Small Change Study Guide

Small Change by Yehudit Hendel

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Introduction

Yehudit Hendel is one of a group of Israeli women writers who made their names known on that coun-try's literary landscape in the 1960s and 1970s. Up until that time, men had dominated the Israeli fiction world, and the work of the few women authors had been available only in Hebrew. This group, which included other Israeli women authors such as Shulamith Hareven and Amalia Kahana-Carmon, expanded its readership by appearing in translation and set the tone for fiction written by women by giving its female characters strong, assertive roles and voices.

Small Change is a dark and disturbing novella about an Israeli woman and her struggle with her domineering father and her harrowing experience in a Swiss jail. Rutchen finds herself in prison for illegally exchanging the coins her father has obsessively collected over the years. As she tells her story to a neighborhood friend, the extent of her trauma□not only from her prison experience but from her dysfunctional family life□becomes painfully clear. Hendel sketches Rutchen's story in an impressionist style; the actual events are, according to various critics, of less importance than the feelings and emotions attached to them.

Author Biography

Born in Warsaw, Poland, in the 1920s, Yehudit Hendel immigrated to Haifa, Israel, in 1930 as a child with her rabbinic family. Considered by many to be one of Israel's most respected women writers, Hendel currently lives in Tel Aviv.

Hendel is little known outside of Israel, and only a small number of her writings have been translated into English from the original Hebrew. Hendel's first book, a collection of stories entitled *They Are Different* (or *Hem Sonim* in Hebrew), appeared in 1950. In 1955, Hendel published her first novel, *Street of Steps,* which was translated into English in 1963. *Small Change,* originally published as *Kesef Katan* in 1988, is a collection of stories that includes the title novella. The book is being translated into Chinese, and the English translation of Small Change appears in the collection *Six Israeli Novellas,* published in 1999.

Much of Hendel's work has been adapted for stage, screen, television, and radio. Israel's Habima National Theatre (more recently known as the Israel National Theater) has staged *Street of Steps,* and Hendel's second novel, *The Yard of Momo, the Great,* was made into a television production. Hendel is a recipient of the Jerusalem Prize, the Newman Prize, and the Bialik Prize.

Plot Summary

Part One

Small Change opens in an Israeli neighborhood with the narrator recalling what she saw and heard, and what the neighbors saw and heard, when Rutchen returned home after traveling. Based on these stories, the narrator learns that Rutchen's father has sold his "magnificent" stamp collection, and the money it brought is surely enough to buy land, houses, shops, diamonds. But it appears that Rutchen has taken some of the money and traveled with it; now she has returned home, looking ill.

The narrator reports□as do the neighbors, including Mrs. Klein, Mrs. Borak, and Mr. Everything Cheap□that, when Rutchen entered her parents' home, her father, Mr. Shlezi, began to yell and moan, "with a growl coming out of his belly." After a time, the lights in the house went out, and they could hear Gerda, Shlezi's wife, emit a scream and say something about small change. Accounts differ among the neighbors, but the narrator swears that she heard "a kind of dry crackle spilling into the darkness.

Rutchen picks up the story as she and the narrator are sitting in a park. Rutchen tells the narrator a bit about that night, primarily about how frighteningly her father behaved and what he said about small change. She and the narrator are sitting on a park bench near Rutchen's house, after Shlezi's funeral. Rutchen says that his collecting small change drove her mad. Shlezi also had a very valuable stamp collection, with different types of stamps, including those with pictures of birds of prey as well as the biggest collection of anti-Semitic stamps.

The narrator remembers that Shlezi worked as a bus driver and always had the early morning shift. This was one of the reasons he was so careful about always having small change ready every evening" for the next day.

The narrator also remembers when Shlezi stopped driving the bus and that, after he sold his stamp collection, there were small stacks of coins wrapped in tracing paper and tin foil all over the house. Rutchen notes that he kept track of the number of coins he wrapped and that he could tell the number in each stack by feel. No one was allowed near him when he counted the coins.

The coins gave Rutchen an idea. She had heard that the Israeli lira, a currency not used anymore and therefore worthless, would produce two francs "in small change" when inserted into a Zurich vending machine that made change. So, she found the lira her father had wrapped up and took them to Switzerland.

For a while, the scheme worked. While at a store, Rutchen "inserted lira into the slot and pressed, and instead of faded old lira her palm was full of small change again, pretty shining Swiss money, really pretty." But suddenly two women walked up to

Rutchen and shoved her into a room where a man was sitting behind a desk. Rutchen is telling this to the narrator, who notices that her voice is becoming increasingly erratic.

As Rutchen continues the story, the man behind the desk asks Rutchen where she is from. She answers "Israel," and he says that he knew that and that the people they pick up for this crime are always from Israel. Rutchen is terrified and begins to hallucinate during the questioning. The man opens her purse, turns it over, and the Swiss francs fall out. Rutchen begins to shake, and she remembers that her father's hands shake because he has Parkinson's disease. The man asks Rutchen why she has all of these coins, and she tells him because her father collects coins and that he always says, "a man needs small change.

Rutchen, the man who interrogated her, and the two women who picked her up then wait for someone named Herr Zutter, who appears to be a lawyer. Rutchen is put into a police car with Herr Zutter, and they drive to "a big house." She is put into a room; Herr Zutter tells her to get undressed, takes her bag, and leaves. Rutchen waits in the room alone and experiences a hallucination of her father.

A policewoman comes in and tells Rutchen to get dressed but to remove her watch and jewelry. She is put into another car and taken to the magistrate. Herr Zutter is there, and she asks him what she should do. He tells her to sign a confession because here in Switzerland you have nothing to fear. When someone confesses and repents we let them go. This increases Rutchen's fear even more.

The magistrate is in a hurry because his wife does not like for him to be late. Rutchen says "yes" to everything he asks her, believing that she will be freed and back in her hotel soon. The next thing Rutchen knows, she is having her fingerprints taken and being shoved down a hall by the police. She is confused and terrified when she realizes that this building is a prison and that they are locking her in a cell.

Inside the cell, Rutchen loses control. She beats on the door until her hands are bloody and then begins screaming and hitting her head against the door.

Rutchen starts the story again. She remarks that a huge colorful fresco of names and writing and huge swollen penises were drawn on all the walls with blood, coffee, soup, and other liquids. Rutchen begins to hallucinate about monsters in the wall, and finally she vomits. She remembers stories she has read about Israelis rotting in jails all over the world, mostly for taking and selling drugs. But she is in jail for making small change.

Rutchen searches for something to write with and finally settles on using her own menstrual blood. On the cell wall she writes, "And I was left naked and bare and for these things I weep. She says to the narrator that she is not right in the head and then asks her if you think I'm crazy. She adds that she wants to "run raving in the streets like the Golem. Rutchen becomes increasing hysterical and angry as she speaks about men who rape women.

Part Two

The narrator and Rutchen are still in the park, where it becomes increasingly apparent that Rutchen has lost her mind. Rutchen tells the narrator about Pudding, the cat left to Gerda in Gerda' s mother's will. Shlezi hated the cat. The neighborhood has a variety of stories about how the cat died, but in all of them Shlezi kills the cat in some very horrible and purposeful way to punish it for jumping on his stamp collection.

The narrator understands that the prison authorities let Rutchen out of jail on the day she had a flight scheduled for Israel, as they didn't want to "waste a plane ticket on her." The narrator remembers that Rutchen set a fire in her family's house, trying to burn her father's small change while Gerda and Shlezi were in Mr. Everything Cheap's apartment playing cards. When they returned, Shlezi was so upset by this sight that he died. The funeral was held, attended by a few neighbors and former bus-driving colleagues.

