

"I Remain an Irishman...and a Jew:"¹ Conflicting Identities of Ireland's Jewish Politicians

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¹ Robert Briscoe, *For the Life of Me* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1958), Ch XXIV, and Ch XXV.

For Jews living in Ireland, the rich legacies of Irish culture and of Jewish culture form a rare yet intriguing intersection of identity. This dual affiliation can be both a source of tension, yet also one of enrichment, as shown by the autobiographies of three Jewish-Irish politicians: Robert Briscoe's *For the Life of Me* (1958), Chaim Herzog's *Living History* (1996), and Alan Shatter's *Life is a Funny Business* (2017). While the three men have distinctly different relationships with their faith and with Ireland, all three reveal in their autobiographies the intricate balance between these two allegiances, and how they attempt to reconcile their two identities.

The Jewish contribution to Irish life has been significant. The Jewish population of Ireland has never been numerous, reaching only 5,221 individuals at its peak in 1936-37.² Nevertheless, Jews have been significant contributors to Irish culture and politics. The first Jews to arrive in Ireland were Sephardic Jews, who created a very small and temporary presence on the island in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ During the 1880s, the Jewish community expanded substantially as Russian and Lithuanian Jews arrived, fleeing the persecution of the pogroms.⁴ This tiny community flourished, although it was marred by incidents of anti-Semitism such as the "Limerick Pogrom" of 1904, inspired by the inflammatory anti-Semitic rhetoric of Father John Creagh, and the subsequent boycott of Jewish businesses, which had a devastating economic impact on the community.^{5 6} These incidents notwithstanding, the persecution of Jews in Ireland was miniscule when compared to the atrocities faced by their continental counterparts.⁷ This history is relevant in explaining the

² Cormac Ó'Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the age of Joyce* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

³ *Ibid*, 10.

⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵ Colm Tóibín. "What is Your Nation if I May Ask?": Colm Tóibín reviews 'Jews in 20th-century Ireland' by Dermot Keogh," *London Review of Books* (1999), 2-4.

⁶ While the Limerick Pogrom did not result in any serious injuries or deaths, it was nevertheless traumatic for a Jewish population who had fled violence in Eastern Europe. See Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 26.

⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

context of the autobiographies, as the authors downplay Irish anti-Semitism by comparing it to the extreme violence against Jews elsewhere.

The genre of autobiography is significant for both Irish historical memory and for Jewish culture. Ireland's complicated past is often contested, and therefore personal histories found in autobiographies must be seen through the lens of each author's biases and worldview.⁸ An autobiography is in essence the author writing the history of his or her times, and the stories included, as well as the stories purposely avoided, are deeply revealing of the author's wishes for how events should be remembered, and how the author's own legacy should be framed.⁹ The faultlines of these autobiographies expose the personal and political biases of the authors, as in the case of Briscoe's lack of inclusion of any criticism of his political idol and close friend, Eamon de Valera. Briscoe overlooks de Valera's atrocious record on Jewish refugees before, during, and after the Holocaust, as well as his astonishing faux pas of conveying his condolences to the German embassy in Dublin after Hitler's death.¹⁰ Such omissions can be revealing of the narrative the author is determined to craft, as facts and incidents that contradict his vision are ignored or minimized. Memories change to reflect present biases, so inconsistencies in autobiographies can sometimes tell the reader more about the author than the event being retold.¹¹ Autobiographies therefore are not perfect sources for understanding historical facts, but can illuminate their authors' self-images: they are, to use Michael Stanislawski's phrase, exercises in "self-fashioning."¹² This is especially significant for Jewish Irish history, as there are a number of layered factors influencing how the author desires events to be remembered. Briscoe, Herzog, and Shatter all qualify instances of anti-Semitism in

⁸ Emilie Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 2.

⁹ Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁰ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 199.

¹¹ Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews*, 17.

¹² *Ibid*, 15.

Ireland, as each man holds the belief that Ireland and Judaism can co-exist without significant conflict or contradiction, a belief each man wishes to impart to his readers. Important in shaping the biographies is the uniqueness of the Jewish-Irish story. Irish recollections of conflict rarely deviate from the narrative of British versus Irish, or Catholic versus Protestant. Nuanced experiences that do not fit inside this framework are rarely remembered, an act of erasure in a culture which is obsessed with the past.¹³ The autobiographies of Jewish-Irish men therefore attempt to insert themselves into this contested space.

Valuable to a more nuanced understanding of Irish history is the perspective of those typically left outside the standard narrative. The Jewish community of Ireland, as a marginalized subset of the population, serves as a unique lens in understanding the nation's history. The memoirs of Robert Briscoe, Chaim Herzog, and Alan Shatter reveal how self-portrayals of Irish Jews have shifted over time, among different generations. The first and most famous Jewish-Irish politician, Robert Briscoe (1894-1969) was an Irish Jew most famous for serving as Lord Mayor of Dublin from 1956 to 1957, and again from 1961 to 1962.¹⁴ Briscoe was an unwavering supporter of Irish independence, even going so far as to become a member of the IRA and a gunrunner during the war. A compelling force in Irish politics, Briscoe found international acclaim in the United States due to his unique religious status, which, in Briscoe's own words, illustrated the "absolute tolerance of the Irish capital."¹⁵ The second politician, Chaim Herzog (1918-1997) was a Jew born in Ireland, who later emigrated to Palestine and became the President of Israel from 1983 to 1993.¹⁶ While Herzog did not remain in Ireland, he nevertheless maintained a sense of his Irish heritage, and his experiences in Ireland during his

¹³ Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory*, 3.

¹⁴ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 229.

¹⁵ Rachel Gordan. "'The Fabulous Irishman': Lord Mayor Robert Briscoe's 'Unusual Religious and National Combination' in Cold War America." *American Jewish History* 102, no. 3 (2018): 401+. Literature Resource Center (accessed March 19, 2019). <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A551168417/LitRC?u=ucsantacruz&sid=LitRC&xid=e2aa61ce>.

