

**The Unlikely Blessings of Living on
Borrowed Time in a Leased Land
—Michael Chabon’s *The Yiddish
Policemen’s Union***

Shuli Chang

Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
National Cheng Kung University
No. 1, University Rd., Tainan 70101, Taiwan
E-mail: zhuli@mail.ncku.edu.tw

Abstract

The culture of violence committed in the name of faith, a malady which plagues our world today, is the subject matter of Michael Chabon’s 2007 speculative fiction, *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*, which is based on the historical premise that Israel, in losing the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, was destroyed, and millions of Jewish refugees given temporary shelter in Alaska, on a 60-year lease with the United States of America. The novel opens in 2007, when the Reversion is to take effect, and Diasporic Jews once again face homelessness. Against this counterfactual background of collective anxiety, Chabon has his detective-protagonist follow a murder case only to unravel a conspiracy to “basically force [the] Messiah

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to come.” Recognized as one of the most important Jewish American writers of the present time, Chabon posits in his novel a provocative question by placing Jews in the awkward position presently occupied by the Palestinians: having to live on borrowed time, on land not their own, with Diaspora an everyday reality. How are peace and redemption possible under such circumstances, given that contingencies tend to divert history from rationally calculated paths onto unintentional detours? Chabon’s counterfactual fiction proffers a strident critique of religious fundamentalism in all its forms, especially fundamentalisms bound up with nationalism. Neither Diaspora nor Zionism guarantees Jews their long-awaited redemption; however, small-scale redemption is readily available when the redemptive fantasy is placed in suspension, thus opening up space for “the blessings of more life.”

Key Words: counterfactual, conspiracy, diaspora, fundamentalism, exceptionalism