After Shlezi dies, the currency changes again, and Gerda must haul all of the small change to the bank to exchange it for the new currency. Rutchen's face, according to the narrator, now bore an extraordinary resemblance to her father's face.

Summary

"Small Change" is Yehudit Hendel's story about an Israeli woman named Rutchen, who lives a life traumatized by a dysfunctional family life and time spent unnecessarily in a prison. The story is told to a narrator, a neighbor of Rutchen's. By the end of the story, she loses her grip on reality. The story reverts back and forth in time from the present to the past, as Rutchen recalls important events. Set in Israel and Switzerland, the story was written in 1999 by Hendel, a noted Israeli woman author.

The story opens with the narrator recalling the time that Rutchen's father sold his magnificent stamp collection. The neighbors are shocked, because the man prizes that almost as much as he does the spare change he has collected for years. The neighbors speculate that the money earned from the sale of the stamps is enough to buy jewelry, property and trips around the world.

This idea is fueled by Rutchen's return from a trip, looking disheveled and exhausted. The noise that erupts from the home indicates to the neighbors that Rutchen's parents are angry with her. Rutchen's father, Shlezi, is described as being "bent over with his chin on his belly and the growl coming out of his belly" for many nights afterward. Rutchen's mother, Gerda, simply moves silently around the house.

The neighbors including the narrator, Mrs. Borak, Mrs. Klein, and Mr. "Everything Cheap" observe the activities in Shlezi's house every night. One night, all the lights in the house go out, and Gerda's shrill scream about small change is the only sound in the neighborhood.

The story transitions to the present, as the narrator and Rutchen sit on a park bench after Shlezi's death. Rutchen shares the terror in the house, while her father was still alive due to his obsessive and violent behavior. Shlezi had been a city bus driver for many years and was obsessed with having plenty of small change available for his route each morning.

This obsession with small change drove Shlezi to wrap stacks of coins in tin foil and store them all over the house, until the coins were stashed everywhere. Shlezi would never allow anyone to watch, as he rolled coins each night. He never had to count them, as he could tell the amount by feeling the coins in his hand.

Shlezi also had a stamp collection, which he prized, especially for the few anti-semitic stamps he owned. Rutchen tells the narrator that there were a few of these anti-semitic stamps, which Shlezi would have to look at before he could sleep each night.

Shlezi's obsession with small change eventually infiltrates Rutchen's behavior, too. Rutchen has heard on the street that the Israeli lira, which is no longer a valid currency, is the same size as a two-franc piece in Zurich. In Zurich, there are automats, which convert the two francs into small change. Rutchen knows that her father has some of the obsolete lira somewhere in the house and searches high and low, until she locates

the lira wrapped in rolls in tissue paper. Rutchen takes the lira with her and flies to Switzerland to try out this new theory.

The first day that Rutchen is in Zurich, she goes to the automat of a big department store and inserts lira that are exchanged for two francs each. Soon, Rutchen has a handful of francs and leaves the store to buy a sausage for dinner. She strolls by Lake Geneva. Later on, Rutchen treats herself to ice cream at a cafy and finds herself sitting next to a man selling pears. Rutchen buys two of the pears and watches the sun set over the lake.

The next day, Rutchen heads back to the store and begins feeding lira into the automat. She receives two francs each, just like yesterday. Rutchen begins shoving the francs into her purse. Her palms are sweating, yet Rutchen cannot stop feeding lira into the automat. Two severe women approach Rutchen and escort her to a room at the end of a long hallway. A man sitting behind a big desk in that executive office meets her.

Upon being questioned, Rutchen reveals that she is from Israel. Both the man and the two women snigger, saying that all the people who commit this coin crime are from Israel. The man empties Rutchen's purse on the table, where a little pile of Swiss francs spills out. Rutchen's hands shake visibly, as she hands the man her shoulder bag. Everyone in the room looks at Rutchen's hands and not the bag.

Rutchen thinks that her hands look like her father's hands did when they shook from Parkinson's disease. Rutchen hallucinates about images of her father lying dead on the floor with only his hands shaking.

The man empties the shoulder bag, revealing a small pile of Israeli lira. The man asks Rutchen why she has these coins. All she can answer is that she has them because her father collected them. A man always needs small change. The man does not acknowledge her. The next thing that Rutchen recalls is waiting for a man, named Herr Zutter, to arrive.

Zutter escorts Rutchen to a police car, where she is transported to another facility. She's taken into a room, told to undress, and left for several hours. During the time in this room, Rutchen hallucinates about her father chastising her about the shame she has brought to the family. A policewoman enters the room and searches Rutchen's body for coins. She is finally allowed to dress, but must leave her jewelry.

Zutter appears again and escorts Rutchen in an armored car to another facility. During the drive, Rutchen tries to question Zutter about what is going to happen. All he will tell her that she needs to sign a confession, and that the Swiss authorities are more lenient on people who tell the truth. According to Zutter, a person who tells lies will end up rotting in prison. Rutchen's best course of action is to tell the truth.

Rutchen is ushered into a holding room, while Zutter determines if the magistrate has time to rule in her case before leaving for the day. The magistrate is annoyed at the delay but agrees to hear Rutchen's case. Rutchen answers affirmatively to each of his questions thinking that her confession will secure her release.

Rutchen is once more taken to the holding room, while she waits for Zutter to come back to release her. Soon, a policeman comes for Rutchen and takes her to a police car for a ride to another building. Rutchen soon realizes that it is a prison. Once inside the building, Rutchen is roughly escorted to a room, where she is fingerprinted and eventually locked into a metal cell.

Rutchen wails in anguish, because Zutter has betrayed her. She repeatedly beats herself against the metal door, until her body is a bloody mess. Finally, the warden arrives, but provides no comfort to Rutchen. He tells her that she has no access to the Israeli consulate or to an attorney.

Rutchen tells the narrator that this is when the nightmare begins. Sitting on the filthy bed, Rutchen's eyes adjust to the light and focus on a horrific fresco of grotesque penises drawn in blood, coffee and other fluids. As Rutchen's mind tries to comprehend the sight, she begins to hallucinate once more and imagines that the penises turn into monsters and serpents. She vomits.

Rutchen hears tapping on the wall from the next cell, but she does not try to communicate with anyone. Rutchen thinks that this is the place where she will die, and that she will be buried here, where no one will know where to find her. Rutchen knows that her mother will begin to worry by now, but that her father will merely grunt at the sound of her name.

After awhile, Rutchen is able to compose herself and vows not to die in this wretched place. However, she does want to make her own mark on the cell's wall. Rutchen realizes that she has begun to menstruate and uses her own blood to write the words, "And I was left naked and bare and for these things I weep."

The story transitions back to the present, as the narrator mentions that she and Rutchen are sitting in the park. The narrator begins to sense that Rutchen has lost her grasp on reality when she mentions an old cat named Pudding, which had been handed down to Gerda from her own mother. Rutchen recalls how Shlezi killed the cat, because it had jumped on his stamp collection one evening.

Rutchen reverts to her imprisonment and tells the narrator that she had been released from prison on the day of her return ticket to Israel. The Swiss authorities are pleased that they can send Rutchen back on her own plane ticket, saving the expense of transporting her back to her home country.

Upon her return to Israel, Rutchen attempts to set fire to Shlezi's small change, resulting in a small fire in the apartment. Shlezi and Gerda had been at the apartment of Mr. "Everything Cheap," playing their weekly card game. Shlezi collapses from a heart attack and dies at the sight of Rutchen destroying his coins.