¹⁶ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 77.

formative years were crucial in shaping him. Herzog's Jewish identity took precedence above his Irish identity, however, as his political career took place outside of Ireland. The third and most contemporary figure, Alan Shatter (b. 1951), served in the Dáil Éireann from 1981 to 2002, and from 2007 to 2016, holding the posts of Minister for Justice and Equality, and Minister for Defense, among others.¹⁷ While active more than half a century after Briscoe, Shatter's less fraught relationship with his heritage shows how dramatically Irish society has evolved since Briscoe's time.

The differences between the three men are striking. Each man is of a different generation, with distinctly different political aspirations, relationships to their faith, and worldviews. However, due to their dual Irish and Jewish identities, certain shared themes are very much on display in their autobiographies. These include: how being Irish and Jewish was formative to their childhood memories and mature identities; experiences with anti-Semitism; perspectives on Britain, the IRA, and Israel; and the need to counter suspicions about their masculinity and their loyalty. Intriguing in the comparison of the autobiographies is the degree to which each man downplays or emphasizes his Jewish identity, and how strongly each asserts his Irish identity. This assertion changes over time, and Briscoe's descriptions of self-identity, published in 1958, are worlds away from Shatter's descriptions in 2017. The differences among the trio lie in their respective eras and experiences. Briscoe and Herzog are in different countries, playing to different bases, and Briscoe and Shatter are a generation apart. The distinctive balance between Irish and Jewish identities in these autobiographies reveals the biases and aspirations of Briscoe's, Herzog's, and Shatter's respective generations and their shifting conceptions of their legacies. While all three men strongly assert their love for Ireland, their perceptions of the importance of their Jewish identities differ in significant respects.

¹⁷ Alan Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 2017), iii.

Part I: Robert Briscoe



Lord Mayor of Dublin Robert Briscoe (center) meets with President John F. Kennedy (left) and Irish Ambassador to the United States, Thomas Kiernan (right), 1962.¹⁸

A central figure in Irish Jewry is Robert Briscoe, who served as the Lord Mayor of Dublin from 1956 to 1957, and from 1961 to 1962, and served in the Dáil as a member of the Fianna Fáil party from 1927 to 1965.¹⁹ Proudly Irish, in his autobiography *For The Life Of Me*, Briscoe strongly emphasizes his patriotism. While Briscoe remains loyal to his Jewish heritage, he affirms that his love for Ireland takes precedence over everything, and he ruminates in his autobiography: “I sometimes wondered if I loved Ireland more than I did my God.”²⁰ This forceful profession of loyalty exists in the context of the heavy scrutiny Briscoe underwent, as his Jewishness called into question his Irishness in the eyes of many of his fellow citizens. Reminiscing about his first election to the post of Lord Mayor of Dublin in 1956, Briscoe

¹⁸ Abbie Rowe, *President John F. Kennedy Meets with Lord Mayor of Dublin Robert Briscoe*, March 26, 1962. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKWHP/1962/Month%2003/Day%2026/JFKWHP-1962-03-26-C>

¹⁹ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 229.

²⁰ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 50.

acknowledges that his victory was “so unexpected” because he was Jewish.²¹ However, Briscoe follows this up by saying his election proved the tolerance of the Irish people, and their lack of bigotry.²² Briscoe’s autobiography is fascinating, as it is a mixture of a war memoir, political manifesto, and tall tale. Central to the book are his repeated attempts to prove his Irishness once and for all, which he does with no shortage of bravado.

Briscoe’s deep patriotic roots are notable in his reflections on his childhood. Born in 1894, Briscoe says the most important things for his family were “our religion and our love for Ireland.”²³ He asserts that these values “never clashed at all,” which he attributes to his upbringing.²⁴ Briscoe’s father emigrated from Lithuania, where Briscoe stresses he was denied many freedoms and economic opportunities.²⁵ Briscoe is very careful in describing his father’s initial impression of Ireland. Briscoe says his father thought “Ireland seemed to be the very land of liberty,” a statement that appeals to Briscoe’s characterization of his family as hyper-patriots, who are deeply impressed with Ireland and have no loyalties outside of the island, not even to their place of origin.²⁶ Accusations of dual loyalty, or lack of loyalty, have long followed Jews, and Briscoe spent much of his career in public life attempting to combat this anti-Semitic trope.²⁷ Briscoe says his father was pleased that he could “worship and work and rise unfettered by the stigma of race,” and quickly came to think of himself as an Irishman.²⁸ However, Briscoe’s father emigrated in the late nineteenth century, before Ireland gained independence, which Briscoe is also careful to acknowledge, saying that while his father initially found Ireland to be a place of liberty because of the personal freedoms he enjoyed, “he soon learned to think differently.”²⁹

²¹ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 312.

²² *Ibid*, 314-315.

²³ *Ibid*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁷ Gordon, “The Fabulous Irishman.”

²⁸ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

This qualifier ensures the reader has no doubts as to Briscoe's father's opinion on the British occupation. Adding another example of his family's patriotism, Briscoe mentions that his younger brother was named "Wolfe Tone," after the "Irish hero" of the 1798 rising, a name choice that showed the Briscoe family's deep commitment to the cause of Irish freedom.³⁰

Briscoe also attempts to distance his family from anti-Semitic stereotypes by emphasizing his father's hatred for unscrupulous moneylenders.³¹ Briscoe recalls his father, upon learning that Briscoe was dating the daughter of a moneylender, declaring that he would rather see his son's "right arm cut off at the shoulder" than marry her, due to her father's profession.³² Briscoe credits this hatred of moneylenders as inspiration for a later bill he co-introduced to the Dáil, which would end the moneylenders' "worst abuses," and made it illegal for a woman to borrow money without the consent of her husband.³³ Several decades later, in the 1970s, Alan Shatter would campaign against this type of archaic family law, and lobby to reform it.³⁴ Despite the sexist undertones of Briscoe's efforts to curb moneylending, his inclusion of his family's strong stance against it is an attempt to distance them from prejudice they faced, including the medieval stereotype of the Jews as greedy usurers. Moneylending had long been associated with Jews in Ireland, and was a sensitive issue for the Jewish community.³⁵ In his infamous anti-Semitic sermon, Father Creagh alleged that housewives were the primary victims of predatory Jewish moneylenders.³⁶ By making it illegal for a woman to borrow money without her husband's approval, Briscoe was echoing this rhetoric while simultaneously trying to distance himself from it.

