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Bi-Modal Name and Tragicomic Fate: Delmore Schwartz's Shenandoah Fish and Thane Rosenbaum's Duncan Katz

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Delmore Schwartz and Thane Rosenbaum are two Jewish American writers with similarly unusual names, bi-modal both in their sonority, the smooth or powerful first name followed by the guttural or trailing last name, and in their ethnic signification, an Anglo first name preceding a strongly Jewish patronymic. It is clear that the future writers' parents, immigrants all, were trying to endow their sons with American identities, but the outrageous bi-modality of the resulting names undermined that effort, showing instead the children's alienation from being fully connected to their native land. Schwartz and Rosenbaum explore the effects of having such names through the creation of fictional alter-egos Shenandoah Fish and Duncan Katz, respectively. Schwartz's verse play *Shenandoah* and the first chapter of Rosenbaum's novel *Second Hand Smoke* both focus on the central character's naming ceremony, his *bris*. While each author indicates that fate has dealt his character a heavy hand by investing him with such an appellation, they are also able to see the humorous side of the situation.

KEYWORDS Schwartz, Delmore, Rosenbaum, Thane, Shenandoah, Jewish, tragicomic

> We must first come into the possession of our own names. For it is through our names that we first place ourselves in the world. Our names, being the gift of others, must be made our own. (Ellison, 1964: 151)

The concern with names expressed in this passage might seem odd to one who does not know that, at his birth, the future novelist was christened Ralph Waldo Ellison. His father clearly intended for someone hearing the name to think of the American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, although he died when Ralph was only three and could not explain his reasoning to his son. In the writer's younger years, Ellison "was uncomfortable" (153) with the name, "the joke implicit in such a small

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brown nubbin of a boy carrying around such a heavy moniker" (154). Later in his life, however, having come to understand the value that the Negro community places on naming, and having started to become a writer himself, he realized that his father "was aware of the suggestive powers of names and the magic involved in naming" (154). Coming to terms with his own weighty name, Ellison argued that African Americans in particular "must charge [our names] with all our emotions, our hopes, hates, loves, aspirations. They must become our masks and our shields and the containers of all those values and traditions which we learn or imagine as being the meaning of our familial past" (151).

Two Jewish American writers who can empathize with Ellison's situation and would agree wholeheartedly with his assessment are Delmore Schwartz and Thane Rosenbaum. Each of these writers experiences a contradiction in his name, a disconnect between the high-sounding first name and the low-sounding surname. Even more significantly, the Anglo inflected first names seek somehow to efface the obviously Jewish patronymics, although the attempt to do so clearly fails and in fact has the opposite result by drawing attention to itself. Given this situation, Schwartz and Rosenbaum feel themselves to be marked off from birth as outsiders. They understand what their parents, first-generation immigrants, were trying to do in giving them such ill-conceived names, but they nevertheless feel that their names have indeed, as per Ellison, led to a complex fate. In calling attention to the effect that their names have had on their lives, both Schwartz and Rosenbaum create character alter-egos with similarly outlandish names: Shenandoah Fish and Duncan Katz, respectively. Both writers, furthermore, structure long narratives around the character's naming ceremony, his *bris*. In each case, the writer sees a less-than-ideal fate being given to the child at his naming, but also sees the humorous side of the situation. Ultimately, Schwartz and Rosenbaum arrive at a tragicomic position that would be in line with Ellison's assessment about names: "We take what we have and make of them what we can" (152).

Delmore Schwartz and the bi-modal name

That James Atlas begins his biography of Delmore Schwartz with a discussion of "the origin of his first name" (1977: 3) is no surprise, for his name is not only the most immediately arresting element about him but is also an issue that he obsessed about personally throughout his life, conceiving the idea that his character and fate were in large measure given to him along with his odd moniker. Rachel Peckham, in a fascinating article about naming in African-American and Jewish-American literature, has observed that "names function as sites of identity anxiety, as they are never fixed, but rather in constant tension with the authors' and/or the characters' fraught experiences" (2009: 31), and Schwartz's life and writings bear this out. He also understood that this "identity anxiety," at least in part, was the reason behind his parents having given him such a name — their desire to connect their child with the land of *his* birth rather than theirs. Many other immigrant parents of the time did the same. They think they are doing these children a favor, Mark I. Goldman explains, but in reality they are "wound[ing] them for life" (1984: 563). Schwartz himself provided a

number of explanations for the origin of his name — everything from an actor to an apartment house to a delicatessen (see Atlas, 1977: 3, and Phillips, 1992: xv) — but in every iteration, according to the biographer James Atlas, he was aware that the situation exposed "the conflict between American values and his parents' aspirations" (1977: 5). They were "choosing a name they thought to be typically American; but the name they chose was so incongruous that it served only to reveal — in their son's later estimate — their precarious grasp of the New World" (Atlas, 1977: 5; see also Politzer, 1950: 564). By reaching to embrace America, in other words, his parents had succeeded in emphasizing their differentness from it.