Soon after Shlezi's death, Mr. "Everything Cheap" informs Gerda that the Israeli currency has changed. She will have to transport all Shlezi's coins to the bank for exchange. Rutchen has lost her mind. She sits every day in the apartment, and swears

that she still sees her father counting his small change. The neighbors comment that Rutchen looks amazingly like her father.

Analysis

The story is told from the first person narrative perspective. Although the plot line is about Rutchen and her parents, all the reader gleans from them is what Rutchen experiences and shares directly with the narrator. In other words, Rutchen's experiences and recollections are conveyed by the narrator as told to the narrator, rather than from Rutchen herself.

The author uses the technique of moving back and forth in time to convey Rutchen's memories. This erratic technique is especially effective to mirror Rutchen's increasingly unstable state of mind. In conjunction with this, the author uses a stream of consciousness method, which also points out Rutchen's erratic state of mind through rambling thoughts. These thoughts do not necessarily relate.

The theme of persecution is prevalent in the story, especially among the women, including Rutchen and Gerda, who are silent victims of Shlezi's abuse. The neighbors hear Gerda's screams coming from the darkened apartment and understand that Shlezi is the reason for her distress. Shlezi mentally and emotionally abuses Gerda and Rutchen, too, as evidenced by Gerda's constant picking at the flowers in the kitchen tablecloth whenever Shlezi is lecturing her.

Her father essentially ignores Rutchen. Her trouble in Switzerland comes as a result of her wanting to please her father by converting the obsolete Israeli lira into Swiss francs. Rutchen's thoughts that she could bond with her father over a success with the coin escapade are destroyed by her imprisonment and Shlezi's heart attack soon after her return.

Rutchen suffers even more torment at the hands of men during the prison experience. The authorities are all men, who do not provide Rutchen with any information about her situation and have her moved from place to place like an inanimate object. Rutchen is surrounded by the vile side of men with the penile fresco drawings in her cell and by the men nearby, who masturbate knowing that she is there.

Ironically, all the coins, which Shlezi has wrapped and stored for so many years, become obsolete soon after his death. In another irony, Mr. "Everything Cheap" tells Gerda that there are so many coins that she will have to go to the bank by taking the bus, which had been Shlezi's profession all his working life.

In the ultimate irony, the story gets its name, "Small Change," as its subject is derived from the item coveted most by Shlezi, and which ultimately results in his death. Shlezi's fixation on the coins has blocked all view of his wife and daughter, so that he misses the big picture of his life in favor of the tiny coins.

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Characters

Mrs. Borak

Mrs. Borak is Shlezi and Gerda's neighbor who remarks on various versions of stories about the family.

Mr. Everything Cheap

Mr. "Everything Cheap" is Shlezi and Gerda' s asthmatic neighbor who keeps an eye on their house. He corroborates one version of how Gerda's cat died, as well as information about Shlezi's collection of coins and stamps. Mr. Everything Cheap" has Gerda and Shlezi over to play cards the night Rutchen tries to burn her father's wrapped stacks of coins.

Gerda

Gerda is Shlezi's wife and Rutchen's mother. She is very thin, and her neck is in a plaster cast. Some of the neighbors swear that Shlezi hurt her in some way, either physically or emotionally, and that this is why she wears the cast. Gerda, who does not speak much, usually behaves very passively around Shlezi.

Gerda had a beloved cat named Pudding□an inheritance from her mother□but Shlezi hated the cat because of its habit of jumping on his stamp collection. He killed the cat, an act that devastated Gerda. After Shlezi dies, she resumes her familiar position at the kitchen table, picking at the tablecloth and not speaking.

Mrs. Klein

Mrs. Klein is one of the many neighbors who watches Shlezi and Gerda's house for any interesting activity. She is the one who first sees Rutchen when she returns home from Switzerland, traumatized. Mrs. Klein, like the other neighbors, has various stories about Rutchen's family and what goes on in their house.

Narrator

The person narrating the story gives some background and then relates that she heard the story from Rutchen after Shlezi's funeral. Little is known about the narrator, except for a few details about things she has done or seen. She has visited Arizona and met an Indian, and she has a relative who was an electrician. The narrator seems to be somewhat older than Rutchen, as she remembers seeing Rutchen as a child. As well, the narrator appears to be of two minds about hearing Rutchen's story from her own

mouth: the narrator wants to hear Rutchen's story but is also frightened of what horrors she may reveal. Watching Rutchen descend into madness is very upsetting to her.

Rutchen

Rutchen (Ruthie) is Gerda and Shlezi's only daughter. She leaves home to initiate a scheme trading worthless Israeli coins for valuable Swiss coins but is caught by Swiss authorities and forced to spend some time in jail, an experience that traumatizes her. At the time she narrates the stories about her jail experience and Shlezi's coins, Rutchen is slipping deeper and deeper into depression and madness. Reality becomes even more precarious for her, and her mind flits from one subject to the next as she imagines walls moving and other hallucinations.

Rutchen is obsessed about her father, with whom she has a difficult relationship. She is caught in a struggle between hating him for his autocratic ways and defending him for the horrible things he has done, such as killing Gerda's cat. Nevertheless, Rutchen believes that her father will haunt her mother long after he is dead.

A few days after she arrives home from the Swiss jail, Rutchen sets fire to her father's stacks of coins, though only the paper in which they are wrapped burns. Seeing this causes Shlezi so much shock and grief that he dies almost immediately of a heart attack. At the end of the story, Rutchen begins to acquire some of his physical characteristics.

Ruthie

See Rutchen

Mr. Shlezi

Shlezi is Gerda's husband and Rutchen's father. He is cold and autocratic, and he displays affection only for his stamp and coin collections. Shlezi once worked as a bus driver, but at the time of the story he seems to be retired and focused almost entirely on collecting and organizing his cache of coins. He fusses with them every night, stacking them in short towers and wrapping them in tracing paper and tin foil. His excuse for this behavior is that in the morning a man needs small change.

A few days after Rutchen returns from the Swiss jail, she sets his coins on fire, but only the paper wrapping burns. This upsets Shlezi so much that he dies almost instantly after seeing what his daughter has done.

Shlezi also has a stamp collection, which he sells at the beginning of the story. Some of his stamps are anti-Semitic stamps. He becomes so enraged when Gerda's cat, Pudding, steps on his stamp collection that he kills it.

Herr Zutter

Herr Zutter is assigned to help process Rutchen through the Zurich jail system after she is caught exchanging Israeli lira for Swiss francs. He tells her that she should confess to the crime, assuring her that she will be released immediately because the judge looks much more kindly on a defendant who is repentant.

Themes

Generational Differences

Rutchen and her father have a strained relationship. Shlezi never appears happy with her, while she, on the other hand, often tries to please him. Rutchen's trip to Switzerland is an attempt to please her father by securing even more small change for his collection, even though she finds his collecting destructive. Shlezi growls at her when she returns from jail, haggard and broken, for he only sees her failure instead of her attempt to bond with him on his terms.

As Jews, Rutchen and Shlezi share the legacy of the Holocaust, though in different ways. Shlezi is much closer in age to those who experienced the events of the Holocaust; he could even be someone who fled Europe and eventually made it to Israel. Rutchen, a young adult, was either born in Israel or left Europe soon after her birth to live in Israel. The tension between the father and daughter is also reflected in the tension between the Old World of Europe□with its hundreds of years of brutality against the Jews□and the New World of Israel, built on history but full of hope and promise for a better life. Shlezi reveals his pessimism and despair about the future when he cautions Rutchen not to drive with her eyes on the horizon because, according to him, "drivers who looked too far ahead were accident prone.