³⁰ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 6.

³¹ *Ibid*, 16.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ *Ibid*, 16.

³⁴ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 146.

³⁵ In the 1920s the IRA targeted moneylenders, raiding offices and destroying accounting books. While almost every moneylender attacked was Jewish, the IRA explicitly denied any anti-Semitic intention. Briscoe supported the campaign. See Ó'Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the age of Joyce*, 66-68.

³⁶ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 29.

Another way Briscoe emphasized his Irish patriotism was by playing up his hatred of England. As the First World War was raging in Europe in 1918, the woman who would later become Briscoe's wife, Lily Isaacs, expressed her feeling that she should go overseas as a nurse.³⁷ Briscoe was disconcerted "at the idea of her in a British uniform," and tried to impress on her "that England's cause was not ours."³⁸ Lily ultimately decided not to go, and the pair became engaged soon after.³⁹ Briscoe's hatred for the British would only deepen after he joined the IRA, although he later acknowledged admiration for how stoic the English were during the bombings of the Second World War, and admired them for fighting Hitler.⁴⁰

Briscoe was active in the IRA, where his Jewish appearance saved him on occasion, as "a Jewman" did not seem a likely member of the Irish fight for independence.⁴¹ It is Briscoe's involvement in the IRA that most explicitly shows that his Irish identity took precedence over his Jewish identity. In his recollection of swearing allegiance to the Irish Republic, he states that this was the "most solemn obligation" he had ever undertaken, and proudly declares that while he has broken most of the Ten Commandments, he has never broken his oath.⁴² Indeed, his involvement in the IRA was often in direct conflict with his religious values, and even Jewish cultural ones. Briscoe was a gunrunner for Irish revolutionaries, which he acknowledges made him complicit in the atrocities that followed.⁴³ However, Briscoe defends the IRA's actions, saying: "no damage was done wantonly; no man was robbed or killed without reason or justice."⁴⁴ Partaking in the violent exploits and clandestine operations of the IRA violated the Decalogue's prohibition against killing, as Briscoe mentioned, and Briscoe's father was deeply

³⁷ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 67.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 67.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 291.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid*, 52.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 117.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

distressed at his son's involvement in the revolutionary movement, despite his sympathy for Irish freedom.⁴⁵

Briscoe called being Jewish a "definite advantage," in his time with the IRA, as its improbability helped him avoid suspicion.⁴⁶ In fact, a Jewish IRA member was so unheard of, that even one of Briscoe's IRA comrades refused to believe Briscoe was Jewish, insisting that Briscoe was playing a joke on him.⁴⁷ Some of the higher-ups in the IRA were especially impressed with Briscoe, stating that he was "an Irishman by conviction," and could have "chosen to be otherwise."⁴⁸ Posing as a Jewish wool merchant, Briscoe was able to make contact with the German military underground, and purchase weapons.⁴⁹ After Irish independence, Briscoe was able to use his involvement with the IRA as a springboard into politics, and was elected into the Dáil in 1927.⁵⁰ Despite this victory, and his close personal friendship with Eamon de Valera, Briscoe was never given a ministerial post, nor did de Valera, anxious to avoid provoking the anti-Semitic element of the electorate, promote him.⁵¹ Briscoe accepted this, but tellingly makes no reference to it in his book.

In conjunction with the need to prove his Irish identity, Briscoe also is preoccupied with proving his masculinity. IRA culture, with its emphasis on bravery, violence, and discipline, no doubt had an influence on Briscoe's hyper-masculine posturing, yet deeper considerations were also at play. Jewish masculinity has a long history of being challenged by anti-Semitic disparagement, and Briscoe actively challenges this in his recollections.⁵² Briscoe constantly

⁴⁵ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 50.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 113.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 81-83.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 235.

⁵¹ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 89

⁵² A consistent anti-Semitic trope was that Jews were lacking "honor and machismo." This charge led to restrictions on Jewish participation in certain activities, such as the prohibition on Jewish involvement in dueling in Austria by 1896. See John Efron, Matthias Lehmann, and Steven Weitzman, *The Jews: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 362.

brags about his daring exploits, involvement in gun-running for the IRA, and other displays of bravado, saying things like “as a rugged old football player I could buck a line.”⁵³ When talking about the intimidating presence of an IRA associate, Briscoe is also quick to add that he “had some small notoriety” of his own.⁵⁴ Briscoe’s determination to be seen as powerful is most explicit when Briscoe says “as perhaps you have noted, I am not the meek, mild suffer-in-silence sort of person which those Jews who have lived in a ghetto have been forced to become.”⁵⁵ This statement explicitly distances Briscoe from the stereotype of perpetual victimhood of Jews in the ghetto. This disparaging remark against ghetto Jews affirms Briscoe’s masculinity at the expense of this hypothetical “ghetto Jew.” Rather than confronting anti-Semitism more broadly, Briscoe protects his own reputation, asserting his own masculinity in the hope of being accepted into Irish culture, rather than defending Jewish men more universally.

Briscoe’s priority of belonging to Irish culture rather than challenging prejudice continues, as Briscoe minimizes any instances of anti-Semitism he experienced in Ireland, instead focusing on his experiences in Germany. Briscoe recalls a childhood memory of his uncle David being called a “damn Jewman” by a farmer, after his uncle caught the farmer attempting to scam him.⁵⁶ However, Briscoe calls this “almost [his] only” experience of “racial prejudice.”⁵⁷ By highlighting that such an instance was incredibly rare, Briscoe reassures his Irish audience that he finds no fault with them. Briscoe says he was very fortunate to live in a “country where we Jews were subject to no persecution and very little prejudice, far less even than in the United States of America.”⁵⁸ These sorts of statements found in his book are indicative of his central

⁵³ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 138.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 215.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 259.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 259.

assertion that Ireland had no problems with anti-Semitism, an untrue statement that nevertheless led to increased support and popularity for Briscoe.

