

The Frummer in the Attic: Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room* and Jewish Memory

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David Rodinsky, the “frummer in the attic” in *Rodinsky's Room*, was an Orthodox Jew who lived above the synagogue in Princelet Street, in the old Jewish East End of London.¹ In the late 1960s he disappeared but his absence went unnoticed for more than a decade. In fact, Rodinsky's room was locked and remained untouched until it was opened in the 1980s. Everything appeared to be as Rodinsky had left it: piles of esoteric books, a calendar dated January 1963, an eccentrically annotated *London A–Z*, a half-eaten bowl of porridge, the imprint of his head left on the pillow, and rumors of a mummified cat found sleeping in his bed. In *Rodinsky's Room* (1999), Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair ask questions about David Rodinsky's enigmatic life and strange disappearance, and they scrutinize notions of memory, myth, and self-definition for contemporary British Jews.

The text is coauthored, but the story is primarily that of Lichtenstein, a young British artist who investigates the mysterious disappearance of David Rodinsky in order to explore her own Jewish history and identity. In so doing she takes on the role of detective, archivist, and questing heroine. Lichtenstein's quest to unravel the mystery at the heart of Rodinsky's life and disappearance is sometimes frustrating, often painful, and ultimately anticlimactic. At points in the narrative her absorption into the Rodinsky story appears to be extreme and self-destructive. Nevertheless, it is Lichtenstein's intense identification with Rodinsky that generates an intriguing tension within the text. This tension and the excesses that the text both produces and represses are the focus of my discussion.

At the centre of *Rodinsky's Room* is David Rodinsky, a character who is only ever glimpsed in the reconstructed remnants of his life. He is an absent presence whose story embodies an ambivalent identification with what Jack Kugelmass has termed “ethnic memory culture.”² This complex tension between remembering and forgetting is key to the text's exploration of British Jewish identity at the close of the twentieth century.

¹ Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* (London: Granta, 2000) 3. Subsequent references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

² Jack Kugelmass, “Jewish Icons: Envisioning the Self in Images of the Other,” *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 43.

For Iain Sinclair, the mysterious figure of Rodinsky typifies ambiguity. "Rodinsky," he writes, was "a shape whose only definition was its shapelessness" (3–4). He was a man that nobody seems to have really known. There are no photos of him and no single or clear version of who he was. As Sinclair suggests, Rodinsky has been defined in some ways by this essential unknown quality. He could have been anything: "Meshuganer, cabbalist, spook. Inspirer of fictions. Retro-golem" (6). Most importantly, "Rodinsky was an empty space" (63). Even Sinclair acknowledges a tendency toward exploitive emptiness at the heart of his own and others' metaphorization of Rodinsky's life. And he announces that "the true Rodinsky biography, its weight and significance, was waiting for the true biographer, Rachel Lichtenstein" (86). If, as Sinclair asserts from the outset, "Rachel Lichtenstein is the story" in *Rodinsky's Room*, then how do the stories of the vanished eccentric and a young artist meet? What binds these figures together?

Lichtenstein's story can be described in David Roskies's terms as "a dialectic of loss and retrieval." Roskies argues that "a memory-site ... is fashioned from the prior awareness of loss."³ Lichtenstein's journey in *Rodinsky's Room* is predicated on such a dialectic. Her story begins by her connecting to the past through memories of her Polish Jewish grandparents. Lichtenstein presents her grandfather's death when she was seventeen as a profound moment of rupture and dislocation. She describes a sense of urgency and panic that this loss generated, because "with him was buried the key to my heritage" (19), and in response she recounts an immediate concern with reconnecting "my past and my present" (19). She starts by "reclaiming" her name from the anglicized Laurence that her father had adopted and reverting to the Jewish family name, Lichtenstein. She then takes the opportunity that her grandfather had been denied and leaves her family home in Westcliff, Essex, to study at art school in Sheffield. There she focuses on explorations of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the East End of London and on the questions of "assimilation and integration" (20) into a new culture—a quest that will preoccupy her for years to come.

Lichtenstein passes over her upbringing in the hinterlands of Essex with no comment. But in a text so much concerned with place and identity this seemingly small detail is significant. Lichtenstein is a grandchild of the ghetto, but a child of the suburbs. The Essex coast epitomizes the process of Jewish dispersal in Britain—from the cities to the suburbs and beyond—that leaves many third-generation Jews feeling dislocated from their origins and, in some cases, longing for a connection to a more authentic Jewish experience. For many, authenticity is inevitably located in the past. So it is that an uninhabited attic becomes the ideal locus for a journey into ethnic memory culture.