Thus, what proves to be the most significant aspect of his name in terms of its impact on Schwartz's character, an impact that he felt to be far more than incidental in his life, is its bi-modal nature. In other words, the problem is not so much the name "Delmore" in itself as it is the name "Delmore" in juxtaposition to the name "Schwartz." On the surface, there is a certain amount of humor brought about simply by the contrast in sounds, "the incongruity of pairing the soft, poetic appellation 'Delmore' with the harsher, guttural 'Schwartz'" (Phillips, 1992: xv). Schwartz himself played this up to comic effect in giving his characters — ones who are thinly veiled versions of the author himself (see Zucker, 1990: 154–55; McDougall, 1974: 36) — names such as Belmont Weiss, Marquis Fane, Maximilian Rinehart, and Hershey Green. More significantly, the linguistic gap between the "Delmore" and the "Schwartz" halves of his name can be seen as representative of the split that several commentators have noted within Schwartz himself in terms of his view of the world and his place in it. According to Hans Politzer, there is "an almost constant division [that] runs through [his] works," one in which his own personal experience, growing up in Brooklyn, is paired off against "the world of his education, full of the names of books, famous men, and images taken from books: an abstract universe of the intelligence" (1950: 561; see also Harap, 1987: 87). It is this "Delmore" side of his personality that the writer strives to live up to, but the "Schwartz" side often becomes an impediment. In this way, Politzer argues, Schwartz felt that "the contradiction between the banality and ugliness of daily life and the truth and beauty of intellectual existence" (1950: 562) was writ openly for all to see in the bifurcated nature of his very name.

The juxtaposition of "Delmore" and "Schwartz" also necessarily involves another issue to which Schwartz was always particularly attuned: the Jewish question. There can be no doubt that, at least on some level, using a first name like "Delmore" is an attempt to compensate for a last name like "Schwartz," as though an Anglo-sounding first name will erase the taint of the name that follows it. Louis Harap states that "one persistent theme [...] implied in much of his work [is] his distress at the anomalous combination in his name — 'Delmore,' an Anglo-Saxon name, and the Jewish 'Schwartz'" (1987: 88; see also Goldman, 1984: 287). Most of his oddly named characters share such "ludicrous combinations — using Christian forenames and Jewish surnames" (Phillips, 1992: xv). By playing on this aspect of his characters' names, Schwartz underscores how the division within his own name points to a division within his personal identity as an American on the one hand and a Jew on the other. This is what Irving Saposnik refers to as "the irreconcilable duality of being a

Jewish American" (1982: 151). Schwartz's parents were trying to stress his Americanness but actually ended up emphasizing his status as an outsider, since his odd name "singled him out and [...] was a constant source of consternation" (Ford, 2005: 13).