Briscoe contrasts the tolerance of Ireland to the injustices faced by Jews in Germany, where he says he first “encountered any real anti-Semitism.”⁵⁹ In 1922, Briscoe was in Germany helping set up Irish connections, when the new Irish Trade Commissioner, Charles Bewley, made anti-Semitic remarks to a Jewish coffee shop owner.⁶⁰ Briscoe destroyed Bewley’s office in a display of machismo and revenge.⁶¹ While Briscoe calls Bewley a “fellow Irishman,” it is notable that this takes place in Germany, and the physical distance from Ireland somewhat absolves Ireland from this incident, and makes it a German problem.⁶²

Briscoe omits from his autobiography the full story of his encounter with Bewley, as well as the true impact of having such an anti-Semite in this post. Briscoe’s autobiography portrays Bewley as a bigot who is easily cowed, calling him “childishly fearful” and “servile” in the face of confrontation.⁶³ This narrative makes no mention of the very real damage Bewley’s anti-Semitism did.⁶⁴ Far from the minor player Briscoe made him out to be, Bewley was “the most influential anti-Semite in the early days of the state,” who was sent to Berlin in 1933 to represent Irish interests.⁶⁵ Briscoe describes their confrontation as a brawny disagreement where Bewley submitted, a mischaracterization of actual events. Far from just a minor scuffle, Briscoe tried to have Bewley removed from his post, but was unsuccessful.⁶⁶ Briscoe’s omission of this political struggle was no doubt due to his defeat, which beyond being a personal

⁵⁹ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 259.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 260.

⁶⁴ Bewley served as the one of the only sources of information for the Irish government regarding Nazi Germany. Bewley attended Nuremberg rallies and did not report on the plight of Jews in Germany. See Tóibín, “What is Your Nation if I May Ask?” 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

embarrassment, is revealing of the new Irish state's indifference to anti-Semitism. Bewley was an overt supporter of Hitler, and sent anti-Semitic propaganda to Ireland.⁶⁷ Most damagingly, Bewley was also very influential in determining who received Irish visas, leading to the preventable deaths of many Jews who might have otherwise found refuge in Ireland.⁶⁸

Briscoe also downplays Ireland's neutrality in the war, emphasizing how Ireland was neutral in name only, and how the Irish aided the Allies in covert ways.⁶⁹ This apologeticism is taken a step further, as Briscoe asserts his Irish loyalty above his Jewish identity in the high-stakes background of the Holocaust. Briscoe says that while he personally hated Hitler, he felt that neutrality was the right path for Ireland, and therefore the right decision.⁷⁰ Briscoe says "people have sometimes wondered how I reconciled my loyalties to Ireland and to my race," but insists it has never been a problem, and says the only exception to this was the question of Ireland's neutrality during the war, where "from the point of view of a Jew" it would have been better for Ireland to join the Allies.⁷¹ ⁷² However, in this conflict, Briscoe sides with Ireland, saying "I am an Irishman who happens to be of the Jewish faith."⁷³ This is one of Briscoe's most explicit statements regarding the supremacy of his Irish identity over his Jewish identity. The very chapter name where he discusses Ireland during the Second World War is entitled "I remain an Irishman," a blunt assertion that wards off any accusations of dual loyalty.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Tóibín, "What is Your Nation if I May Ask?" 5.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 286.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 308.

⁷² Briscoe did lobby for the British government to open an independent organization of Jewish Volunteers to fight for the Allies, but stressed that his vision would not be a brigade or division of the British Army. Briscoe says he was willing to resign from the Dáil in order to serve against this "monstrous tyranny," but the British government refused to sanction this idea. Briscoe notes with pride that a Jewish Brigade in the British Army was eventually formed, and performed well. Ibid, 292.

⁷³ Ibid, 308.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 283.

Another example of Briscoe placing Irish interests above his personal feelings as a Jew, was his negotiations with Nazi Germany to further Irish economic interests. Negotiating with Nazi officials in his capacity as an Irish representative was not without its challenges: Briscoe insisted that the Germans be informed that he was Jewish, and at various points felt “hemmed in.”⁷⁵ Faced with the odious task of negotiating with people who were already persecuting his fellow Jews, Briscoe proudly states “as you can see, I would do business with Hitler if it was for Ireland’s good.”⁷⁶ This is the ultimate example of Briscoe’s Irish patriotism. For Briscoe as a Jew to cooperate with Nazis for the betterment of Ireland, can leave no doubt where his ultimate loyalties lay, and yet Briscoe was still treated with suspicion by some of his Irish peers. Briscoe downplays how his serious warnings about the approach of war, which he sensed during his time visiting in Germany in the 1930s, were callously written off by de Valera and others, who felt he was biased because of the poor treatment of Jews by the Nazis.⁷⁷ They told him “because you are a Jew...you are wishing for war in the hope that the Nazi regime will be overthrown.”⁷⁸ The dual loyalty trope proved itself inescapable for Briscoe despite his best efforts, and hindered him from reaching his true political potential. Briscoe also ignores Ireland’s shameful policy on Jewish refugees during and immediately after the Second World War, instead framing the issue as the fault of Britain for not letting refugees migrate to Palestine. Avoiding Ireland’s failure to aid refugees, Briscoe presents migration to Palestine as the only solution for Jewish safety.⁷⁹

Despite his exceptional love for Ireland, Briscoe is also deeply sympathetic to Israel. Briscoe calls Zionism a “magnificent inspiration,” but says he was preoccupied with Ireland.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 262.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

Yet Briscoe formed a close personal relationship with the right-wing Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky, who came to Ireland to study guerilla war tactics.⁸¹ It is in Briscoe's retelling of his relationship with Jabotinsky that the flaws of *For the Life of Me's* historical accuracy come into clear focus. Briscoe got many facts wrong about the chronology of Jabotinsky's life, such as the timeline of Jabotinsky's imprisonment, as well as a fake story of Jabotinsky leading a force to capture British arms.⁸² While these inaccuracies seem due to misinformation rather than malice, they nevertheless raises questions about the reliability of Briscoe's narrative. Jabotinsky himself seemed aware of Briscoe's shortcomings, saying in a telegram before Briscoe's arrival to Poland on a Zionist mission that Briscoe's "preparation is superficial though loyalty tremendous."⁸³ While in Poland, Briscoe bizarrely lobbied for Palestine to become a Polish colony.⁸⁴ Briscoe claimed that he was speaking "on behalf of the New Zionist Movement," which is curious because this was not in line with the Zionist Movement's goals.⁸⁵ Briscoe's disconnect from the aims of Zionism demonstrates that while he was a passionate advocate, his understanding of Jewish politics was more limited than his understanding of Irish topics.