³ David G. Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) x.

During her first research trip to London, Lichtenstein is advised to visit a heritage center in the old Jewish quarter of the East End. In so doing, she reverses the journey that her grandparents have made from the East End to Essex and returns to the exact place where they had their first marital home and business. She takes the tube to Aldgate East, walks up Brick Lane into a derelict synagogue at 19 Princelet Street, and stumbles into the story of David Rodinsky.

The story starts with a mystery and more than a hint of horror. Lichtenstein approaches the old synagogue, but the building does not look like a museum. There is no plaque marking its function and no one is there to answer the bell. Like the reader of a gothic novel, one can almost hear the large wooden doors creaking ominously as the baffled heroine pushes them open and steps inside. Though it is a hot summer's day, she begins to shiver as she enters the dark, damp, dusty space. Empty beer bottles are stacked behind the entrance doors. Lichtenstein can hear muffled voices and traces a dim light seeping from under a door at the end of a corridor. She tries to call out but the words do not come. She goes further and enters a room behind the door. What she finds makes her cry. Here is the faded debris of the old synagogue. A sight that, for Lichtenstein, evokes her recent journeys around the devastated sites of Polish Jewry. But this ruined synagogue is not empty. It is alive with noise and activity. The artist explorer has stumbled into a film set. Students from the National Film School are making a film called *The Golem of Old Princelet Street*. A bored lighting technician follows Lichtenstein around the building telling her the story of the enigmatic David Rodinsky. Lichtenstein realizes that "the moment I entered 19 Princelet Street I knew I was meant to be there" (22).

In describing the portentousness of the moment, the narrative borrows some elements of traditional folk tales. Indeed, it is possible to map Lichtenstein's story in *Rodinsky's Room* onto Propp's thirty-one functions of the folktale.⁴ She leaves home, embarks upon a quest, encounters both helpers and obstacles along the way, and finally completes her journey. In short, like the archetypal folk hero/heroine, Lichtenstein meets her destiny. In this way she becomes a character within the text, not just the teller of this story.

David Roskies has argued that modern Yiddish folktales such as those written by I. L. Peretz and Sholem Aleichem "exploited traditional narrative forms in order to highlight the possible continuities or the impossible contradictions between a dimly remembered past and a fragmented present."⁵ In her implicit presentation of herself as folk hero/heroine, Lichtenstein does the same. The past that she looks for in the East End is not hers. It is a vague memory

⁴ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 28–31.

⁵ David G. Roskies, "The Story's the Thing," *What Is Jewish Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994) 124.

that she attempts to recall into an uncertain present. Collective myth and shared stories allow her a way into this faded memory landscape. She explains, “to me David Rodinsky’s story seems to touch on a human need for a contemporary myth of discovery and survival” (224). And it is this emphasis on discovery and survival, myths and needs, memory and preservation that shapes the telling of this story for Lichtenstein as a reluctantly postmodern Jew.

For Lichtenstein, the architectural remains of the old Jewish East End symbolize the ghetto that she must defend. An early episode in the text marks out her commitment to preserving this past. She enters an art installation in the Great Garden Street synagogue next door to the old Jewish Luncheon Club on Greatorex Street (around the corner from Princelet Street). The structures of the synagogue remain in place (the ark, the beautifully carved wooden *bimah*), but the room has been converted to a techno rave venue: “It was Friday night, Shabbat. Where the rabbi and cantor would have stood, a long-haired DJ with baseball cap secured by giant headphones was busily spinning nightmarish techno tunes” (38). The effect for Lichtenstein is of a dizzying vertigo. Elsewhere in the text she discusses her own attraction to the underground rave scene in Dalston (122), but here, as on her first visit to the Princelet Street synagogue, she is dazed and profoundly disturbed by this unseemly appropriation of a place of Jewish worship. From her perspective, the past has an authenticity, and a value that is grotesquely debased by its transformation into this present.

As a custodian of the past, giving sightseeing tours of the Jewish East End in the early 1990s, she describes how she was continuously marking sites of absence. Tours would consist of visiting old Jewish sites that, as newly built car parks covered the remains of the past, were already no more than a memory. The Luncheon Club had become Lichtenstein’s “ace card,” a place that was, until it closed in 1994, “alive and kicking” (37). A place that could lift tourists from their despondency that such a tour of lost sites evoked. Here “the clink of glasses and the slurp of soup to a backdrop of Yiddish and laughter” (37) evoked a feeling of nostalgia for the warmth and community that was feared to be fading in the newly developed streets of Spitalfields.