One way for Schwartz to deal with this unusual situation was to write about it, turning it into the central scaffolding upon which much of his work would be built. "There is little doubt," Politzer writes, "that his name is a sore — and at the same time a creative — point with Delmore Schwartz," that he had a kind of love-hate relationship with "the crippling and at the same time creative power of his resounding and ridiculous name" (1950: 564). Because he found the stamp of Jewishness to be ineradicable, he was forced to examine thoroughly what that designation actually meant for life in America. Most centrally, Schwartz discovered that being a Jew means being in exile (McDougall, 1974: 30). Largely through his experiences at Harvard, Schwartz found "that he had entered a world in which he would never feel at home" (Atlas, 1977: 162). This sense of being alienated from his surroundings became the hallmark of his writings. In fact, Richard McDougall opens his study of Schwartz with the line "Delmore Schwartz thought of himself as being a poet of alienation, a witness to various forms of spiritual isolation in the modern world [...]. This role was one that he felt the circumstances of his life had assigned him to play" (1974: 7). The Jew is necessarily an alien, Schwartz felt; unlike T. S. Eliot, for example, whom Schwarz revered, he stated of his own poetry that it was "motivated by the alienation which only a Jew can suffer, and use, as a cripple uses his weakness, in order to beg" (qtd. in Phillips, 1992: ix). And yet he also pointed out, according to Harap, that, in the modern world, most men feel alienated, that "the sense of being 'left out' — unconnected — experienced so acutely by the Jew had become a general social condition" (1987: 80, 84), such that the Jew can in fact become the symbol for modern humanity (McDougall, 1974: 31, 33). This explains why modernist masters like Joyce were drawn to Jewish characters and why Jewish writers like Kafka and Proust became modernist masters (Harap, 1987: 83) — as well as why Schwartz was so troubled when modernists, including Eliot, made anti-Semitic comments (Atlas, 1977: 163–64; Harap, 1987: 85). When Schwartz himself "decisively linked his Jewishness with the alienation he sensed as the mood of the period" (Harap, 1987: 83), he opened the door for the subsequent flood of Jewish American fiction that became the mainstream of American literature in the 1950s and 1960s (McDougall, 1974: 33; Harap, 1987: 80, 84, 88). By writing about himself and his relationship to his Jewishness, Schwartz was helping to make his situation and that of other American Jews representative of the universal modern man.

In doing so, Schwartz could not help but see that there was a further level to his connection between being a Jew and being alienated, that between being an alienated Jew and being a poet. For Schwartz, the two seem to become inseparable (see Zucker, 1990: 151). Because they were both outsiders, possibly even outcasts, Jews and poets were naturally aligned. Ultimately, Schwartz came to see his Jewishness as a very important and positive element among the forces that conspired to make him a poet. In a famous statement from 1944 he asserted that "the fact of being a Jew became available to me as a central symbol of alienation, bias, point of view, and certain other characteristics which are the peculiar marks of modern life, and as I think now, the essential ones [...] [T]he fact of Jewishness has been nothing but an

ever-growing good to me" (qtd. in McDougall, 1974: 32). It is clear that Schwartz turned this internal struggle into the central concern of his writings and, in so doing, made himself the paradigm of the modern alienated Jewish poet.

In his noted essay of 1951, "The Vocation of the Poet in the Modern World," Schwartz asserted that "the Jew is at once alienated and indestructible, he is an exile from his own country and an exile even from himself" (qtd. in Harap, 1987: 86). The easiest way for Schwartz to explain this idea of being an exile from himself was by making use of his own name, the two halves of which contradict each other in so many ways. Through the medium of fictional characters whose bi-modal names share the characteristics of his own, Schwartz is able to make of them, again quoting Ellison, "the containers of all those values and traditions which we learn or imagine as being the meaning of our familial past" (151). Nowhere is this more evident than in a series of texts featuring the most explicit and enduring of Schwartz's fictional manques, Shenandoah Fish, who appears in several short stories as well as an eponymous verse play. Through all of his appearances in the Schwartz oeuvre, Shenandoah comes to spearhead the list of characters who, like Schwartz himself, are "haunted by their Jewishness and by their inescapable necessity to reconcile both their incongruous names and their ambiguous identities" (Saposnik, 1982: 151). All of these issues come to a particular head in *Shenandoah* (1941), which Robert Phillips calls "the fullest exposition of the writer's psychic wound concerning his name, his family's differences, and his alienation," as well as "his most successful exploration of the symbolic dichotomy of his name and background, a lyric poet just possibly named after a delicatessen" (1992: xv, xvi). Not only does the central plot fact of the play concern naming — the setting being the *bris* of the recently born son of Walter and Elsie Fish, which we see through the eyes of "the commentator Shenandoah Fish, who, at twenty-five, stands in the wings to watch himself as a baby being circumcised and fatally named" (Goldman, 1984: 287) — but the central thematic concern of the drama focuses precisely on the question of the fateful, perhaps even the irreparably negative, impact that a child's name will have on his subsequent development.