Rutchen is treated by the prison guards, images of the Holocaust emerge. They tell her to strip and demand her jewelry. Rutchen is kept disoriented and moved around without any information about her ultimate destination.

After Rutchen has sat in her cell for a time, she remembers reading stories of Israelis rotting in jails all over the world. Hendel also evokes the image of the wandering Jew by having Rutchen leave Israel to accomplish her scheme, always searching for a place to feel safe and never feeling at home anywhere. While she is being held in Switzerland, Rutchen speaks in Hebrew, a language that is a vital part of her identity, but a terror grips her body and she feels as if she is slipping into an abyss.

Mistreatment of Women

In Hendel's novella, men are never warm or caring but always menacing□especially toward women. Shlezi threatens his wife, Gerda, and physically and emotionally damages her. He kills her cat. He is no better to his daughter, making Rutchen feel small and greeting her with violent growls when she returns home from her harrowing experience in Switzerland. He loves his coins and stamps more than he does his family.

The Swiss man who questions Rutchen about the coins is threatening, and she cannot help but shake while in the room with him. Herr Zutter, the man who is supposed to advise Rutchen on the legal process after she is arrested, lies to her when he says that it would be advisable for her to sign a confession. "Nobody in Switzerland has ever

been punished for the truth," he says. The judge who briskly hears her case is more interested in getting home than he is in doing his job.

While in jail, Rutchen feels endangered by the graffiti on her cell wall□pictures of penises and names of men who were there before her. The drawings turn into snakes and lizards and swell and advance in an effort to choke her. She is convinced at one point that the men in the other cells can tell that she is there and that they are masturbating and threatening her sexually.

Mistreatment of Jews

Rutchen receives horrible treatment in Switzerland, much harsher than her crime seems to merit. When she is first picked up, the authorities comment in German that, yes, they expected that she would be from Israel and that the people they pick up for this crime are always Israeli. In the description of how

Style

Impressionistic Writing

While impressionism is usually thought of as a technique used in the visual arts, such as painting, writers have also employed it. Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf are all said to have written in an impressionistic style. Impressionism in literature involves depicting a scene by writing about the sensory and emotional perceptions (or impressions) associated with the scene rather than by recreating the objective reality of the scene.

Hendel uses this technique extensively in "Small Change. For the author, representing Rutchen's emotions and feelings while she tells her horrible tale is more important than retelling the events in realistic detail. As well, the narrator's emotions are expressed when Hendel paints a scene. For example, when Rutchen gets ready to start her story, she tells the narrator, Look at the trees. The narrator does so, but what she sees is not trees but a manifestation of her thoughts and feelings. Rutchen has just told the narrator about her father's obsession with small change, so when the narrator looks at the natural world around her, she sees, "the mountains turned into a moving heap of coins, the grounds, and the trees and the walls of the houses ... a hail of silver and gold that became a molten surface, turning the mountain into a steep wall of coins ... It lasted a moment. Maybe an hour." Reality has been transformed to reflect more of a sensory impression and less of what the trees and the mountains look like. Even time, usually a quantifiable factor, has been transformed. Time stands still or is incalculable.

Through the use of impressionistic language, Hendel creates a world where the specific details of events have less impact than characters' responses and feelings about them. Rutchen is all emotion and feeling, and, as these emotions come forth, they comprise a large part of what the story is about.

Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness, as a literary technique, was first used in the late nineteenth century and is associated with impressionistic writing. In fact, many authors known for their use of the stream-of-consciousness technique are also known for their impressionistic writing.

Stream-of-consciousness style is marked by a story structure that is based on associations rather than on chronology or logical sequence. Emphasis is on revealing characters' feelings, thoughts, and actions. Hendel has Rutchen behave and speak in this mode, evoking both the trauma she has endured and the resulting panic, as well as her increasing sense of hysteria amid the disorder of a world that does not operate the way it should. A young woman from a comfortable neighborhood is not supposed to end

up naked in a filthy jail cell, but she does. Her irrational and nonlinear train of thought thus becomes an appropriate means for expressing her experience.

For example, in the beginning of the novella, Rutchen begins to tell the narrator "the story about the cat but is distracted into talking about her father's stamp collection before she can finish. The narrator does not hear about the cat's demise until near the end of the novella, when Rutchen has finished the story about being in jail and rambles on about her watch.

Historical Context

The Israeli Economy in the 1980s

In the 1980s Israel suffered spiraling inflation and troublesome economic challenges from bearing the cost of maintaining national security and accepting Jewish immigrants from all over the world. At the beginning of the decade, inflation was at a rate of 131 percent. In an effort to lower inflation and to stabilize the monetary system, the Israeli government changed the form of currency from the lira to the shekel.

When Rutchen gets the idea to go to Switzerland and exchange Israeli coins for valuable Swiss francs, she uses worthless Israeli lira, which had been replaced by the shekel at the time of the story. Even though the lira was an obsolete form of currency, her father has squirreled away stacks of the coins.

By the middle of the decade, Israel's inflation rate had subsided to approximately 20 percent and plans were devised to stimulate economic growth. The new shekel was released into circulation in 1985, replacing the previous currency. Toward the end of the decade, however, unemployment jumped to 9 percent and signs of a recession were evident.

Israeli Literature, 1960s through 1980s

The establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 meant that, by the 1960s, there existed a generation

of writers who had grown up in the new land and knew very little of Jewish life in Europe. Many of these writers' books focused on young people's difficulties with keeping traditional customs, as well as on their inner lives and struggles. Other topics included the exploration of Jewish identity and the struggle of Israelis to escape the memory of the Holocaust after the end of World War II.

By the late 1960s and 1970s, Israeli literature, like that of Europe and the United States, expressed themes related to the individual in society, as well as loneliness and alienation. In 1968, the highly regarded novelist Amos Oz wrote *My Michael,* a story about the mental breakdown of a young wife. In 1982 around the time that Hendel was writing about family issues and Jewish identity in "Small Change," Oz published *A Perfect Peace,* a novel that examines the tensions between two generations of a kibbutz family.

Contemporary Israeli poetry also began to attract international attention during this period. Yehuda Amichai, whose 1977 collection *Amen* was translated by the author and the English poet Ted Hughes, is one example of an Israeli poet who found a worldwide audience.

Critical Overview

Because a very limited amount of Hendel's work has been translated into English, a correspondingly low number of English-speaking critics have looked closely at her work. In Jeff Green's *Jerusalem Post* review of her 1996 short story collection, *An Innocent Breakfast,* he notes that Hendel has been writing fiction on a high level for several decades, and she would probably figure on every knowledgeable critic's list of significant Israeli writers, though she is not as well known as she might be. But critics are fairly universal in their appreciation of Hendel's use of language and her willingness to approach difficult subjects such as familial strife and mental collapse.

Matt Nesvisky, writing a review in the *Jerusalem Post* of *Six Israeli Novellas,* in which Hendel's Small Change appears, praises the author for having written one of the two best stories in the collection. Hendel's novella, according to Nesvisky, "is a truly nightmarish story about an obsessive and obsessed Tel Aviv family. Also lauding Hendel's contribution to *Six Israeli Novellas* is *Kirkus Reviews.* Its reviewer refers to Hendel as the standout contributor, singling out her depiction of the generational tensions between Shlezi and Rutchen in the novella. Hendel has given readers a "precise portrayal ... of a tradition-burdened woman in thrall to her domineering father, writes Nesvisky, who further admires her fine rendering of the tensions at work in an 'old world' stubbornly resistant to change.

