The afterwards an emptiness.

I watched this new delight  
Stride quickly up the steps.  
She turned and laughed and went inside,  
And banged the door behind.

In this context, even those poems that do not describe any erotic images, acquire such a meaning by contrast, for instance “The Statue”:

### **The Statue**

On the top of the frozen hill

The statue stands

Cold and dumb.

What use to those who died,

Or now to those who live?

The unpublished manuscripts embrace a novel and some stories.<sup>24</sup> The novel had several titles. The author's variants were "In The New Land," "In The New Country," "A Wonderful And A Beautiful Big New Country," "Gordon's Story,"<sup>25</sup> but eventually Galloway offered it to different publishers under his own title "From Time Immemorial."<sup>26</sup> Its dedication, "To Canada (with special thanks to my mother, without whose help and understanding this book might never have been completed)," is rather sound and revealing of the author's biography and should be considered together with the text.

Among the author's materials, which can eloquently testify to the writer's tastes, one can find a notebook with handwritten quotes, as well as some newspaper and magazine clippings.<sup>27</sup> For example, Jacobson was interested in Alfred Kazin (1915-1998) –an American literary critic of Jewish descent who wrote about immigrants in the U.S. Jacobson kept his article about Chekhov entitled, "Writing For Magazines."

There is also a series of clippings from *The Moncton Times*, probably made by Galloway, dedicated to Jacobson after his death. In particular, *The Moncton Times*, January 5, 1978, Thursday, opens the conversation by the editor, Graham Galloway, who wrote an article on Jacobson and published excerpts from Jacobson's unpublished manuscript and *Minyan*. *The Moncton Times*, January 6, 1978, Friday, contained the excerpts from *Gordon's story*. *The Moncton Times*, January 7, 1978, Saturday, offered some excerpts from *Minyan* again. *The Moncton Times*, January 9, 1978, Monday, concluded the series with an article by David Butler (1941-2003), a journalist and an English teacher from Chatham, entitled, "Epilogue: The Writers of Shirreff Street." In this epilogue,

the author, who seems to have a personal relationship with the Jacobson family, talks about the representation of Melvin Jacobson's double-alienation in *Minyan*: as a Jewish boy and as a writer in Canada. Butler states: "In general, writers have had a rather mixed reception in Canada—the usual attitude seems to run along the lines of 'He's strange lad. . . smart, though. . . but you'd think, with all them brains, he'd go out and make a million bucks, and then fool around with books if he wants to. . .'" Several years later, he published another article about Jacobson in *Miramichi Leader*, July 31, 1985.<sup>28</sup> Besides these and some other newspaper articles,<sup>29</sup> I have not encountered any academic research on Melvin Jacobson as a writer.

The critical feedback on Jacobson's writing was diverse: there were some positive responses from editors and some of his stories were published, while many times he had to endure much criticism and rejection—the experience quite common among the emerging writers.

For instance, an international daily newspaper from Boston, Massachusetts, *The Christian Science Monitor*, was interested in Jacobson's stories. In his letter of August 4, 1952, the overseas news editor, Joseph G. Harrison, states they would be happy to publish the stories about the Maritime Provinces of Canada, as long as they fit the newspaper's interest in broader economic, political, and social trends.<sup>30</sup>

By contrast, the following responses highlight some problems with Jacobson's language and style, although they do not describe the situation as desperate.

*Canadian Speakers and Writers Service*, the letter of November 14, 1960:

Two readers were so upset about your manuscript that they felt I should look at it before it went to anyone else. I have spent the weekend on it and find that until you have a better command of English, there is really no use in our going on with this. The story fooled everyone at the outset. Chiefly because it is "thought very modern" in the present tense. On pages two and three, we all thought you were perhaps trying to beat Faulkner about the length of a sentence, but as we read on, it became all too evident that this is not a

development of style; it is simply the only way one can write when one is not too familiar with the language. There are examples also of the misuse of certain words. On page 3, Sarah is described as being “content” with the situation. Our feeling is that she has accepted the situation but she can hardly be content with it. Throughout the material you use the progressive present tense with the verb “to be”. In other words, instead of “disappears, goes”, etc., you continually say “is disappearing, is going”, etc. The punctuation is pretty well incorrect throughout, simply because you insist on such run-on sentences. Because we cannot complete the reading of this manuscript to any advantage to you, I am returning half your fee. . . . What you really need is someone to sit down and rewrite this with you, perhaps an English professor at the University.

Matie Molinaro, Director

Another letter by the same person, Matie Molinaro, of February 7, 1961, is more supportive of the writer's efforts to improve his text and has an advising rather than a criticizing tone:

As I suspected, it is still being read by members of the staff and it has not yet been scheduled for discussion at the regular staff manuscript meetings. Privately, Mr. Dobbs told me that the idea of the Jewish story teller is interesting when the material is limited to a short story, simply because in small doses, it is interesting and different and sparkling, but when the entire pattern of the novel is based on this treatment, it becomes a little bit tedious for the readers. Mr. Dobbs' suggestion at the moment is that you should tell most of the story in a regular narrative form resorting only occasionally to the Jewish story teller technique. On checking the short stories in Canadian forum, we found that for a short period of time, it is possible to enjoy this change and this is the point that Dobbs promises he will be making in an official report to me as soon as the manuscript meeting is held.

Matie Molinaro, Director<sup>31</sup>

In fact, several editors had suggested that Jacobson improves his language, namely, grammar and style, which is a bit weird as he was born in Canada. This may imply that his family used some other languages, and we can find the remnants of Yiddish, Russian, and German words in his writings.

