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THE JEW AS HUMAN PARADIGM IN THE FICTION OF IMPORTANT TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN JEWISH WRITERS

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-
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Cincinnati, Ohio
May, 1970

Referee:

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FOR HANNAH

DIGEST

It is assumed by many writers, critics and readers of fiction that the novel reflects and interprets the milieu that produces it and its author.

This study has chosen many of the most prominent works of fiction produced by 20th Century American Jewish writers. Since the writers' backgrounds are socially and culturally diverse within the sphere of the 20th Century American Jewish world, we may assume that we have an adequate cross section of representation from this world.

In concentrating on the American Jewish novel of the 20th century, we would hope to see, through the perceptions of the authors of these novels, insights into the attitudes and self-images of the modern American Jew.

As the title implies, the study seeks to determine to what extent, if any, the Jewish writer regards his experience in his environment as a paradigm for human experience.

The author feels that the novel is a valid and insightful laboratory for this study, in that it is one of the most articulate and reflective voices speaking out of and on behalf of the culture which generates it.

It is hoped that a better understanding of the 20th Century American Jew may be attained by this examination of one of his richest and most prolific art forms.

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INTRODUCTION

In Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, Joey Goldstein's grandfather tries to explain to Joey why the boy was beaten by some gentile children in the neighborhood. The old man feels that the answer lies in the nature of the Jew. He feels that he must tell the boy what being a Jew means:

> It's a difficult question, the meaning of a Jew. It's not a race...it's not even a religion any more. Maybe it will never be a nation...
>
> What is it, then? Yehudah Halevy said Israel is the heart of all nations. What attacks the body attacks the heart. And the heart is also the conscience which suffers for the sins of the nations... It's an interesting problem, but personally I think a Jew is a Jew because he suffers. Olla Juden suffer. (p.376)

The old grandfather cites a theme that is repeated time and again throughout the American Jewish novel: That the Jew is every man, only more acutely so. Conversely we find repeated throughout our works the theme that Bernard Malamud is thought to have stated: All men are Jews.

Certainly, these themes by themselves are overstatements. The Jew tenaciously clings to his particularistic identity. Living a bi-cultural life in America, and for

that matter in any country of the Diaspora, he is polarized by his two identities. Somehow, in our novels, "Jew" emerges as the substantive term in formulations like "American Jew" or "Russian Jew," or "(whatever) Jew."

The novels selected for this study are American Jewish novels. They have been written by American Jewish writers, and with a single exception (Bernard Malamud's The Fixer), they deal, at least in part and usually predominantly, with the lives of American Jews.

No qualitative judgment was made in their selection. They include, we may be certain, some of the finest American (not only American Jewish) novels. They may include, as well, some of the most pedestrian. It is not our purpose here to do a critical evaluation of these works. (It has been impossible, at times, not to allude editorially to the quality of some of the novels.)

Our purpose is simple, though twofold. We are looking at these novels to see how they reflect the way that the Jew copes with certain problems and situations. Inasmuch as these problems are either universal or involve the rest of the community as well, we are looking to see, additionally, to what extent the experience of the Jew is the experience of the outside world.

We start the study with a thorough analysis of one of the novels: Michael Gold's Jews without Money, a paradigm for the study. Jews without Money was chosen for detailed treatment because of the simplicity and directness with which it approaches the Jew in his environment.

I. JEWS WITHOUT MONEY

"America is so rich and fat because it has eaten the tragedy of millions of immigrants." (p.41)

Tragedy, indeed, is the constant companion of Michael Gold, the young hero of the autobiographical novel, Jews Without Money. Michael Gold's* characters are portrayed as hopeless victims of their environment. The environment is New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the century. It was a hostile world, where survival was for the hardy and the sturdy. The corrupt politicians, the pimps, the unscrupulous landlords, and the pietistic, insincere rabbis not only survived but flourished. Their victims crumbled and died.

Gold portrays his Jews as hopeless dreamers. They are superstitious losers in the game of life. They are completely out of touch with reality.

> The Jews had fled from the European pogroms; with prayer, thanksgiving and solemn faith from a new Egypt into a new Promised Land.
>
> They found awaiting them the sweatshops, the bawdy houses and Tammany Hall. (p.14)

---

*Michael Gold was the pen name of Irwin Granich.