For Schwartz, having a bi-modal name elicited a bi-modal response (and I do not mean to suggest a possible psychological connection between either of these and Schwartz's purported bi-polar disorder). At times he felt that his strange name had given him an unnecessary burden in life, as in the reference above to being "fatally named" (Goldman, 1984: 287); Atlas reports that, "over the years, [he] had conceived a passionate resentment of his name" (1977: 178), echoed by Harap's comment that he "resented his first name all his life" (1987: 88). He felt singled out for negative attention by his name, as though it was forecasting a troubled life. At other times he could be jocular about it. Atlas reports that "he could be satirical about it in company" (1977: 178), and notes that "he was fond of telling playful stories about the origin of his own first name" (Phillips, 1992: xv). He certainly sees the humorous value of a name like Maximilian Rinehart or Belmont Weiss. Ultimately, then, for Delmore Schwartz, and for other Jews with similarly bi-modal names, the response he suggests is one of accepting the tragicomic nature of one's situation. This truth is borne out not only through the main character of *Shenandoah*, but it can also be seen at work in Thane Rosenbaum's character Duncan Katz.

Delmore Schwartz's Shenandoah Fish

Although the facts of Shenandoah Fish's naming are somewhat different than Schwartz's own, the emotional ethos explained above prevails. At its most fundamental, *Shenandoah*, a play about "the forces and events which coalesced to mold [Schwartz's] essential identity" (Phillips, 1982: xv; see also McDougall, 1974: 77), focuses on the importance of naming. In the very opening lines, the adult Shenandoah looking back to the day of his *bris* calls it "the greatest day of my whole life!" (1941: 3) because the naming "gave my mind and gave my character, / Amid the hundred thousand possibilities / / the very life I know!" (3–4). Since Schwartz's own naming ceremony, according to Atlas, "was for Delmore the symbolic moment when his false identity had been established" (1977: 178), he naturally set his drama at this pivotal event. As the story opens, we learn that Elsie had intended to name her infant Jacob, after her own deceased father, but her plans were upset when the baby's other grandfather, very much alive and also named Jacob, objected. Forced to find a new name at the last minute, and under the guidance of her neighbor Mrs. Goldmark, Elsie begins to look through the society column of the local paper for ideas. Schwartz has already described for the reader the ways in which the Fishes are "moved by the taste and trend of the middle class" (4), such as the "cut glass bowls" that "are the works of art of these rising Jews" (4), and finding a "distinguished and new and American" (11) name for the child becomes another manifestation of this desire to assume their rightful place in society. As the adult Shenandoah comments, "they gaze at their glamorous ruling class" (11) and "gape[] / And strive[] to imitate the sick elite / In thought in emptiness, in luxury" (20). After rejecting names from Murray to Archibald, even including Delmore (12), Elsie latches on to an item about a Mr. Brewster and his "estate in the Shenandoah Valley" (13) and makes up her mind immediately that that will be the baby's name. Although she had earlier expressed her concern about not giving the child an incongruous appellation — "I like those names," she had said, but "How do you think they would sound with Fish? Washington Fish? Christopher Fish?" (13) — she does not see that this combination fits that pattern. The elder Shenandoah comments that his mother "comes close to the problem's very heart," as she seems to have "a sense of connotation," but she does so "wrongly, / As if, somehow, she stood upon her head" (13). Elsie's finding a name in the society pages as a symbol of the Fishes' aspirations for their son is matched when Walter, challenged about the name, decides to turn the matter over to his gentile lawyer, Kelly, a man whom Walter feels to be "one of the *coming* men" (26). Kelly approves and the child is thus endowed with his pretentious bi-modal name, one that in fact emphasizes the very distance Walter and Elsie have yet to travel before becoming fully accepted in this country. As with "Delmore Schwartz," the name "Shenandoah Fish" demonstrates how the parents project their hopes into the naming of their child, only to have the name itself create a situation that renders those hopes unlikely to be fulfilled.

As with "Delmore Schwartz," furthermore, the name "Shenandoah Fish" emphasizes the differences between the two contrary elements contained within that single identifier, both names "eptomiz[ing] the grandiose linked with the banal" (McDougall, 1974: 29). When Elsie's brother Nathan, a young doctor, arrives at the scene of the *bris*, where he is to serve as godfather, he protests greatly against naming the child

"Shenandoah," primarily because the two names do not go together. "The association of ideas is appalling," he says (18). Telling Elsie that she "ought to be ashamed of *[her]self*!" (19), Nathan threatens to leave the ceremony and not be the child's godfather unless some change is made. The elder Shenandoah urges his uncle on, but after the rabbi admits that there's nothing wrong with the name, and especially after Kelly signs off on it, Walter is convinced that the name is appropriate and will not listen to his young, upstart brother-in-law.