Thus, when Lichtenstein sees old books from the synagogue being destroyed as part of a morally vacuous performance event at the Luncheon Club, she is moved to righteous, if perhaps somewhat excessive, rage: “Scenes of Nazi Germany came to mind” (40). She confronts the two garishly made-up women artists dressed in “baby pink vinyl” and defends the space, and the artifacts within it, from further violation. She feels instinctively that it is her role to guard the Jews. But where are the Jews in this scene? This is not a ghetto under immediate threat from anti-Semitic attack or Nazi genocide. She acknowledges that “these books had not been ripped from the homes and synagogues of terrified Jews, they had been abandoned by the federation of synagogues” (40).

Ultimately, it is the neglect, the lack of care for the past, that she seeks to repair in this episode and throughout the book as a whole.

Lichtenstein is constructing her Jewish heritage by defending the Jews who are no longer present; who, like David Rodinsky, have disappeared, leaving barely a trace. However, it is this very absence that allows her ways in which to (re)construct the past and to find her own role in relation to that history. Absence here is not blankness. It represents potential. Lichtenstein's preoccupation with the protection of the Jewish past demonstrates, in many respects, an admirable commitment to an ethnic heritage. But, in other respects, especially in the way that she claims the past in order to define herself, it borders on the fetishistic. The lost Jew at the center of Lichtenstein's quest is herself.

At the center of Lichtenstein's narrative is an overdetermined response to her own Jewishness. Lichtenstein's mission to uncover and recover the story of David Rodinsky is inextricably bound up with her struggle to decide between the Orthodox Jewish life to which she is drawn in Israel and the largely secular Jewish life that she inhabits in England. For Lichtenstein, however, conversion to Orthodox Judaism involves a painful rejection of her family. As she explains almost in passing, "My parents are far from orthodox. My mother is in fact not Jewish" (126). This statement illuminates the sense of isolation and estrangement that underpins much of Lichtenstein's narrative. In choosing to identify with her father's parents, the Polish Jewish part of her family, she implicitly denies her mother's family history. In her attraction to orthodoxy, Lichtenstein presents a heartfelt wish to honor the memory of the millions of Jews whom she believes to have died for their religion: "How did their deaths make sense if I did not perpetuate the Jewish faith they had died for?" (125). But, in Jewish tradition Jewishness is defined through the maternal line. Technically, then, Lichtenstein is not Jewish. This crucial detail is the unspoken fact that haunts the text. It is another absent presence that draws Lichtenstein to Rodinsky; the Jew whose Jewishness had been so concentrated that he could only exist within a reified attic room removed from the world around him.

The profound connection that Lichtenstein feels with Rodinsky is rooted in her identification with him as an outsider. As with Rodinsky, Lichtenstein is moved by the idea of a closed world of Orthodox Judaism. But also like Rodinsky, who was apparently drawn to curry houses, beer, and foreign languages, she is attracted to the diverse pleasures of the world around her. In her identification with Rodinsky, Lichtenstein embraces some of the excess of Jewish otherness, but she also understands the tension and isolation that are generated by this difference. Rodinsky's pull from orthodoxy toward the secular is the reverse of Lichtenstein's own pull from the secular toward orthodoxy. Again, Rodinsky provides the mirror image to her own story. And it is this mirroring that produces, in the text, a workable sense of her Jewish self.

Lichtenstein feels intuitively that “Rodinsky had chosen me to tell his story” (286). However, as she takes on the role of Rodinsky’s archivist, storyteller, and amanuensis, she becomes less a ventriloquist, speaking for Rodinsky, than a double, inhabiting his story as her own. In the next part of my discussion I want to develop these ideas of doubling and shadowing to consider the repressions that are implicit in the play between memory and forgetting that so mark this text.