Green indicates in his review that Hendel's inability to seize the public imagination and secure a more high-profile position among contemporary authors has more to do with the grim subject matter she usually tackles than with her skills as a writer. Hendel's stories in *An Innocent Breakfast* cover such subjects as loneliness, mental instability, and the tensions arising between differing generations, which are similar to those in Small Change. Green goes on to give Hendel high marks for the sensitivity with which she explores these subjects. She conveys deep but unsentimental empathy with their suffering, he writes. The stories develop slowly and without pyrotechnics, leaving one with the feeling that the effort invested in reading them has been well rewarded.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson examines Yehudit Hendel's story as a consideration of the multi-generational legacy left by the Holocaust.

Yehudit Hendel's Small Change, a harrowing tale of familial disintegration and the impact one generation can have on succeeding ones, presents pictures of mental disturbance so gripping that to find a grain of reality among all of the hallucinatory images might seem a daunting task. However, to read this work simply as a story of a dysfunctional father-daughter relationship that goes from bad to worse ignores the deeper implications of the layered images Hendel uses to tell her story.

As an example of such a limited reading, Gershon Shaked, in his introduction to Hendel's novella in the collection *Six Israeli Novellas,* erroneously and unfortunately states that what happens to Rutchen can be classified as the paranoid experience of an Israeli woman in a foreign country. True, Rutchen's character is in severe need of professional psychiatric assistance□anyone who burns cigarettes into her arms and regularly experiences hallucinations cannot be mentally stable. But to dismiss what happens to Rutchen in Switzerland simply as paranoia is to overlook that, throughout the story, Hendel calls forth visions of the Holocaust and reminds readers that evil can be handed down from one generation to the next, despite noble intentions. With this legacy haunting her, it is no wonder Rutchen's mental health is vulnerable.

After the Swiss authorities catch Rutchen attempting to exchange worthless Israeli lira for valuable Swiss francs, she enters a hell that is Kafka-esque in its malevolence. She is caught in a situation over which she has no control and of which she has no understanding. Everything that happens to Rutchen is confusing but softened eerily by the insincere assurances of the state operating at peak efficiency.

To begin with, Rutchen's Jewishness becomes an issue when she is arrested. When the man who interrogates Rutchen asks her where she is from and she answers "Israel," he responds that he knew this already. He and the two women who brought Rutchen into the interrogation room begin to laugh in a malicious way about her being from Israel, speaking in German and agreeing that, yes, the people they pick up are always from Israel. Rutchen asks the interrogator how long she will be held; he says he does not know.

Rutchen feels trapped and shrieks in terror, realizing that she feels a quiet steady vicious hatred . . . inside the deep memory of her body. Even though Rutchen did not experience the Holocaust first-hand, this description is a clear indication that the horror of that event has been passed down to her through her parents, two people who are in psychic pain. They are of the generation who witnessed the horror of efficient state-supported mass murder, and they cannot help but pass these memories on to their daughter, as surely as they passed on the color of her eyes or hair. Thus, when Rutchen

accidentally says something in Hebrew to the authorities, she becomes frightened and feels the light touch of terror.

As Rutchen's prison experience develops, the author draws parallels between how she is treated by the Swiss officials and how the Jews were treated by the Germans during the Holocaust. Rutchen is taken to a building, the purpose of which she is unsure. After emptying her purse, the prison authorities take her money and force her to get undressed and sit in a room alone. Next, they take her jewelry. When a ring will not come off her finger, a policewoman brings soap and rubs until the ring is free. Eventually, Rutchen sees and feels blue ink under her skin. Whether this is a hallucination is unclear, but the passage where it appears is haunting: "she felt her whole body like tattoo, she felt the ink inside her skin and the smell of stale herring in her skin. . . . Oh God, she was here alone and there was no God." Taken together, these passages recall the long lines of concentration camp prisoners standing naked, tattooed with blue identification numbers on the insides of their arms, and all of their valuables piled up, waiting for the Nazis to take what they wanted.

Rutchen's trial, if that's what her appearance in front of the Examining Magistrate can be called, is a sham. The Examining Magistrate is agitated because Rutchen's case□a little problem here is how he refers to it□is going to make him a few minutes late returning home for the evening, and his wife doesn't like for him to be late. The authorities push Rutchen to say "yes" to everything and to ask no questions, and she is led to believe that "if they got it over with quickly the little problem might grow even littler." The man responsible for helping her through the legal process tells her to confess to the crime, because Nobody in Switzerland has ever been punished for the truth." Rutchen believes that her cooperation will put her back in her hotel room in no time. But she is mistaken.

While Rutchen, stripped bare and relieved of her personal belongings, is shuttled from one empty official room to another, life around her goes on as usual. She notices the rain and the color of the sky through a window. City noises seep through the bars of the armored car in which Rutchen is transported, and she envies the normalcy of the beautiful bustling city and the gleaming lights in the grand shops and cafés. After World War II, Hannah Arendt, the German-American political theorist, coined the term "the banality of evil" in reference to the frighteningly commonplace nature of the Nazi war crimes. Hendel reproduces this atmosphere in Rutchen's prison experience, contrasting the horror of what the Israeli woman experiences against the ordinariness of everyday life: hurrying home for dinner, a storm coming, traffic lights.

Ultimately, after being dragged across an iron floor and thrown into a filthy prison cell, Rutchen realizes the cruelty of her treatment and how it ties in with the thousands of years of mistreatment suffered by the Jews. She uses her menstrual blood to write on her cell wall, over and over again, a sentence that paraphrases the lamentations of Jeremiah in the Bible: "And I was left naked and bare and for these things I weep." The lamentations refer to a time when the Israelites were enslaved, and her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper. Rutchen feels the weight of the Holocaust experience□the entire history of Jewish struggle□ on herself and her own generation and questions, like many before her, God's presence during hellish events.

Can the Holocaust somehow explain why Rutchen's father, Shlezi, behaves in the mean-spirited way that he does? While there is no direct evidence in the story that Shlezi was imprisoned in a World War II concentration camp, he is of that generation and certainly had family or friends who suffered or died in the camps. Possibly, hoarding small change serves as a psychological hedge for Shlezi against the near destruction of his people, but this activity eventually develops into a mean-spirited and destructive obsession that contributes to the ruin of his home life.

That Rutchen absorbs part of her father after he dies is no mystery. At the story's end she has nearly taken his place in the family, and her face "bore an extraordinary resemblance to her father's face, as if there was nothing between them now but the short distance at the end of the road.

Woven throughout this story, as well, is the question of Hendel's interesting decision to make Switzerland the country where Rutchen has her near-Holocaust experiences. Switzerland has recently admitted to keeping paintings, jewelry, gold, and other valuables taken from the Jews as they entered the concentration camps, but stories and suspicions of such activities have been widespread since World War II. Certainly Hendel's choice of setting is not accidental and stresses that Small Change is not simply a story of generational difficulties but a story of the Holocaust and its painful, enduring legacies.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on Small Change, in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, Korb explores the feelings of entrapment and violation that define the family in Hendel's story.

Small Change recounts the tragic story of a German immigrant family haunted by the Holocaust. Though many years have passed since they moved to Israel, Shlezi and Gerda still carry the repercussions of the concentration camps, and they pass the pathologies this trauma has engendered to their daughter Rutchen. The family in Small Change" may have escaped from Germany and the Nazis, but they cannot escape from the ensuing feelings of entrapment, violation, and paranoia. With its multiple motifs of imprisonment, violence, hatred, and aggression, the concentration camp experience has come to limit the family and its interior relationships.