The entire novel is a dirge of hopelessness. Everything lovely and fragile is doomed. Michael's parents are people who have nothing save a bit of hope and workingman's dignity, and manage to lose even that.

When Michael's father, Herman, got off the boat from Rumania, he bought himself a derby hat. It was a "fun-hat" (p.106) and he had a picture taken of himself to send to his parents. He was soon out of money, and searched out his cousin Sam, in whose factory he took a job for twenty-five cents a day.

> Soon I came to understand it was not a land of fun. It was a Land of Hurry-Up. There was no gold to be dug in the streets here. Derbies were not fun-hats for holidays. They were work hats. Nu, so I worked! With my hands, my liver and sides! I worked! (p.106)

Michael's father ultimately becomes a working partner in Sam's suspender business. He is the brain and Sam the brawn. The business flourishes. Being prosperous enough to marry, he takes a wife, and after a wedding trip to Niagara Falls returns to find the business gone. In his absence Sam has moved the business to a new location, stolen it.

So Herman takes a job as a house painter, ever dreaming of improvement. He dreams of starting his own suspender factory. He dreams of becoming the foreman. He dreams of moving his family to Brooklyn where there are trees. But dreams are flimsy. They have the same poor chances of flourishing as the grass that sprouts between the cracks in the East Side pavement. Lead poisoning ends

Herman's dreams. After a fall from the scaffold, and his subsequent acrophobia, Herman is reduced to peddling bananas from a pushcart, no longer able to provide for his family.

"Only children are sturdy enough to grow on the East Side." (p.41) Not all children, however, were sturdy enough. Michael's friend Joey Cohen was too delicate. He was a dreamy boy who mourned a butterfly he had inadvertently killed. He read a lot. He was adventurous enough to be lured into a hallway by a bum offering him a nickel. He was molested. He was brave enough to steal a ride on a horsedrawn streetcar. He fell under the wheels of the car and was killed. Decapitated!

In the bleakest winter of Michael's young life, Esther, Michael's sister, met a similar fate. His father was unable to work. His mother worked in a restaurant, and his sister took care of the house. Michael sold newspapers. Esther went out to get some wood for the stove, and on her way home she was run over by a truck. She died that very night.

Together with an overabundance of human beings in the East Side ghetto, there were too many cats. They wandered the East Side like the urchin children. They were the victims of the children's malice. They were draped from tenement rooftops by boys curious about the fabled nine lives of cats, and they in turn tortured the human East Siders by groaning their needs at night. For Michael Gold the cats were authentic residents of the East Side,

and shared the fate and the dignity of the Jews who lived in the tenements.

In Jews without Money, the spiritual resources of the disadvantaged East Siders were scant weapons. Time and time again the God of their ancestors, and the institutions of Jewish religious expression, provided little but disillusion.

A group of impoverished Hasidim saved for years to import a rebbe to lead the congregation in its quest for salvation. Their rebbe, when he finally arrived, was a fat, dull-faced man with a countenance that held no ecstasy. He disliked children, and gorged himself with food. He made demands on his flock, insisted that he be settled in Brooklyn, away from the riffraff of his congregation, that his wife and children be imported from Europe, that they have a servant to care for the home that was provided by the penniless congregation, and finally left the congregation to serve a group of wealthy, non-Hasidim in Brooklyn.

Despite the constant reassurance from Michael's mother that God still lived, and that He still cared, God was never more than concept to Michael.

> I was oppressed with thoughts of God because my parents had put me in a Chaider. I went to this Jewish religious school every afternoon when the American public school let out...
>
> Reb Moisha was my teacher. This man was a walking, belching symbol of the decay of orthodox Judaism. What could such as he teach anyone? He was ignorant as a rat. He was a foul-smelling, emaciated beggar who had never read anything, or seen anything, who knew absolutely nothing but this sterile