Ghosts, locked rooms, doubling, remembering, repeating, home, and homelessness all contribute to a pervading sense of the uncanny in this text. The uncanny is far more than just a trope here. The spine-tingling quality of this story is rooted in its evocation of profound uncertainties about memory and identification that run through the narrative. As Freud noted, it is not the unknown that causes fear of the uncanny but the known or the familiar that has been lost, alienated, or repressed.⁶

As the madwoman in the attic (the first Mrs. Rochester) has come to represent the dangerous double of repressed nineteenth-century femininity, so Rodinsky represents an unnerving mirror image of the assimilated Jew in late-twentieth-century London. Lichtenstein’s enquiries into the life and death of David Rodinsky reveal, in the end, a sad story of one family’s problematic transition into the Diaspora. A story marked by poverty, depravation, isolation, and severe mental illness. This is the antithesis of the archetypal immigrant success story. Neither does it have the nostalgic chicken soup glow evoked by the depiction of a lovable eccentric kept safe within the Jewish ghetto. Instead, Rodinsky’s story is the shadow in the corner of all such brightly lit tales.

Lichtenstein relates how on a cold November day, “reading some terrible book about the Holocaust ... I saw him for the first time” (49). She describes a dim vision of a “dark silhouette” that she pursues into Brick Lane: “He looked ancient, his skin was so pale and transparent it gave off a bluish hue, and hanging majestically underneath his nose was a long trailing white beard. His coat and large black hat were tattered and worn but unmistakably the costume of a Hasidic Jew, an unusual sight in the 1990s in Whitechapel.” She adds, “I was beside myself with excitement and fear” (49). Is this David Rodinsky? Or is it the ghost of David Rodinsky?

The apparition disappears and Lichtenstein wonders if she has imagined the whole episode. The blurring of the line between reality and delusion is significant. In her quest to find Rodinsky, Lichtenstein has entered into the world of the past, but it is unclear whether this world still survives in a real shape or form. In chasing shadows, she is looking for herself, for a connection with her own Jewishness that exists in the pasts of her paternal grandparents. But this

⁶ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919), in Rivkin and Ryan 154–67.

past has been repressed in the literal and metaphorical shift from Lichtenstein to Laurence that her family has enacted. In going back to a previous place, a site of origins, Lichtenstein is attempting to reclaim and indeed remember an identity.

The old Hasidic man whom she follows is, of course, not Rodinsky. He is called Mr. Katz, the owner of a small shop selling string and paper bags located opposite the mosque in Brick Lane. When Lichtenstein meets Mr. Katz and tells him about herself, he remembers her grandparents and they share a meaningful moment of connection. She has found, for a time, what she had been looking for. But Mr. Katz recognizes the doubling that underpins Lichtenstein's journey into the uncanny. He shows an astute understanding of the ways in which the past and present intersect when he suggests that it is the young artist herself who is really the ghost in this tale. What does she do for a living, he asks, "apart from haunting old synagogues?" (53).

As strange coincidences and ghostly layerings are repeated throughout the narrative, an eerie mood builds within the text. The visual images that illustrate the book are central to the evocation of this effect. The photographic images of Rodinsky's empty room are disquieting. They record a compelling mystery but feel, at times, uncomfortably intrusive. This, after all, is the room of an excessively private man. As Freud, drawing from Friedrich Schelling, defines the uncanny, it is "something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light."⁷ And perhaps, in its sometimes disturbing intrusiveness, this is finally the case with Rodinsky's story.⁸ As Sinclair notes: "There is nothing he could say. He is an absence. He doesn't belong in his own story" (174).

Lichtenstein's project, however, is to resist, or at least to fill the space left by, this absence. Her artistic work reconstructs fragments from the past into complex tissues of representation. A reproduced photograph of Bessie or Bertha Rodinsky, David's sister, epitomizes the atmosphere of connection and disconnection that characterizes Lichtenstein's artistic and personal journey. No photograph of David Rodinsky has ever been identified, but as Lichtenstein explains, "I was desperate for an image of the man" (47). Instead, she finds his sister's picture, "a faint image of a sad face, framed by a large hood, making it difficult to distinguish whether the person was male or female" (47). Lichtenstein painstakingly records every artifact in the Rodinsky archive and photographs this photograph of Bessie Rodinsky. When it is developed, a strange double exposure has occurred whereby the face is superimposed onto one of the many language dictionaries in Rodinsky's room. Lichtenstein finds in this image an

⁷ Freud 166.

⁸ In her article "Your Place or Mine," Lisa Jardine explores some of the "moral queasiness" that a reading of this text can evoke despite its demonstration of "so much enthusiasm, so much good will." *The Observer*, 13 June 1999: 12.

uncanny double of herself, a woman in search of a Jewish identity but frustrated by her exclusion from “the wonders of Jewish learning” (159) within the Orthodox tradition. The ethereal image encapsulates the difficulties faced by the late-twentieth-century Jewish woman in relation to religious tradition and self-definition.