Nathan expresses such a strong opinion regarding the naming of his nephew because he understands the potentially tragic impact that having a name like Shenandoah Fish will have on the child as he grows and develops. In trying to argue with Elsie and Walter to change their plan, he points out that "the boy will be handicapped as if he had a clubfoot," that "he will be mocked by other boys when he goes to school because his name is so peculiar" (18). He feels that giving him such a name will be "punish[ing] him for the rest of his life" (19). In expressing this position, Nathan is in concert with the elder Shenandoah, looking on from the wings, who often describes the day of his naming with fatalistic and tragic overtones — "Now it is done," he says of the *bris*, and "I am undone" (I4). Even the baby himself seems to sense the monumental wrong that is being inflicted on him; it is after Elsie's comment that "I want the boy to have an unusual name because he is going to be an unusual boy" (8) that the stage direction first reads "*The BABY begins to howl*" (8). The baby's loudest cry comes at the very end of the play, however, at the moment of the circumcision, the oldest rite in Judaism, a symbolic connecting of the child with the history of his people. As the elder Shenandoah comments:

> … with a wound
> What better sign exists — the child is made
> A Jew forever! Quickly taught the life
> That he must lead, an heir to lasting pain:
> …
> Chosen for wandering and alienation
> In every kind of life, in every nation — (30)

As McDougall notes, Shenandoah's circumcision represents "the infliction of a symbolic wound which the name, itself a wound, or stigma, resembles" (1974: 77). Shenandoah's name becomes an ever-present reminder of the tragic way in which fate conspired against him.

In being made an exile through his bi-modal name, singled out as "an alien and a freak!" (10), Shenandoah Fish is fated to being an alienated Jewish poet. At the same time, however, having to carry around such an odd appellation allows him to see the comic aspect of his life as well. As McDougall says of Schwartz, "he also had a quick sense of humor that lightened his intellectual earnestness and often took the form of genial mockery of himself and others" (1974: 15); Schwartz himself once described writing *Shenandoah* as an instance of "defen[ding] against a joke 'by the telling the joke oneself'" (qtd. in Goldman, 1984: 287). When Nathan is arguing with Walter that "the two names of Shenandoah and Fish do not go well together," for example, Walter gets a cheap laugh from his friends by replying, "I suppose you think

something like Fresh Fish would be better?" (19), in the process obliquely pointing out that no first name is going to go smoothly with "Fish." There is something of the farcical to the whole situation, which could be played broadly in a kind of Marx Brothers vein; David Zucker writes that the play "is shaped humorously" (1990: 153) and notes that it "mix[es] the serious with the funny. The grave tone is usually relieved by outbursts of comedy or fantasy" (Phillips, 1992: x). More significantly, the very idea that the naming of this one infant is going to have monumental consequences in the world, the central conceit of the whole text, is undercut in the play's opening by Schwartz's use of the "mock-grand" style, a "consciously absurd, deliberately pompous" (McDougall, 1974: 29) way of writing that is itself a kind of bi-modal poetry that shares the bifurcated nature of so many other elements of Schwartz's psyche. Schwartz himself noted that "when the poet is regarded as a strange, rare, and abnormal human being, it is natural that he should mock at the same time as he enjoyed the language of the grand manner" (qtd. in McDougall, 1974: 30). The joke at the opening of *Shenandoah* in part depends on hyperbole, so I must quote at some length:

> In January 1914 a choice was made
> Which in my life has played a part as endless
> As the world-famous apple, eaten in Eden,
> Which made original sin and the life of man
> Or as the trigger finger with a bitten nail
> Which Prinzip's mind was soon to press
> In Sarajevo, firing at Verdun,
> St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Berlin –
> And like the length of Cleopatra's nose,
> And like the grain of sand in Cromwell's kidney. (3)

Shenandoah knows that he's laying it on more than a bit thick here, yet this kind of self-deprecating, even absurdist, humor endears him to the reader. Goldman argues that "Schwartz's use of commentators in his verse plays [...] is an attempt to show the protagonist in tragicomic terms" (1984: 286), "the meeting of the banal with the spiritual" (Politzer, 1950: 567). Nathan says bluntly that "nothing is more important than a name" (18), and the experiences of Delmore Schwartz and Shenandoah Fish show us that having a bi-modal name is both a blessing and a curse, displaying a tragicomic fatalism.