## **Conclusion**

Melvin Jacobson remains an unknown writer, even in New Brunswick, where he lived for a long time and of which he wrote. We can restore the milestones of his biography according to the sources in his archival collection but there are still some lacunae to be filled out. In particular, other sources, external from the collection, are necessary to draw a detailed picture of Jacobson's life and experience as a writer. This is the case when the author's biography becomes an integral part of his writing, being charged with his childhood memories and important people, creating an aura of *local patriotism* and the poetry of a mundane. But vice versa is true either: Jacobson's writing was the way to find his own path, to come to his true self despite his family's traditional occupation. His literary heritage is not extensive and consists of one printed novel, *Minyan*, some published and unpublished stories, as well as an unpublished novel, *From Time Immemorial*. As Graham Galloway claimed, Jacobson earned his place among the Canadian writers by picturing the Jewish newcomers to New Brunswick, illustrating how they settled into the country, survived and contributed to the prosperity of their new home.<sup>32</sup> In my opinion, Jacobson's characters seek inclusion: into Canadian society, Canadian way of life, into life itself, picturing a fundamental human desire. Thus, incorporating Melvin Jacobson into the literary cohort of Canadian writers will contribute not only to the cultural and regional, but also to the multicultural and developmental canvas of Canada.

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<sup>2</sup>Syracuse University, *Graduate Transcript*, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, MC488 Melvin Jacobson's Collection, MS1/A Folder "Biographical records," Typescript.

<sup>3</sup>About Melvin Jacobson's sister, Irene Mendels, see: "Irene (Jacobson) Mendels: Obituary," *Montreal Gazette*, Mar. 14, 2018, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/montrealgazette/obituary.aspx?n=irene-mendels-jacobson&pid=114489878>, Web; About his brother, Robert Jacobson, see: "Robert C. Jacobson," *InMemoriam.ca*, Mar. 14, 2018, <http://www.inmemoriam.ca/view-announcement-145395-robert-c-jacobson.html>, Web.

<sup>4</sup>PANB "Index to New Brunswick Marriages," Vital Statistics from Government Records, Mar. 14, 2018, <http://archives.gnb.ca/Search/VISSE/141B7.aspx?culture=en-CA&guid=4ae5a982-b5b3-4222-903c-da76b43433d2>, Web; About Dorbian, see: "Darbenai," *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust: A-J*, Mar. 14, 2018, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=MFn3KeENnA0C&pg=PA292&lpg=PA292&dq=dorbian+lithuania&source=bl&ots=W43fnhosHE&sig=pSjbjqkTkfR999r0QhC2ADKAE0wI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiltZHS9ajbAhXQslkKHUUWCh04ChDoAQgrMAE#v=onepage&q=dorbian%20lithuania&f=false>, Web.

<sup>5</sup>PANB, MC488, MS2/B/1 Folder "Articles," Manuscript.

<sup>6</sup>PANB, MC488, MS3 Folder "Lord Beaverbrook," Typescript.

<sup>7</sup>*The Brunswickan*, Nov. 8, 1946, Accessed Mar. 14, 2018, [http://sve.canadiana.ca/view/car1.NBFU\\_19461108/5?r=0&s=1](http://sve.canadiana.ca/view/car1.NBFU_19461108/5?r=0&s=1), Web; Melvin Jacobson, "Red and Black Team shows Improvement In Second Win," *The Brunswickan*, Nov. 29, 1946, Accessed Mar. 14, 2018, [http://sve.canadiana.ca/view/car1.NBFU\\_19461129/1?r=0&s=1](http://sve.canadiana.ca/view/car1.NBFU_19461129/1?r=0&s=1), Web.

<sup>8</sup>PANB, MC488, MS3 Folder "The Atlantic Advocate," Typescript.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, Folder "Jacobson, Annie (Mother)," Manuscript.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

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<sup>11</sup>See: *The New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia*, Mar. 14, 2018, <http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/nble/index.aspx>.  
Web.

<sup>12</sup>PANB, MC488, MS4/B Folder "Galloway, Graham," Typescript.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>See: "A boy meets a girl in Winnipeg and who cares? Hollywood's formula for the great Canadian novel threatens to change Hugh MacLennan's way of life," *The Montrealer* (Feb. 1959), PANB, MC488, MS2/C/1 Folder "Clippings from magazines and newspapers," Print.

<sup>16</sup>Melvin Jacobson, *Minyan* (Eastern Press, 1971), PANB, MC488, MS2/A Folder "*Minyan*." Print.

<sup>17</sup>PANB, MC488, MS4/B Folder "Galloway, Graham," Manuscript.

<sup>18</sup>Melvin Jacobson, *Minyan*, 115.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. 127-8.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. 128.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. 129.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. 135.

<sup>23</sup>PANB, MC488, MS2/B/4 Folder "Poetry," Typescript.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., MS2/B/2 Folder "Stories," MS2/B/3 Folder "*From Time Immemorial* (novel)," Typescript.

<sup>25</sup>The size of these stories vary and they look like variants of the same plot. Moreover, the characters and events are pretty similar to those on the published novel *Minyan*, therefore a careful textual analysis of the published and unpublished novel together with their variants should become a subject of a separate study to clarify their relationship.

<sup>26</sup>PANB, MC488, MS2/B/3 Folder "*From Time Immemorial* (novel)."

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., MS1 "Press clippings," Print.

<sup>28</sup>David Butler, "Melvin was a writer without a bad word," PANB, MC488, MS1 "Press clippings,"  
Print.

<sup>29</sup>Galloway published several letters to editors in local newspapers about the donation of Melvin

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Jacobson's collection to PANB.

<sup>30</sup>PANB, MC488, MS3 File "The Christian Science Monitor," Typescript.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., MS3 File "Canadian Speakers and Writers Service," Typescript.

<sup>32</sup>Graham Galloway, "A Literary Acquisition," *Telegraph Journal*, 20 May 1981, p. 6, Print.