Briscoe clearly values both his Irish and his Jewish identities, and diligently tries to honor and uphold both. Ultimately, in matters where his two identities clash, Briscoe proves that his primary allegiance is to Ireland. Abroad in America, Briscoe was upheld as an Irish rebuttal to stereotypes of Jews being unpatriotic or cowardly.^{86 87} Briscoe was portrayed as a "happy

⁸¹ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 264.

⁸² Joseph B. Schechtman, "Reviewed Work: *For the Life of Me*," *Jewish Social Studies* 21, no. 4 (1959): 270-71. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4465741>.> 271.

⁸³ Schechtman, "Reviewed Work: *For the Life of Me*," *Jewish Social Studies*, 271.

⁸⁴ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 268.

⁸⁵ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 268, and Schechtman, "Reviewed Work: *For the Life of Me*," *Jewish Social Studies* 271.

⁸⁶ Gordon, "The Fabulous Irishman."

⁸⁷ While Lord Mayor in 1957, Briscoe embarked on an exhaustive two month "good-will" visit to America, where he accepted 2,000 different invitations. In America Briscoe was considered a novelty due to his dual status as an Irishman and a Jew, but his popularity was such that groups that were neither Irish or Jewish invited him to speak. See Ray Rivlin, *Shalom Ireland: A Social History of Jews in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2003), 196.

resolution to...the problem of dual loyalties,” yet this resolution came at a cost.⁸⁸ The price Briscoe paid for success in Ireland was being a prominent mouthpiece to downplay Irish anti-Semitism, and to promote Irish virtuousness at the cost of ignoring his country’s ignominious failure to take positive action regarding Jewish refugees. In response to an article criticizing Ireland for not taking in refugees, Briscoe released a statement “as a member of the Irish Parliament and a practising adherent of the Jewish faith... I deny emphatically that the people of Ireland are or have ever been anti-Semitic.”⁸⁹ Sadly, this statement was not true, and the fact that Briscoe released it in response to the refugee crisis is all the more disheartening.

Part II: Chaim Herzog



Chaim Herzog at Dublin Airport, 1985.⁹⁰

Another notable Irish Jew was Chaim Herzog. Although he departed for Palestine in 1934, Herzog states that his “journey began in Ireland,” and was formative for his life story, which he chronicles in his autobiography *Living History*.⁹¹ While he reflects fondly on his

⁸⁸ Gordon, “The Fabulous Irishman.”

⁸⁹ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 182.

⁹⁰ Pat Langan, “Former Israeli president Chaim Herzog, who was born in Belfast and brought up in Dublin, pictured inspecting a guard of honour at Dublin Airport in 1985,” 1985. *The Irish Times*. Accessed March 25, 2019.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/the-belfast-man-who-became-president-of-israel-1.3433703>

⁹¹ Chaim Herzog, *Living History: A Memoir*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), 18, XI.

childhood, his time in Ireland was also marred by the violence of the Civil War taking place around him. Herzog claims his earliest memories are of violent incidents such as the time he witnessed a man get shot dead in front of his house when he was only three years old.⁹² These traumatic incidents set the foundation for Herzog's life and political career, which was marked by violence and war as well as diplomacy.⁹³

At the time of Herzog's birth in 1918, there were approximately 5,000 Jews in Ireland, a small yet tight-knit community.⁹⁴ Herzog's father, Isaac Herzog, was a very prominent member of this community, as the Chief Rabbi of Dublin. Isaac Herzog was a key figure in the non-Jewish Irish community as well, and his counsel was valued by the famous Prime Minister and key figure in Ireland's independence movement: Eamon de Valera.⁹⁵ Isaac Herzog was "an open partisan of the Irish cause," a commitment he imparted to his son.⁹⁶ Herzog takes a great deal of pride in his family's support for the Irish fight for liberty, and says the "Jewish community as a whole gave a lot of help to the Irish."⁹⁷ This remembrance of Jewish effort in the struggle for independence is Herzog's way of reconciling the two communities. Just as in the previous century Italian Jews took a prominent role in the Risorgimento, Irish Jews' support of the Irish cause married them in an alliance with the new state, removing any tension between these dual identities.⁹⁸ Herzog himself is centered in this alliance, as he describes his parents as "parents

⁹² Herzog, *Living History*, 12.

⁹³ Herzog joined the Haganah, and after German surrender in World War II was tasked with interrogating Nazi officials. See Lawrence William White, "The Belfast Man Who Became President of Israel." *The Irish Times*, 20 Mar. 2018, www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/the-belfast-man-who-became-president-of-israel-1.3433703.

⁹⁴ Herzog, *Living History*, 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

⁹⁸ From 1830-1870, thousands of Italian Jews participated in the fight for unification, a distinctive path towards emancipation which unified concepts of Jewish emancipation and Italian national unification. See Efron, et al., *The Jews: A History*, 281.

of Dublin's Jewish community" and emphasizes his family's place at the heart of the Irish Jewish community.⁹⁹

While Herzog is careful to emphasize his family's support for Irish independence, Herzog is not as uncomfortable praising the British as Briscoe is. Herzog served in the British Army during the Second World War and like Briscoe, admired the "greatness of the British people" during the bombings.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, during family trips to England, Herzog was aware of the "cultural conflict" of being Irish in England, due to the historical bitterness that the Irish held toward their colonizers.¹⁰¹ Adding further complexity to his relationship to the British, Herzog later struggled against them as he fought for Palestine to be free from the British Mandate.

