



The Prophet and Other Stories (Jewish Latin America Series)

Samuel Rawet

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Samuel Rawet (1929-84) was born in a small Polish town near Warsaw that was eventually destroyed during World War II. He emigrated to Brazil at the age of seven and grew up on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro in neighborhoods teeming with Jews and other immigrants. Known as the pioneer of Brazilian-Jewish writing, Rawet represents an artfully sensitive voice of the Jewish Diaspora in Latin America, especially Brazil, a country of more than 150 million inhabitants that today harbors nearly 150,000 Jews whose ancestry is primarily Eastern European.

As Nelson Vieira notes, the stories in this collection all relate to the vicissitudes of displaced individuals who are frequently trapped by society's rigid norms. Some, like the Jew with the white beard and the long black overcoat in the title story who steps off the gangplank, are entering a world that is no longer theirs. Old World characters enter a New World where they are not used to the language or the sun or "the frustration of not being able to explain." Other characters can't communicate even with those familiar to them; one woman describes herself and her sister as two strangers in a doctor's waiting room.

Rawet's characters eloquently embody exile, alienation, and displacement. His is a prophetic, solitary Brazilian-Jewish voice that Vieira has made available at last to English-speaking audiences. Writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Rawet knew first-hand that we all can be others and strangers, even in our own land.

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