There are many such examples of the uncanny in the text’s representation of blurred images and fragile histories. But the uncanny is also present at a deeper and more structural level in Lichtenstein’s attempt to recover her own Jewish past through tracing her roots to the Jewish East End and Eastern Europe. As Jon Stratton has argued in his discussion of the Jewish uncanny: “Freud’s description of the uncanny as the experience of the return of the repressed, can be read as a reworking of the idea of displacement in the terms of personal experience.”⁹ Stratton points out two experiences of the uncanny: that of the assimilating Jew and that of the children of assimilated Jews. For the assimilating Jew the attempt to acculturate into a new society leads to repression. But since repression can never be complete, an inevitable residue or excess will surface. For the children of assimilated Jews the repression works at another level. Their parents’ assimilation leads them to experience a sense of displacement from both their present situation and a Jewish past that is beyond their own experience. As Stratton explains: “the uncanny is related to their inability to feel at ease, to feel at home in the cultural order in which they find themselves.”¹⁰ It is this uncanny effect of alienation, of homelessness at home, of the strangeness of the familiar, that characterizes Lichtenstein’s experience within her narrative.

Lichtenstein describes a recurring sense of suffocation and claustrophobia as she pursues Rodinsky’s story. She becomes ill with pneumonia and cannot breathe in the “dusty synagogue” (55) when working on the Rodinsky archive. While an asthmatic disposition is obviously not simply a somatic sign of repression, the motif is metaphorically resonant. It seems that in identifying so closely with Rodinsky and fixating on the past to such an excessive extent, Lichtenstein has repressed aspects of Jewishness that are located in the present. The twenty-first-century British Jew might well be an Orthodox scholar living in holy isolation. But she/he is more likely to be part of a shifting and diverse society living perhaps in the suburbs of London, or Manchester, or Glasgow. Or even, the Essex coast.

However, the reason that Lichtenstein holds on to the idea of Jewish singularity is sincere and important. As Sinclair puts it, “the black spider of the Holocaust ... haunted everything that Rachel undertook” (86). When she tours the shattered landscape of Polish Jewry, the journey that Lichtenstein takes is a hard one. The Jewish past has been almost annihilated, and the trip is marked by

⁹ Jon Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish: Constructing Ambivalent Identities* (London: Routledge, 2000) 71.

¹⁰ Stratton 75.

the recurring and haunting figure of “the last Jew in the town” (239). But Lichtenstein is with a group of similarly minded people who are researching lost family histories and she finds connection. Here Lichtenstein feels at home: “For the first time I recognised that I was not alone in my obsessive pursuits but part of a worldwide phenomenon in my generation. I added my story to the others; no one here thought my research bizarre or obsessive and Rodinsky became a talking point for all of us, desperate for a story of survival in this land of ghosts” (212).

During this trip Lichtenstein constructs a satisfying explanation for Rodinsky’s isolated life. As she visits Jewish burial sites and the rooms of old Jewish scholars, it seems clear to her that Rodinsky is part of this tradition that could not have been properly understood in Whitechapel. This misunderstanding of the intensely spiritual Jewish scholar meant that Rodinsky, his mother, and his sister never assimilated into British society.

The idea that he was one of the *lamed vavnick*—“the 36 righteous men who always live in the world. No one knows who they are” (240)—is seductive. Lichtenstein allows herself to fit Rodinsky into this sacred myth: “Maybe Rodinsky truly was the eternally wandering Jew and throughout the centuries there were thousands of abandoned rooms like this” (240). She is also aware that this is yet another story and acknowledges that “there was nothing romantic about the room” (300). As she finds out more about Rodinsky’s story, she realizes that “his life, particularly the latter part of it, was grim and lonely” (300–301). Rodinsky’s mother was traumatized and his sister was mentally ill. Rodinsky had died a sad and isolated figure.

The story does not provide any nostalgic comforts for the postmodern Jew searching for a usable past. There is no real mystery to Rodinsky’s life. Only confusing and half-forgotten memories. He is archetypal, fictitious. He is both a larger-than-life embodiment of Jewishness—an uncomfortable excess that cannot be assimilated—and, at the same time, a shadowy trace of an almost forgotten past. He is both vulnerable and resistant. An uncanny figure that marks the way in which home for the Jews has so often been based in memory. Most significantly, David Rodinsky is a usable story, and his story marks the ways in which, for Jews, identity cannot be perpetually fixed in the past.