> memory course in dead Hebrew which he whipped into the heads and backsides of little boys...
>
> I hated this place. Once he tried to whip me, and instead of the usual submission, I ran home. My mother was angry.
>
> "You must go back," she said. "Do you want to grow up into an ignorant goy?"
>
> "But why do I have to learn all those Hebrew words? They don't mean anything, momma!"
>
> "They mean a lot," she said severely. "Those are God's words, the way He wants us to pray to Him!"
>
> "Who is God?" I asked. "Why must we pray to Him?"
>
> "He is the one who made the world," said my mother solemnly. "We must obey Him."
>
> "Did He make everything?"
>
> "Yes, everything. God made everything in this world."
>
> This impressed me. I returned to the Chaider. In the midst of the riot and screaming I would brood on my mother's God, on the strange man in the sky who must be addressed in Hebrew, that man who had created everything on earth. (pp.64-67)

Despite his youthful fascination with the God of his mother, Michael's reverence is tempered with bitterness. The God who made everything in the world is the God who made poverty, bedbugs and cats.

Again and again, Momma reasserts her belief that "God is still in the world" (p.244), but this was children's fantasy. Momma and Reb Samuel, the Hasid, looked forward to a Messiah who would "save the world" and "make everything good." "He would ride a white horse and put to shame every enemy of the Jews." He would be meek and win the world

with love, but Michael was disappointed. He needed a Messiah who looked like Buffalo Bill, "and who could annihilate our enemies." (pp.189-90)

Who were these enemies? At times they were the gentiles. Italian kids on Mulberry Street, who chased Michael and called him Christ-killer were enemies (pp.186-189). Chinese waiters, who stayed up late drinking, whoring and gambling, were enemies (pp.177-178). Gypsies were enemies (pp.175-177). Haughty, black Abyssinian Jews were enemies (pp.174-175).

The real enemies, however, were poverty and the rich exploiters of the poor. The landlords, the pimps, the bosses, the ambulance-chasing lawyers, and the intimidating local politicians--these were the real enemies.

Capitalism is the real enemy. When discussing a railroad accident, Michael's father says: "...seventeen innocent people were killed in a railroad accident in New Jersey!... The fault of the rich American railroads!" (p.163) Life was made intolerable because of a panic on Wall Street.

Capitalism, however, isn't even a familiar concept to Gold's innocent Jews. They are beaten and ravaged by it, but they know only its ghetto manifestations. These are not big investors, ruined by the stock market decline. These are not financiers, shaken by a change in the prime lending rate. These are poor Jews who buy but a few cents' worth of coffee or butter, or a dime's worth of meat. They suffer from their contacts with the fringe of the system.

Capitalism is always represented by the corrupt individuals, who bring it to the ghetto. They are dirty, greasy, smelly, fat, self-indulgent, conniving and stained Jews. They are carrion, preying on the decayed hopes and depleted strength of poverty-stricken immigrants.

The victims are pushed to the edge of the abyss. Some of them survive the experience with dignity, like Gold's own family. Although they reach the brink of despair they manage to salvage their self-respect by turning away the ambulance chaser and the welfare inspector. They have lost their hopes for a home in Brooklyn, for a medical career for their son, but not to the point of total submission.

Others were not so fortunate. The whores that cluttered the streets and tenements of the East Side were not so fortunate. The small-time gangsters, pimps, and their like were pushed over the edge of the abyss. They were victims of the system, as it was manifested in the East Side ghetto.

Michael Gold shows enormous sympathy for the Jews of the East Side and their way of life. Though he has little use for the Jewish God and institutional religion, he describes warmly and with what is apparently great nostalgia, the old-country-Jewish folkways, mores, and even superstitutions that brought a modicum of color and richness to their otherwise poor, colorless lives.

The tenements of the East Side, as we have pointed

out, were not the exclusive domain of the Jews. Although streets and neighborhoods seemed to have been predominantly settled by one ethnic group or another, and Chrystie Street was Jewish, they shared their habitations with smatterings of other immigrants as well, and even an occasional native American. (pp.178-179).

Generally the Jews hated and feared their neighbors, but there were always exceptions, especially for Michael's mother. The poor gentiles in the ghetto shared the suffering of the poor Jews. If the Irishman who lived above the Golds in the tenement was always drunk and beating his wife, the fault was his poverty rather than his ethnic propinquities.