Perhaps in light of the horrors he witnessed freeing Jews from the concentration camps, Herzog is quick to downplay Irish anti-Jewish sentiment. Herzog declares in his autobiography: "Ireland had no history of anti-Semitism."¹⁰² This statement is not true, yet can be explained by comparing Irish anti-Semitism to that of continental Europe, which was indescribably more vicious.¹⁰³ However, Herzog does recall some incidents of stones being thrown at his family for "allegedly crucifying Christ," although Herzog in the same paragraph describes the "great deference" his family was shown by gentiles due to his father's well-known support for Irish independence.¹⁰⁴ Despite his idyllic view of Irish sentiments towards Jews, Herzog does note that he "did feel different" as a Jew, although he did not feel like "an outcast."¹⁰⁵ Herzog attributes this feeling of otherness to the insular nature of the Irish Jewish community, and says the feeling of inadequacy in comparison to non-Jews was endemic to Jews in Western

⁹⁹ Herzog, *Living History*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, XI.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁰³ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Herzog, *Living History*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

society.¹⁰⁶ This feeling of inadequacy and being “othered” is a significant factor in the appeal of Zionism for Herzog, as the concept of a Jewish state filled him with pride and hope.¹⁰⁷

Like Briscoe, Herzog also emphasized his masculinity. In his youth, Herzog took up boxing, and in an intersection between masculinity and Jewish identity, Herzog says “The idea of Jewish boys knocking the daylight out of the *goyim* filled these immigrants with satisfaction.”

¹⁰⁸ This anecdote is meant to be glib; however, it underscores the hidden tension Herzog felt between the Jewish and gentile communities. Boxing served as a method of proving the masculinity of Jews, as well as proving Jewish strength and their place in the world.^{109 110}

While Herzog spent the majority of his life in Israel, he never fully forgot his Irish roots. Throughout his political career, he continued to acknowledge his Irish origin, most notably by having recordings of the Irish singer John McCormack signal his arrival during functions.¹¹¹ In Herzog’s struggle between his Irish and Jewish identities, his ties to Judaism proved to be stronger, as evidenced by his full commitment to Israeli politics, diplomacy, and cultural life. Herzog’s relationship with Israel is stronger than Shatter’s or Briscoe’s, and he sees it as “an essential force...at the center of world Jewry.”¹¹² However, Herzog is careful to mention that he had “absorbed much of the Irish culture” which he continued to love and admire.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Herzog, *Living History*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Jewish participation in boxing has a long history, gaining special popularity in the interwar period. In England and the United States, Jewish boxers gained fame, and often wore uniforms with the Star of David prominently displayed. Jewish boxers such as Judah Bergman, Barney Ross, Benny Leonard, and many others became “folk heroes” to the Jewish community in a time of rising anti-Semitism. See Efron, et. al, *The Jews: A History*, 403.

¹¹⁰ Barney Ross, a Jewish-American boxing champion is another example of a Jewish figure achieving fame and fortune through his athletic talents. A hyper-masculine idol, Ross was billed as “the pride of the Ghetto,” a tagline which emphasized his Judaism, and many young Jews saw him as an inspiration. Herzog’s emphasis on his own physical strength and skill at boxing is evocative of figures such as Ross, and part of a rich history of Jewish boxing. See Douglas Century, *Barney Ross: The Life of a Jewish Fighter*, (New York: Random House, 2016).

¹¹¹ White, “The Belfast man who became president of Israel,” *The Irish Times*.

¹¹² Herzog, *Living History*, XII.

¹¹³ Ibid, 18.

Herzog's relationship with Judaism and with Ireland cannot be honestly described as a dual relationship, as his Zionist convictions are without rival. However, while his ties to Judaism were stronger, he never fully forgot or discounted his Irish identity. Returning to Ireland on a state visit in 1985, Herzog reflected that the visit had a "particular significance" to him, and was deeply moved by returning to the Adelaide Road Synagogue he had attended as a child.¹¹⁴ For this connection to Ireland to remain for Herzog, even in light of the momentous events that occurred later in his life, shows the strength of his Irish-Jewish identity.

Part III: Alan Shatter



Alan Shatter¹¹⁵

A contemporary figure in Jewish-Irish public life is Alan Shatter, a former Member of Parliament, and former Minister for Justice and Equality and Minister for Defense.¹¹⁶ A member of the Fine Gael party, Shatter made many notable contributions to Irish Family Law.¹¹⁷ Shatter wrote about his experiences in his autobiography *Life is a Funny Business*. Born in 1951,

¹¹⁴ Herzog, *Living History*, 285.

¹¹⁵ Frank McGrath, *Fine Gael's Alan Shatter*, 2016. *Independent.ie*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/election-2016/shatter-makes-a-late-bid-in-turf-war-34491138.html>

¹¹⁶ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, XII.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Shatter came of age in the post-World War II era, making his experiences markedly different from those of Herzog and Briscoe.¹¹⁸ With less pressure to prove his fealty to Ireland than his predecessors, Shatter is more freely able to ruminate on his Jewish identity, without his allegiance to Ireland being questioned.

In another sign of how far Irish society has changed since the beginning of the twentieth century, Shatter is also able to acknowledge his British heritage without controversy. Shatter describes his parents as both English and Jewish, neither of which undermines Shatter's Irish identity in his eyes.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Shatter is able to discuss his parents' British heritage and his father's English accent without fear of coming across as an impassable outsider, and Shatter's views on the British are significantly warmer than Briscoe's.¹²⁰ Shatter discusses his father's guilt that he was unable to join the British Army to fight Nazism, and Shatter credits his father's perspective as inspiration for bringing legislation before the Dáil to grant pardons to those who deserted the Irish Defence Forces to fight with the Allies.¹²¹

Shatter is also very open about his father's atheism, which did not undermine his father's desire for Shatter to have a Jewish education and to be in touch with his Jewish roots.¹²² Shatter's autobiography shows that things in Ireland have changed enough for him to have room to explore questions of religion, and that Shatter doesn't have to downplay his British ties because his loyalty to Ireland is not perceived as suspect as Briscoe's was. Breaking with Briscoe, Shatter has no love for the IRA, although this is very much due to the IRA's evolution from an army fighting for independence to a terrorist organization that occurred between Briscoe's era and Shatter's. When discussing the 1981 hunger strikes by IRA prisoners in Long

¹¹⁸ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 44.