Shlezi and his unhealthy obsessions set the tone for the family's interactions. A collector, first of stamps and then of common coins, Shlezi's hobbies show his futile attempt to create a world in which he can maintain complete order. As a German Jew, Shlezi faced persecution and the eventual breakdown of his belief in humankind. The patterns of his stamp collecting demonstrate the issues that plague him. At first, he selected stamps that showed faces and birds of prey, as well as those that displayed anti-Semitism. Each of these types of stamps stands for a different facet of the human experience: the faces represent humanity itself; the birds of prey represent rapaciousness and violence; the anti-Semitic stamps represent unmitigated hatred. When Shlezi exchanged the stamps of faces for those of birds of prey, he moved away from the acknowledgement that basic humanity does exist, thus nullifying optimism and faith. He chose instead to focus on the glorification of violent behavior. Shlezi's anti-Semitic stamps, a blatant reminder of the Nazi horror, show that the Jewish experience continues to define his personality and his development. Even though he and his family are now safe in Israel, Nazism still haunts them. By his later years, Shlezi has come to place the most value on his collection of anti-Semitic stamps because "it [anti-Semitism] will go on to the end of the world, it will go on as long [as] there are people in the world.

Because he was helpless in the face of Nazism, and he continues to feel helpless in the face of what he considers to be never-ending anti-Semitism, Shlezi develops a psychological need to wield power over his wife and daughter as well as himself. He maintains self-control through his rigid adherence to patterns; the neighbors have long noted that, in his preparations to go to work, he kept to a strict schedule and set of behaviors, right down to wearing sunglasses "even in winter and in the rain." His collection of small change manifests an even more unhealthy pattern of behavior than did his stamp collecting. He fills the house with small change in little stacks wrapped in tracing paper and thin tinfoil, in all the cupboards and all the tables and all the drawers and in the kitchen ... in boxes and in suitcases. This currency serves no monetary purpose; Shlezi is occupied only with "transferring the stacks, smoothing the paper and turning it over, and then closing and folding, and then pressing it down. Indeed, Shlezi procured the change by selling his stamp collection. With the profits, he could have

bought land, houses, shops, diamonds, but instead he chose to collect a countless amount of small change. He clings to the hope that in keeping track of it, obsessively "smoothing the paper and turning it over, and then closing and folding, and then pressing it down, he will take charge of his own destiny.

While this proves impossible□he dies as a result of a defiant Rutchen setting fire to the packets of change she has stolen□for most of his life, he is able to subjugate his wife and daughter to his will, rendering them his victims. As Gila Ramras-Rauch writes in *World Literature Today,* this "tyrannical father dominates the life of his wife and daughter and destroys them physically and mentally. Shlezi' s cruelty is clearly manifest when he viciously runs over Gerda's cat, Pudding. He ostensibly did so because the cat jumped on his stamp album, which he insisted on leaving on the kitchen table. Symbolically, by killing the cat, which Gerda was crazy about" and which is her sole connection to her dead mother, Shlezi flaunts his power over Gerda. Pudding had two yellow eyes that drew Gerda, bewitched her, a power that Shlezi "hated." As one of the neighbors correctly pointed out, in killing the cat□which, like Gerda, "had a look of permanent hunger□Shlezi had run over her over too . .. crushed her slowly without a bus and without a road, on the chair, sitting up. The narrator recalls that, before Shlezi's death, Gerda virtually becomes non-human. She has been reduced to leaning into the doorway for so long that she became part of the door itself. She becomes a fixture sitting in front of the window, with only her silences moving back and forth.

This change in Gerda is able to take place because she and her daughter ascribe power to Shlezi. The entire neighborhood knows that wherever Shlezi went, of course Gerda followed. Rutchen further invests power in the small change as a physical manifestation of her father. She gives Shlezi's relationship to his coins a supernatural quality, maintaining, "he knew with his eyes without counting [the amount of money], he could see in the dark and he knew, and nobody was allowed to come near. Shlezi keeps vigilant watch over the small change. Thus, in stealing the coins, Rutchen subverts his authority and tries to end his control.

To accomplish this goal, Rutchen decides to take the obsolete Israeli coins to Zurich and exchange them in vending machines for Swiss currency. This action has less to do with the money she can gain from the illegal transaction than it does with her attempt to end her father's influence. After her first successful transaction, Rutchen uses her ill-gotten gains to buy a "fat sausage with mustard," a huge helping of ice cream, and several pears dripping with golden juice. These choices show that Rutchen's actions are those of symbolic defiance. Her father has starved her emotionally, and she wants to nurture herself with indulgent food. She is attempting to take the money, which her father rendered worthless, and turn it into something that provides care and sustenance, even luxury. However, because the money, along with the family, has been tainted, Rutchen's actions end in her imprisonment and violation.

The scenes of Rutchen in jail mirror far more intensely the entrapment and the violation she has felt all her life. When she speaks of the rape, she can only describe the chain of events metaphorically. Instead of the attacker touching her, it is snakes

clearly advancing on her on her body, slimy, hissing, closing in on her and climbing up her and coiling around her neck and crawling into her throat and filling her mouth and her throat and choking her inside her throat.

The aftermath of rape, however, is grounded in reality, as befits such a physical violation. Rutchen comments on the blood dripping dirty from her body between her legs, the chafing of the skin there, as well as the stickiness and stains on her underclothing and skirt. She loses her human qualities as a result of the attack; now she is merely a bleeding animal.

She also comes to identify even more with her heritage, especially those Jews who were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. On an external level, her surroundings recall the camps. Her captors speak German, the language of the Nazis. The prison cell is like a tomb. She is sure that "this is where I'll remain, this is where I'll be buried, and the cell smells of "damp earth, of flesh and bones, a smell of unknown, decomposing bodies. She likens her experience to that of being buried alive. In a sense, she is suffering the slow, painful death that many Jewish prisoners experienced. On a psychological level, she manifests the depredations that have been foisted upon her. She feels that her body is tattooed; "she felt the ink inside her skin" and her hands were blue, the same color as the ink used to tattoo identification numbers on the arms of the Jewish prisoners. Soon her whole body is enshrouded in a "tattoo netting [that] burned like an inflammation. " The memory of the rapist's body entering her mouth makes her think of the line, ' *'their throat is an open sepulcher.* Rutchen's body is a place where death resides.

Though she eventually is freed, this devastating experience propels Rutchen onto a path of destruction that she aims both at her father and herself. When Rutchen sets fire to the towers of coins she brought to Zurich, her sleeves are rolled up to reveal little round marks and a spent cigarette droops from her mouth. Because Rutchen's self-worth is enmeshed in the concept of her father, her attempt to punish him cannot come without punishment to herself.

The family's story ends in either literal or symbolic death for everyone. Shlezi dies when he sees the charred tinfoil and the coins that lay quietly, faded, and lusterless. Gerda turns into a walking skeleton, much like the Jews imprisoned in the concentration camps. Her emotional entrapment by the past is physically represented by her position on the balcony, where she stays seated, "her back tensed against the chair, as if it were tied to a pillar." She remains haunted by Shlezi, her eyes "two deep holes of despair, her face like a skull.

As for Rutchen, the past lives within her. Time stands still because she continues to see Shlezi, sitting in the window, arranging the small change.... Everyday, arranging the small change. Even after his death, Rutchen cannot escape her father. Her own face has come to bear an "extraordinary resemblance" to his. It was "as if there was nothing between them now but the short distance at the end of the road, or the short distance to death. Unable to take steps toward the future, Rutchen dies metaphorically; as in the Zurich prison, she is buried alive to undergo a slow, painful end. After Shlezi's funeral,

she stands on the balcony, cautiously stroking one hand with the other, as if fingering the non-existent tattoo, [that is] slowly but steadily poisoning her blood.

