

**Monda Halpern, *Alice in Shandehland: Scandal and Scorn in the Edelson/ Horwitz Murder Case* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 308 pp., ISBN: 9780773545595.**

In November of 1931, Alice and Ben Edelson, married for nearly twenty years and parents to seven children, met in Edelson's jewelry store in Ottawa with Jack Horwitz, Alice's married and long-time lover, in an attempt to "settle the thing" (3). A heated exchange ensued, followed by a struggle that culminated with the shooting of Horwitz who died several hours later. In a case sensationalized in local media, Ben Edelson was charged with Horwitz's murder, which was a capital offence at the time. In *Alice in Shandehland*, Monda Halpern reconstructs and analyzes deftly an affair that turned into an Affair.

Building on a growing historiographical trend of exploring Jewish deviance, this book uses the Edelson-Horwitz case "as a lens through which to investigate prevailing attitudes regarding the interconnected issues of gender, ethnicity, and class" (5), as well as the processes by which Jewish immigrants integrated into early-twentieth century Canadian society. Roughly-contemporaneous murder trials in the United States and Germany in which Jewish men were the alleged murderers turned into platforms for the expression of virulent antisemitism. Such a development might not have been unexpected in the Edelson-Horwitz case, given the pervasive bigotry of 1930s Canada and the lens of antisemitism through which interwar Canadian Jewish history is often seen. However, antisemitic discourse remained absent in the trial, as Halpern notes. She attributes this absence to the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and class, and in particular the ways in which the defendant, Ben Edelson, embodied Anglo-Protestant norms of middle class respectability, which were particularly difficult to attain during the Depression years. It was not only Edelson's respectability, in Halpern's analysis, that facilitated his acquittal; his case spoke to an "unwritten law" with roots in Victorian doctrine that justified, in the name of manly honour, a man's killing of another man who had seduced the former's female kin. As the title of the work suggests, therefore, it is the sexual indecency of Alice Edelson which the jurors and the Ottawa Jewish community came to see as a *shandeh*, the Yiddish word glossed as "shame or disgrace," rather than the actions of her murderous and cuckolded husband or his murdered rival.

Halpern crafts the book in six chapters which focus on the lead-up to the shooting, the trial, and the trial's aftermath. She weaves together archival sources and court transcripts with extensive material from the Yiddish- and English-language Ottawa press, and interviews with the surviving children and grandchildren of the story's central figures. Chapter one reconstructs the events of the eight-year-long affair, the November 1931 shooting, Horwitz's death that night, and Ben Edelson's arrest for

his murder. In a forecast of the shaming of Alice that was to come, Horwitz's widow Yetta placed the blame for her husband's extramarital relationship on Alice entirely, while the police implied that Alice, as an "exceptionally attractive young woman," was complicit in the homicide (25). The second chapter details how Ben Edelson, an immigrant from Friedrichstadt in the Russian Empire (today Jaunjelgava, Latvia) wooed and married Alice Coblentz, a Russian immigrant from Ponevezh (Panevėžys, Lithuania), how together they left the United States to immigrate to Montreal in 1913, and how their marital dynamics were crucial to Ben's attainment of the middle-class respectability that undergirded his later exoneration. Ben, trained as a jeweler before leaving the Russian Empire, continued his profession in Canada. His entrepreneurial success even through the years of the Depression enabled Alice to avoid working outside the home and to devote her attention to Jewish philanthropic activities, marks of middle-class status for the Edelson family as understood by the local Jewish population. Chapter three analyzes the coroner's inquest and Ben Edelson's preliminary hearing, where details of the affair and shooting entranced both the local Jewish community and the broader population, which threatened Ben's respectability and was exacerbated by Alice's seclusion after the shooting and her avoidance of contact with her incarcerated spouse. The fourth chapter explores how Alice Edelson became a scapegoat spurned by the Jewish community, her long-term affair deemed a breach of religious and cultural values that highlighted weakening Jewish masculinity, family life, and subverted proper Jewish womanhood. The murder trial itself is the focus of chapter five, where Edelson's defense attorney's "brilliant and effective" closing remarks blamed Alice for the tragedy and called on the all-male jury to make note of Ben Edelson's character in forgiving his adulterous wife. By tapping into the "unwritten law," Edelson's attorney gained exoneration for his client, thereby underscoring the gendered class dynamics at play in the capital trial. The final chapter examines the legacy of the case, one that garnered so much attention from the media and the Jewish community at the time, but that was subsequently largely forgotten, highlighting both the personal and communal implications of selective remembrance and forgetting. Nonetheless, Halpern notes, while the case largely disappeared from Ottawa Jewish collective memory, Alice Edelson's unsavoury role in the Affair was never wholly forgotten, and her reputation, unlike that of her husband, never recovered.

*Alice in Shandehland* raises a number of compelling questions about the intersections of class and gender with perceptions of criminality, as well as the social and legal tensions between written and unwritten laws. The compelling narrative of this micro-historical analysis would lend itself well to undergraduate courses on Canadian Jewish history, providing a lens other than antisemitism through which to understand the interwar period. While Alice's voice is notably missing from the story, this is a product of the source materials rather than the author's oversight. Nonetheless, Halpern shows convincingly that the intersection of gender and class are crucial for understanding the Edelson trial itself and Jewish history more broadly. Indeed, this

book points to the ways in which critical analyses of Jewish deviance expose seemingly counterintuitive processes of Jewish immigrant integration.

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