Kesh, Shatter asserts he has “no sympathy of any nature for the IRA,” yet was critical of the British response to the crisis.¹²³ Shatter complained that this critique was wrongfully interpreted as if he were sympathetic to the IRA, which he calls a “completely untrue” allegation.¹²⁴

Shatter’s experiences with anti-Semitism in Ireland were not hugely traumatic; however, there were a few incidents that made a strong impression on him. While Shatter states that growing up he experienced “very little anti-Semitism,” one neighborhood child repeatedly called him a “dirty Jew.”¹²⁵ Shatter speculates that this child was simply repeating bigotry heard at home, yet the incidents left such an impact on him that years later when he was canvassing for votes and ran into the individual who had taunted him, Shatter was still deeply wary of him.¹²⁶ In another childhood incident in 1961, Shatter remembers a man on the bus commenting in regards to the trial of Adolf Eichmann: “I don’t know why they don’t leave that fella [Eichmann] alone. He only killed Jews and it happened a long time ago.”¹²⁷ Shatter felt guilty about not challenging this man, although he was only a child of ten at the time, and says this exchange had a “profound impact” on him.¹²⁸ Such incidents were not confined to Shatter’s childhood; however, due to his advocacy surrounding Family Planning, Shatter was also called “the Jewish abortionist,” a statement revealing of the prejudice some Irish voters felt against Shatter’s faith as well as his advocacy.¹²⁹

These childhood events, while formative, were not as impactful for him as learning about Ireland’s failure during the Second World War to extend protection to Jewish refugees. In 1976, Shatter was browsing State archives on an unrelated matter when he stumbled across old Department of Justice files containing letters from Jewish families in the 1930s, begging for

¹²³ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 261.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 262.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 40-41.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 40.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 40.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 216.

visas for Ireland.¹³⁰ Also contained in the archives were “racist vitriolic anti-Semitic advice” from Charles Bewley to reject them.¹³¹ Shatter has no hesitation calling Bewley anti-Semitic, or noting that the Justice Department followed Bewley’s advice.¹³² This is very different from Briscoe, who refrained from publicly condemning Bewley. Additionally, when reflecting on Hitler’s goals of eliminating the Jews of Ireland had he won the war, Shatter ruminates on “who and how many in the Ireland of that time” would have collaborated with the Nazis in exterminating Irish Jews.¹³³ This statement would have been akin to blasphemy for Briscoe, but Shatter is free to speculate about such questions without fearing extreme political blowback.

In another sign of the changing atmosphere of Irish politics and society, Shatter felt comfortable running for office as a Fine Gael candidate, the first (and only) Jew to do so.¹³⁴ The reason for Shatter’s solitary participation is because of the Fine Gael’s association with the Blueshirts, a pseudo-fascist group.¹³⁵ Shatter says this association made the Party “anathema to many members of Ireland’s Jewish community.”¹³⁶ This history, as well as the continued membership of the notorious anti-Semite Oliver Flanagan, who continued to serve until his retirement in 1987, repulsed the Irish Jewish community.¹³⁷ Shatter acknowledges this problematic history of the Fine Gael Party, but rails against the Jewish community supporting Fianna Fáil and Eamon de Valera. Shatter says that de Valera’s condolences to the German

¹³⁰ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 184.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹³⁵ The Blueshirts were founded by General Eoin O’Duffy, and tried to build a partnership with anti-Fianna Fáil elements by emphasizing nationalism, fascism, and Catholic corporatism. However, the Blueshirts denied any allegations of anti-Semitism as a platform policy. See Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 95-96.

¹³⁶ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 142.

¹³⁷ Flanagan was infamous for an anti-Semitic speech in 1943, where he accused the Jews of crucifying Christ, and said that Jews needed to be expelled from Ireland, as well as saying “where the bees are there is the honey, and where the Jews are there is the money.” See Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 172.

ambassador after the death of Hitler displayed “a despicable lack of insight and moral judgment,” and says it is hypocritical for Irish Jews to shun the Fine Gael Party for associating with Flanagan, when the de Valera government had a shameful record of ignoring Jewish victims of persecution and denying them Irish visas during the 1930s and 1940s.¹³⁸

Due to his more modern political involvement, Shatter stands apart from Briscoe and Herzog. Shatter shares some similarities with his predecessors: for example, emphasizing his masculinity through his athletic prowess, yet there is a clear generational divide between Shatter and the others.¹³⁹ Specific considerations to appease an anti-Semitic base do not place the same constraints on Shatter, particularly regarding his ability to talk about his Jewish ties without being seen as non-Irish. In an example of this, Shatter is a great sympathizer with Israel, and unafraid to share his ruminations about moving there.¹⁴⁰ This is dramatically different from Briscoe’s experience. While Shatter ultimately decided Ireland was his home, Shatter can discuss thoughts of moving to Israel without fear of being accused of dual loyalty or unpatriotic sentiment. This generational divide is extremely significant, and illustrates how much Irish politics has shifted from Briscoe’s era to the present day. To the general Irish populace, Shatter’s Irishness and Jewishness do not seem to be mutually incompatible, removing much of the tension between his two identities that plagued Briscoe.

Conclusion

In 1966, Eamon de Valera was honored in Israel with a forest of ten thousand trees planted in his name.¹⁴¹ According to Jacob Herzog, Chaim Herzog’s brother, the reason for this tribute was de Valera’s “sympathy towards the restoration of Israel,” and “the friendship between

¹³⁸ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 144.

¹³⁹ Shatter constantly refers to his athletic interests, specifically his youthful dream of playing professional football. See Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 59.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁴¹ Tóibín, “What is Your Nation if I May Ask?” 1.