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on Small Change, in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses images of the human body in Hendel's story.

Through the recurring motif of the human body, particularly the hands and head, Hendel explores the themes of oppression and self-empowerment in her novella Small Change. In this story, hands come to represent instruments of power, whether used in acts of oppression or of defiance against oppression. Similarly, a recurring motif of decapitated heads represents the forces of terror and violence that characterize oppression. Throughout the story, Rutchen, the main character, struggles against oppression in the form of a domineering father in Israel and the widespread anti-Semitism she encounters in Europe. By the end of the story, Rutchen learns to turn these instruments of oppression against her closest oppressor□her father□although she is never able to completely overcome the legacy of anti-Semitism. Rutchen's story is thus a narrative of self-empowerment and triumph over tyranny, although her triumph remains only partial.

Hands in this story represent power, domination, and self-determination. The hands of Shlezi, Rutchen's father, embody the tyrannical and controlling force he exerts over the lives of both his wife, Gerda, and his daughter. His hands are strong and "tyrannical." They are the primary instruments of his stamp and coin-collecting activities, carried out every night at the kitchen table by the window. With his powerful hands, he turns the pages of his books of stamps and piles coins into towers that he wraps in paper and foil. Rutchen mentions that, when her father was looking through his books of stamps, she always looked at his hands when he was holding the page, she didn't know why she did it, but that's what she did. The stamp and coin collections, and Shlezi's obsessive ordering of them, indicate his neurotic need to exert control over his life as a means of compensating for his feelings of powerlessness against the anti-Semitism that, he feels, is never-ending.

Shlezi's efforts to maintain control over his coin collection thus become symbolic of his controlling power over the bodies of his wife and daughter. At night, after watching him look through his stamp collection, Rutchen's fingers take on the qualities of his stacks of coins: round, swollen, with transparent skin the color of silver." Rutchen' s fingers begin to look like her father's stacks of coins because her father treats her like nothing more than a stack of coins, which he can control and manipulate at his will. There is even some implication that perhaps Rutchen's father was physically abusive toward her mother Gerda, as she wears a plaster cast on her neck. Thus, Shlezi's hands represent his tyrannical, oppressive, even violent power and the control he wields over his wife and daughter. After his death, Rutchen says that Gerda will never be able to escape from the oppressiveness of her husband because She'll still feel his hands.

Throughout the story, Rutchen's hands are described as similar to her father's. Like her father, Rutchen has short clumsy hands. After she is arrested for illegally obtaining small

change from a vending machine in Zurich, she notices that her hands look like her father's. They begin to shake uncontrollably, just as her father's hands shook from Parkinson's disease. Her own hands cannot stop shaking when she is interrogated by the authorities, just as her father's hands did not stop shaking, even after he died. Thus, while her father's hands represent his tyrannical, authoritative grasp on her life, the uncontrollable shaking is, by contrast, a sign of how powerless he feels as a person who must face the spread of worldwide anti-Semitism after having lived through the Holocaust. Likewise, Rutchen feels powerless over the German-speaking, anti-Semitic authorities who arrest her.

Although they resemble her father's hands, Rutchen's hands also at times look childlike, emphasizing her vulnerability to those who would terrorize her, such as her father and the authorities in Zurich. Her hands are small, rather chubby, like a child's hands. Later, still waiting to find out what will happen to her after she is arrested, Rutchen's hands stop shaking and become small, unnaturally small, almost like a child's hands.

Thus, Rutchen's father's hands represent both his tyrannical, controlling power over his wife and daughter and his powerlessness in the face of anti-Semitism and violence against Jews. Rutchen's hands, childlike and vulnerable, also register her lack of control and powerlessness in the face of oppressive authorities.

As the story progresses, Rutchen learns to use her hands as instruments of liberation and self determination, as a means of defiance against the oppressive authority of both her father and the Swiss officials. When she is thrown into a jail cell, Rutchen begins to beat against the iron door with her hands and fists. Beating against the iron door is symbolic of the efforts of the powerless to resist the cold, cruel forces of oppression. Although they bleed from the impact, she nonetheless feels "enormous strength" in her hands. Her soft, human flesh cannot break down the iron door of her prison cell, yet this simple act is a step toward empowerment against her oppressors. Rutchen is raped while in jail, an experience that temporarily robs her of all sense of power over her body and her life. After suffering this brutality, her hands become frozen; she tries to warm and "revive" them but cannot. However, once released from the jail and back home in Israel, Rutchen is able to "revive" her hands, symbolically empowering herself through self-liberation from the oppressive authority of her father. While describing her experience in the jail, Rutchen, sitting on the park bench, stretches out her hands as if freeing herself from a trap."

Nonetheless, Rutchen is never able to completely free herself from the legacy of terror and oppression she has inherited from her parents' experience of the Holocaust. Speaking of her father and his coin collection after his death, Rutchen "rubbed her hands as if they were stained with her own blood. The hands, which are her instruments of self-empowerment, retain the wounds of oppression. After Rutchen has told her story, she looks at her own hands, "cautiously stroking one hand with the other, as if fingering the non-existent tattoo, perhaps feeling the ink swelling in her veins, slowly but steadily poisoning her blood. The ink of the tattoo refers to the identification numbers that the Nazis tattooed onto the arms of the Jews in concentration camps. Although Rutchen

herself is not tattooed, the imprint of the Holocaust on the lives of her parents continues to "poison" her own life.

Like the recurring motif of hands, images of disembodied heads throughout Small Change are symbolic of terror and oppression. While in Zurich, Rutchen sees disembodied heads all around her, symbolizing her fear of cruelty and oppression. After she obtains the francs from the vending machine, Rutchen treats herself to a meal and sits at the edge of Lake Geneva, watching the swans. The swans are described as "headless because she sees them floating in the water with their heads tucked into the feathers on their backs, which is how they sleep. The "headless" swans are an image of innocence destroyed by cruelty and oppression.

Images of disembodied heads in this story also evoke an atmosphere of horror, whereby the "floating heads, like monsters in horror movies, invoke feelings of terror in the oppressed. When Rutchen is arrested at the shopping mall, her experience of fear and terror while being questioned is expressed through the impression that the people interrogating her are disembodied heads floating around the room. Rutchen perceives the head of one of the women who has arrested her as "decapitated, floating in the air. She also perceives the man behind the desk as a decapitated head, with only his face floating detached over the chair as if in a horror movie."

Resonating with images of decapitation, Small Change" includes several images of people being hanged by the neck. Once Rutchen has returned home, her mother's head, seen from outside through the curtains of a window, appears to be decapitated as if hanging from a noose. Her mother's head appears to be swinging, hanging on the gathered pink curtain from a scrawny pink neck, its jaws sticking out like a skull." Rutchen's mother wears a plaster cast around her neck; it is not clear what happened to her, but there is an implication that her father may have tried to choke his own wife with his big hands, symbolically hanging or decapitating her. However, the neighbors say that he had "put her neck in a plaster cast right from the start, meaning that, although he may not have physically strangled her, his treatment of his wife was, in effect, a psychological decapitation.

The theme of decapitation or hanging is echoed in the snatch of conversation the narrator and Rutchen hear between a couple walking down the street. The man describes the hanging of a man in which "they hanged him and the ropes broke and they brought another rope and it broke again and they hanged him again.