Rodinsky’s life, as it emerges through the text, was not confined to the “mysterious and magical” ancient synagogue of Princelet Street—now a heritage center celebrating the diversity of immigrant life in Spitalfields.¹¹ Rodinsky’s hand-drawn maps inserted into his diaries and books track journeys that he took well beyond the borders of Spitalfields to places in outer London and Essex. He

¹¹ Note on the Spitalfields Centre, *Rodinsky’s Room*.

had spent some of his childhood in foster care in Dagenham and ended his days in a psychiatric institution in Epsom. The attic did not contain the whole story.

As the book draws to its conclusion, Lichtenstein's own journey moves away from the past and into the present and future. She describes how in her last days in Poland she becomes overwhelmed by the weight of remembering. After watching a heartbreaking video of "the last Jew in Tarnów" she reaches saturation point: "That night I dream all my teeth fall out, crumble in my mouth as I press against them with the back of my tongue. My gums are a bleeding raw mass, to expose them even to the air is extremely painful. I can digest no more" (233). Significantly, her mouth, the organ that both consumes and communicates, is painfully disintegrating. The dream is an evocative symbol of how memories are made in the most tender of places.

When Lichtenstein returns to London from Eastern Europe, it is for less than a day. She goes straight to Israel (the old world made new) to attend a wedding—a particularly noisy, colorful, and life-affirming event. And it is at this late stage in the book that she mentions Adam, "the man I was going to marry" (282), the son of an Irish Catholic and a Pakistani Muslim who had grown up within the Jewish community in a suburb of Leeds. Adam represents the hybridized condition of postcolonial culture in contemporary Britain. He is not Jewish by birth but has adopted many of the attributes associated with the Jews around him. He has a typically Ashkenazi Jewish appearance. He has been one of the first Muslims in history to be a member of a Zionist youth organization. He can break into song in perfect Hebrew. He is both familiar and comfortable with the religious and cultural trappings of Jewish life. He is, for Lichtenstein, an uncanny mirror image, her "perfect match" (282). She explains that she had already decided that she could not wholeheartedly complete the conversion to Orthodox Judaism that she had so deeply considered in Israel. Instead, she chose not to isolate herself from her friends and family, not to reject the pleasures of secular life. In short, she chose to connect with the complexities of the present rather than become mired in the past represented by Rodinsky's empty room. The journey ends as she realizes that she is at home in London, "the city of a thousand cultures" (283), at the break of the new millennium. From this point in the book, the narrative accelerates. She marries Adam, becomes pregnant, and gives birth to a son whom she names David.

As she moves into her present, she completes the story of Rodinsky by laying his memory to rest. Significantly, in terms of the unspoken patterning of the book, she moves beyond the triangle that she has constructed between the old East End of London, Eastern Europe, and Israel and returns to Essex. She reads kaddish by Rodinsky's pauper's grave in Waltham Abbey cemetery. The first edition of *Rodinsky's Room* ends here. The second edition includes an afterword that incorporates responses to the original publication. Lichtenstein creates another end. The success of the book allows her to acquire funds through

an arts project to buy a headstone for Rodinsky's grave. David Rodinsky is laid to rest through the inscription of his name on a marble headstone with the words "May his soul rest in peace." This final act of remembrance is also a moment of release for Lichtenstein. In the last words of the book, the elderly Jewish man who leads the service (and who, completing the circle, is a friend of her grandfather's) tells her, "You have set him free, now it is time to move on" (339). So Lichtenstein leaves the past behind to live as an assimilated British Jew in the composite, hybridized, shifting conditions of the twenty-first century.

The story of David Rodinsky is a powerful expression of the interplay between remembering and forgetting in Jewish consciousness. However, the complex realities of the present as much as the imagined ghosts of the past are repressed in this tale, and it is this tension that underpins the uncanny doubling and shadowing that permeate the story. Finally, though, the text acknowledges the perils of dwelling in dusty attics in order to construct a coherent and grounded identity as a postmodern Jew. As Jonathan Boyarin has argued, "Jews have always, it seems, used narrative to recreate their shared identities across time.... Yet this self-creation of the Jewish collective may also take mythifying forms that endanger the well-being of a contemporary Jewish generation."¹² In remembering the past, but meeting the complexities of the present, *Rodinsky's Room* provides a fitting story for our times.

¹² Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) xvii.