Thane Rosenbaum's Duncan Katz

Thane Rosenbaum has not discussed the origin of his bi-modal name publicly, to my knowledge, but it is hard not to see the similarities between his odd salutation and Delmore Schwartz's. Not only does the disjunction in the name consist of an Anglo-sounding first name paired with a decidedly Jewish last name, but in this case the name itself has a clear meaning. Thane, an honorific more than a name, refers to "a feudal lord or baron in Scotland" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1981). The most famous thanes are no doubt those in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where the title character begins as the Thane of Glamis and then becomes the Thane of Cawdor. It seems logical that Rosenbaum's parents, immigrants like Delmore Schwartz's parents, although

in this case Holocaust survivors, would want to give their American child a name that signified strength and power rather than weakness. As with Schwartz, moreover, the adult writer Rosenbaum has created an oddly named fictional character who is in some ways an alter-ego for the author, in this case Duncan Katz, the central figure in his novel *Second Hand Smoke* (1999). Through Rosenbaum's depiction of how Katz feels about his name, we can see again how the bi-modal nature of one's name can come to be regarded by its owner in a tragicomic light.

Even if we are not willing to grant that Thane Rosenbaum's relationship to his name is likely similar to that of Delmore Schwartz to his, lacking authorial comment to that effect, there can be no doubt that Duncan Katz fits the pattern established by Shenandoah Fish. The novel's opening chapter, much like Schwartz's verse play, centers around the main character's *bris*, and much of it concerns how Duncan Katz has come to be given such an unusual name. As the scene opens, the assembled guests of Yankee and Mila Katz are awaiting the ceremony and discussing the baby's odd name. Maybe they meant David, one suggests, but got it wrong; this theory is quickly discounted. A young coed points out that David and Duncan were both kings and asserts that "'Maybe Mila and Yankee want to give their son a royal name. Maybe they have great things planned for him'" (4). Here, again, we see the intense significance given to the naming of a child, as there is a clear message imparted to the infant, and to the community, through the name the parents bestow upon him. Pointing out that the coed is correct and reminding us that Duncan — like Thane (see Sicher, 2000: 67) — "was the name of a Scottish king, the recipient of a tragic Shakespearean end," the narrator asks: "With such a name, and finale, what were the parents hoping for?" (5). Indeed, the chapter ends with an allusion to *Macbeth* — "what's done cannot be undone" (16) — that might refer to the naming, as Efraim Sicher connects the blood of the circumcision to the "damned spot" of the play that "presumably inspired the boy's name" (2005: 141), or might refer to the Holocaust. What is clear to all gathered is that Mila and Yankee are "trying to tell [their guests] something" (4), but the exact nature of the message remains in dispute. Even when the rabbi asks them to explain the mystery, they at first remain silent, then Yankee asserts that the name is Biblical, which no one is buying, and then Mila admits that he is named for her uncle, Duncan Keller, who was killed in the Holocaust (15). The crowd remains skeptical, but Mila's story and her forceful delivery of it cow them into silence. Whatever the reasoning behind that particular name, the narrator makes it clear that giving their child this sort of name is part of the "disguise" (4) that their life in America has become.

As immigrant Jewish refugees, Mila and Yankee have brought their memories with them but at the same time have tried hard to distance themselves from these images out of the past. One sign of this, not at all irrelevant to our discussion, is Yankee Katz's name. Everyone at the *bris* knows that Yankee cannot possibly be Katz's given first name (6), but nobody questions him about it. We learn that he chose this name, after the baseball team, because "he was looking to lose himself in something foreign — [...] as a Yankee, Herschel Katz would be virtually untraceable and unknowable — even to himself" (6). This is only one of many examples of the way in which "the strategic obsession with names was a fact of life for the Katzes[, how] everything was in the service of deception" (5). This explains the parents' motivation in naming their child as they do. If renaming himself Yankee is part of Herschel's disguise, giving his

son the name Duncan is an attempt to provide his child with a similar form of cover. They are circumcising their son, the narrator notes, despite their misgivings about God's relationship with the Jews, "[b]ut in naming him Duncan, they were also not taking any chances, either. He had to have his goy papers as well, something that would allow him to blend in on the other side" (5). However, if Mila and Yankee really believe that giving their child a bi-modal name like Duncan Katz will allow him to blend into "the larger ghettos of the outside world" (5), they have seriously misunderstood their adopted country. Calling oneself Yankee does not make one a Yankee. Duncan's name, like Shenandoah Fish's, if not quite so grandiosely, actually causes him to be singled out, reminding everyone of exactly what his parents are hoping to avoid, references to their immigrant Jewish past.