The cruelty of Rutchen's father, who exerts power over his family through tyranny and violence, is further indicated by his decapitating his wife's cat. He is said to have deliberately run over and killed his wife's beloved pet cat with a bus. The neighbors circulate conflicting stories about how he killed the cat, but in one story the cat's head is cut off by the wheel of the bus, and flies up onto an electrical pole. The neighbors describe the head as cut like a kitchen knife, right along the seam. Afterward, Shlezi further terrorizes his wife by bringing home a brand of cheese with "a picture of a laughing head of a cat on the packaging, to remind her of the fate of her beloved pet.

Rutchen's revenge against the terror of the disembodied heads and the tyranny of symbolic hanging is acted out against her father in the end when she burns his wrapped bundles of change. Although the money is not actually harmed by the fire, Shlezi understands it as an act of hostility toward him. Overcome by the emotional assault, Shlezi is stricken with a heart attack and dies. His heart attack is described in terms that resonate with the motif of hanging and disembodied heads. His head is described as if it were disconnected from his body: he moved his head in terror. The head moved, alive. His head is again described as floating up over his neck, and, finally, at the moment of death, "The cold climbed to his neck, his head swayed slightly," as if hung from a noose. Rutchen has symbolically hanged or decapitated her father in revenge against his psychological tyranny over her.

By the end of the story, Rutchen has learned to use her hands as instruments of liberation to free herself from the tyranny of her father's oppression. Furthermore, the symbolic hanging and decapitation of her oppressor leads to an act of defiance that results in his death. Rutchen, however, cannot entirely free herself from the scar of the Holocaust, nor from the tyranny of anti-Semitism throughout the world.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on Small Change, in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

- The person who listens to Rutchen's tale is never identified except for her gender. Invent a plausible character description for this woman, including her age, her relationship to the family, what she does for a living, and any personal qualities that you think are important.

- In the story, Rutchen uses Israeli lira to carry out her scheme in Switzerland. At the time of the story, the lira was no longer the official Israeli currency; the government had issued the shekel to replace it. Investigate the history of currency and coinage in the United States. When and how did use of the dollar come about? What currency was in use before the United States achieved its independence?

- Research Switzerland's role in World War II, including the controversy over the valuables many Jewish families from all over the world believe were stolen from them during the war and deposited by the Nazis in Swiss banks. Create a timeline from the war to today, highlighting the critical dates in this controversy.

- Imagine that you are going to rewrite the story, changing the setting to the present-day United States. To plan your story, answer these questions: In your version, what might Rutchen do to end up in jail? What might happen to her there to distress her as deeply as she was in Switzerland? How might the character's relationship with her father be similar, and how might it be different?

Compare and Contrast

 1980s: In an attempt to control an annual inflation rate of 131 percent in 1980, the Israeli government changes the country's currency from the lira to the shekel. In 1985, the currency changes to the new Israeli shekel in an effort to further stabilize the nation's economic growth.

Today: Israel has recently experienced years of positive economic growth. Its per capita gross domestic product for 2000 is higher than that in some European Union countries, and inflation has been reduced to 0 percent.

 1980s: Thanks to a peace treaty signed between

Egypt and Israel, the two countries open their borders and exchange ambassadors in 1980. The treaty eliminates the threat of Israel's primary Arab adversary, which possesses the largest Arab military capability. In contrast to the struggle and pain Rutchen experiences, Israel enjoys a brief moment of peace with one of its Arab neighbors.

Today: The Palestinian *intifada* (Arabic for *uprising)* that began against Israel in late 1987 still threatens the security of both groups. Tensions between Arabs and Israelis have reached dangerous levels, and on both sides lives are lost nearly every week.

What Do I Read Next?

- Yehuda Amichai is Israel's most popular poet as well as an international literary figure whose poetry has been translated into more than thirty languages. For *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* published in 1996, translators Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell selected Amichai's most famous poems from earlier volumes and included forty new poems from his recent work.

- *Boat of Stone* is Maureen Earl's 1993 novel about Hanna Sommerfeld, a seventy-six-year-old grandmother who lives with her son's family in Haifa, Israel. Part of her memories are based on a factual episode during World War II in which 1,580 German Jewish refugees were detained in a British penal colony on the island of Mauritius, off Africa's east coast, after their deportation from Palestine in 1940.

- Shulamith Hareven is considered one of Yehudit Hendel's contemporaries. In her 1992 collection *Twilight and Other Stories,* Hareven leaves the historical setting in which she typically places her stories and presents six stories in contemporary Israel.

- Amos Oz is one of Israel's foremost writers. In his 1993 novel, *Fima,* he tells the story of a divorced, middle-aged Israeli man living in Jerusalem. Fima is still hung up on his ex-wife and has insinuated himself into her new family, where he is tolerated only because of his foolishness. He believes that he has great ideas and plans for resolving all of the problems facing Israel, but in truth he can barely survive from day to day.

- *Six Israeli Novellas,* a 1999 collection edited by Gershon Shaked, presents the English translations of short works that originally appeared in Hebrew from the mid-1960s through the late 1980s. Yehudit Hendel's Small Change appears in this volume along with stories by five other Israeli authors.

- *Mr. Mani,* published in 1989, is the tale of six generations of a Jewish family, which begins in Europe and follows them through their migration to Israel. Its author, A. B. Yehoshua, is one of Israel's better known authors, and his book has received numerous awards, including the National Jewish Book Award for Fiction.

Further Study

Cohen, Joseph, *Voices of Israel: Essays on and Interviews with Yehuda Amichai, A. B. Yehoshua, T. Carmi, Aharon Appelfeld, and Amos Oz,* State University of New York Press, 1990.

Joseph Cohen, an English professor at Tulane University, examines the work of three novelists and two poets who are Israel's foremost authors of contemporary literature. Cohen looks at all English translations of these writers' major works and also includes interviews with the writers.

Glazer, Miriyam, *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers,* State University of New York Press, 2000.

Dreaming the Actual introduces the powerful and provocative new fiction and poetry of Israel's women writers to an English-speaking audience. Themes covered in the writings include homeland, exile, gender roles, the legacy of the Holocaust, the effects of war, and the power of memory. These works were originally written in a variety of languages, including Arabic, Russian, English, and Hebrew.

Horovitz, David, *A Little Too Close to God: The Thrills and Panic of a Life in Israel,* Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Journalist and writer David Horovitz emigrated from England to Israel in 1983, accomplishing a life-long dream. In *A Little Too Close to God,* Horovitz describes how the reality of life in Israel has both fulfilled his dreams and differed greatly from his expectations. His quandary as a father and husband is whether to stay and endure the bad times or to leave for his family's protection.

Segev, Tom, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust,* translated by Haim Watzman, Owl Books, 2000. Tom Segev is a reporter for the leading Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz. The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* is an examination of how political positions have shaped Israeli attitudes toward the Holocaust. The "seventh million" is Segev's term for the Jewish population of Palestine (later Israel), who are still coming to terms with the memory of the six million Jews exterminated by Hitler.

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Green, Jeff, Reading from Right to Left, in *Jerusalem Post,* May 3, 1996, p. 26.

Review of *Six Israeli Novellas, in Kirkus Reviews,* March 15, 1999.

Nesvisky, Matt, Missed Opportunity, in *Jerusalem Post,* April 19, 1999, Sect. B, p. 13.

Ramras-Rauch, Gila, ' *'Six Israeli Novellas,*" in *World Literature Today,* Vol. 73, Autumn 1999, p. 808.

Shaked, Gershon, "Introduction," in *Six Israeli Novellas,* by Ruth Almog and others, translated by Dalya Bilu, Philip Simpson, and Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, edited by Gershon Shaked, David R. Godine, 1999.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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