Ireland and Israel.”¹⁴² This gesture, while a display of international unity, was yet another instance of the whitewashing of Ireland’s history towards the Jews. Briscoe was no doubt delighted by this, as he had come to feel during a 1950 trip to Israel where he accompanied de Valera that the Irish statesman had grown “to see the remarkable likeness between Israel and Ireland.”¹⁴³ Herzog no doubt was also pleased, as the event was arranged by his brother, Jacob Herzog.¹⁴⁴ Breaking with Jews of an earlier generation, Alan Shatter remained scornful. Shatter complains in his book about the ceremony, saying that the Jewish community seems to have forgotten about “the de Valera-led governments in the 1930s and 1940s turning their backs on the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution and the concentration camp survivors of the German genocide and denying them Irish resident visas.”¹⁴⁵

Shatter’s disdain for de Valera indicates a new phase in Jewish-Irish history, one that is less preoccupied with downplaying instances of Irish anti-Semitism. Irish anti-Semitism, while less blatant than that of other nations, had serious consequences before, during, and immediately after World War II, as shown by the callousness the country’s leadership exhibited towards Jewish refugees. Throughout the war, de Valera’s policy towards Jewish refugees remained “reactive rather than proactive,” and no special effort was made to rescue Jews.¹⁴⁶ As few as sixty Jews were allowed into Ireland during the war, a shamefully low number in the face of the millions who perished.¹⁴⁷ Briscoe and Herzog avoid discussing this in their books, to avoid alienating an Irish audience by appearing to criticize them. Ireland’s failure during the war was indicative of larger trends of anti-Semitism, which de Valera was unwilling to provoke.¹⁴⁸ That these memoirs skirt over the undercurrent of anti-Semitism in Irish society during the nineteenth

¹⁴² Tóibín, “What is Your Nation if I May Ask?” 1.

¹⁴³ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 307.

¹⁴⁴ Tóibín, “What is Your Nation if I May Ask?” 1.

¹⁴⁵ Shatter, *Life is a Funny Business*, 144.

¹⁴⁶ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 191.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 192.

¹⁴⁸ Tóibín, “What is Your Nation if I May Ask?” 6.

and twentieth centuries, indicates that Jews in Ireland were grateful for the tolerance they were shown, at least in comparison to the horrors elsewhere.¹⁴⁹ Shatter, writing decades later, is able to comment more freely on Ireland's deficiencies.

When reflecting on his life and career, Briscoe writes that the "saddest and most trying time" of his life was the Irish Civil War.¹⁵⁰ While there is no doubt a great deal of truth to this statement, it is revealing that Briscoe makes no mention of the events of World War II in his summary of regrets, despite the very real personal and political defeats he suffered during this time. In 1939, Briscoe's wife Lily made a personal plea to the Minister for Justice to grant some of the Briscoe's relatives visitor visas, a request that was denied.¹⁵¹ In the same vein, after the war in 1953, Briscoe lobbied for the admission of ten Jewish families to Ireland.¹⁵² This was met with much resistance by the Department of Justice, and in the end only five of the families were allowed in.¹⁵³

It must be acknowledged that Ireland was far from the only country to have an atrocious record when it came to aiding Jewish refugees. However, in comparison to the dismal response of Ireland, it is notable that Britain admitted 42,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1939.¹⁵⁴ Many Irish revolutionaries had a deep disdain for Britain, with statements that the English were "moral lepers" commonplace in the discourse of the period.¹⁵⁵ For these "moral lepers" to have had the moral high ground over Ireland during this crisis illustrates just how indifferent the Irish public was towards Jews. Briscoe was painfully aware of this; however, he was unable to publicly comment on the issue, as this would destroy his image as a politician. For all the praise

¹⁴⁹ Ó'Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the age of Joyce*, 191.

¹⁵⁰ Briscoe, *For the Life of Me*, 334.

¹⁵¹ Tóibín, "What is Your Nation if I May Ask?" 6-7.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 142.

¹⁵⁵ John Banville. "Moral Lepers," *London Review of Books*, Vol. 37 No. 14 (2005).
<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n14/john-banville/moral-lepers>

of de Valera in his memoir, and the high regard Briscoe held for him and his pride in their friendship, de Valera remained unwilling to sacrifice any political capital on behalf of the Jews.¹⁵⁶ Briscoe was unable to convert his personal friendship into political influence during the greatest crisis in Jewish history. The fact that Briscoe had been de Valera's comrade during the Irish struggle for independence had virtually no impact on de Valera's stewardship of Ireland's policy.

The differences in how Briscoe, Herzog, and Shatter approach this shameful episode of Irish history offer the clearest example of the divergent manifestations of their Jewish-Irish identity. While certain themes are common to all three, most notably their shared emphasis on their masculinity and attempts to distance themselves from derogatory anti-Semitic stereotypes, their different political biases and the periods of their careers create contrasts. Briscoe's omissions about the war in his book are an example of his attempt to reconcile the tension between his Jewishness and his Irishness by heavily emphasizing his loyalty to Ireland. Herzog views the war through the lens of a Jew, not of an Irishman, illustrating his devotion to Judaism above any other identity. Lastly, Shatter's criticism of de Valera and the Irish government during the war shows how much has changed in Ireland, as Shatter's status as a Jew does not undermine the validity of his Irishness, and he permits himself to approach both in a more relaxed manner.

The legacy of Jews in Ireland is complex. This small community was allowed to exist, and to some extent flourish, with only mild discrimination until the eve of the Second World War.¹⁵⁷ However, clearly this anti-Semitism was strong enough in Ireland to keep its borders closed during the Holocaust.¹⁵⁸ That Briscoe and Herzog downplay this in favor of lauding Irish hospitality, indicates that Jews during this era were grateful for the relative tolerance shown

¹⁵⁶ Tóibín, "What is Your Nation if I May Ask?" 7.

¹⁵⁷ Ó'Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the Age of Joyce*, 191.

¹⁵⁸ Tóibín, "What is Your Nation if I May Ask?" 6.

towards the Jewish community in Ireland. However, as Shatter rightfully points out, the Irish policy towards Jewish refugees is a shameful stain on Irish history. The diversity in the autobiographies' approach to Irish history demonstrates the richness of expressions of Irish Jewish identity, and the complexity of the Jews' relationship to Ireland in their search for acceptance and belonging.

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