Despite the royal implications of his first name, it is this fateful legacy as the son of holocaust survivors that continues to haunt Duncan Katz, to alienate him from those around him. As Janet Burstein notes, Duncan is "imprisoned by an inheritance he can neither fathom nor cast off" (2005: 126), just as members of the second post-Holocaust generation in general are "already shaped, bred and maimed by the Holocaust, defined by the damage [that] has made their families dysfunctional" (2005: 67). Rosenbaum presents this crucial point in the "Prologue" to *Second Hand Smoke* where he notes that Duncan "seemed to have come equipped with all the right credentials: primed for loss, consigned to his fate" (1). The implication is that, no matter how much his parents are going to try to protect him, the child is going to have to grow up in a world where he must be prepared for the worst at any given moment. Mila did not bother to change her name because "a name change alone would not have been enough, at least not in her case" (6), and it seems that the baby will be dealt his fate no matter what he is named. Unlike Shenandoah, Duncan does not cry out as the *mohel* does his job, but it is nevertheless clear that he has already been damaged and given a certain fate along with his incongruous name.

Even more than Schwartz does in *Shenandoah*, however, Rosenbaum plays the *bris* scene in *Second Hand Smoke* for as many laughs as he can get. Beyond being merely "unkosher in ways that violated not just the menu" (8), the *bris* is rendered as only slightly less than a complete "farce" (Furman, 2000: 78). There is the part of the godfather played by an actual Godfather, which is to say a gangster, for example; he faints at the moment that Duncan's foreskin is cut (16). The *mohel*, Marty, is sometimes called upon to help cut meat in the deli where he and the other Jewish mobsters hang out, but he warns the customers that he only cuts small pieces (9). Another gangster fancies himself a director and is making a film of the ceremony, encouraging the "extras" to be natural. One of the guests is described as "wearing a pair of all-occasion green polyester slacks and a white shirt with a golf emblem. An outfit equally suitable for both afternoon tee-offs and severing of Jewish foreskin" (4). The rabbi wears a soiled cocktail napkin on his head in lieu of a yarmulke (14). Even the business with Duncan's name is treated comically, with Mila sticking adamantly to a story that everybody knows is false. It will take most of the novel and the meeting with his (at this point unknown) half-brother, Isaac, who teaches him about laughter, before Duncan will be able to acknowledge the comic aspect of his situation, but already here in the first chapter Rosenbaum is presenting the situations in a manner that is "shifting their tragic valences toward comic ends" (Burstein, 2005: 72). Duncan Katz,

like Shenandoah Fish, comes to see the incongruity contained within his own name as a symbol of "the rupture and discontinuity that lamentably defines Jewish existence after the Holocaust" (Furman, 2000: 78), just as it had defined Jewish life in Delmore Schwartz's pre-Holocaust America, including both its tragic and its comic valences.

Conclusion

To paraphrase the age-old question, then, what's in a bi-modal name? For both Delmore Schwartz and Thane Rosenbaum, the experience of growing up with such a disjointed name led them to create fictional characters with equally bi-modal names, Shenandoah Fish and Duncan Katz, respectively. In doing so, Schwartz and Rosenbaum used this quirk in their own personal histories to comment upon the entire history of Jewish life in America. Irving Saposnik sums the situation up well for Schwartz, and we can apply the same to Rosenbaum as well:

> Being Jewish is thus both a blessing and a curse, though the latter is often prominent. For [them], as for [their] characters, alienation and exile are implicit in the Jewish birthright, and that separation is most recognizable in one's given name. By focusing on the names that immigrant Jewish parents were wont to give their children in order to certify their American credentials, [they] developed a telling metaphor for that sense of separation that was ever to haunt both [them] and [their] characters. (1982: 152–53)

From the time of their naming, both the authors and their characters are connected to a history far beyond their influence and at the same time disconnected from that history and from their simple American identities, resulting in a situation that can best be described as tragicomic. While Delmore Schwartz and Thane Rosenbaum indicate that fate has dealt their characters a heavy hand by investing them with bi-modal names, they also see the humorous side of the situation.

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