Gold's Jews are a prototype. The East Side Jewish immigrant milieu is the environment which produced Michael Gold. It is the medium in which he works most comfortably. All the poor, however, are the victims of the rich oppressor. Gold's solution knows no ~~ee~~ethnic bounds. It is what he refers to as the "great Beginning" in his somewhat hasty conclusion:

> And I worked. And my father and mother grew sadder and older. It went on for years. I don't want to remember it all; the years of my adolescence. Yet I was only one among a million others.
>
> A man on an East Side soap-box, one night, proclaimed that out of the despair, melancholy and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty.
>
> I listened to him.
>
> O workers' revolution, you brought hope to me,

> a lonely, suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit.
>
> O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live.
>
> O great Beginning! (p.286)

Jews without Money easily serves as a paradigm for this study. It is uncluttered with sub-plots and subtle themes. The very characteristics that deprive it of a place among the literary masterpieces of the American novel enable us to use it as a pattern.

Jews without Money is extremely episodic. It deals with various life problems faced by the Jew, in his environment. Gold chooses the squalor of the East Side for his environment. It is natural that he should have done so. Michael Gold's first encounters with life and its problems took place in the very quarter in which he sets his novel. Some of our authors place their characters in different settings. Some in the towns and cities in which they were reared. Some under different economic conditions. Some place their characters in environments which exist only in fantasy, and some in settings so removed from the authors' realm of experience in time and custom that fancy is required to connect the dots, to color the pictures.

What unifies the novels is their treatment of a common circumstance--the Jew's encounter with the world. How these Jews cope with their surroundings, the constants and variables of their respective milieus, will be the subject of the

succeeding chapters of this study. We will pay particular attention to poverty, Jewish identity, the non-Jewish world, alienation, and what we perceive to be the novelists' conceptions of the Jewish quest. We hope to find what relationships, if any, exist between the experiences of Jews and the non-Jewish world, and to what extent, if at all, the Jew's experience is a microcosmic or paradigmatic reflection of the people around him.

II. POVERTY

> "It is the fate of those who toil at the lower employments of life to be rather driven by the fear of evil than attracted by the prospect of good; to be exposed to censure without hope of praise; to be disgraced by miscarriage, or punished for neglect, where success would have been without applause, and diligence without reward." (Samuel Johnson: Preface to the Dictionary)
>
> "The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." (Ecclesiastes IX:16)

It is a characteristic of our times that the needs of the poor have apparently entered the domain of universal concern. For almost a decade our country has been waging a "War against Poverty", albeit with less aggressiveness and seemingly less commitment than we have been waging some of our undeclared wars. Millions of American dollars have been sent by well-meaning citizens to countries like Biafra and India, where starvation litters the streets with the dying and dead--the victims of malnutrition. The government tries to relieve the burden of poverty in our country, we are told, with food stamps, distribution of surplus commodities, and untold other social welfare programs. The welfare rolls of the United States are swollen with the

names of the poor. Ethnic and religious philanthropies by the dozens and scores and hundreds collect for, contribute to, and agitate on behalf of the poor in this country and abroad.

Yet, there is still poverty.

We do not hear many expressions of gratitude from our poverty-stricken brothers. No one says: "Thank you for the handout;" "Thank you for the welfare;" "Thank you for the charity." "What ingrates!", we might be tempted to say. "Have they no appreciation for all we are doing for them?"

The answer would most likely have to be negative. A poor family with food stamps remains poor. A jobless, poor husband and father on welfare remains jobless and poor, despite the not-quite subsistence-level funding he receives from the city, county or state.

The reason for this lack of gratitude seems obvious. A poor person has nothing to be grateful for. He may receive some relief from the beneficence of others, or through bureaucratic functioning of government, but his condition is unchanged. He is still poor, just as morphine may relieve the pain of a terminal cancer patient, yet do nothing to change his hopeless state.

Poverty is a condition which fills people with frustration and rage. None of the literary media seem to express the plight of the once but no longer ubiquitous poor Jew as effectively as the novel.

There is more of a tendency in Jewish theatre and in

Jewish memoirs, than in the novel, to treat poverty with bitter humor than with realism. Tevye, the milkman, jokes about his poverty: "When a poor Jew eats chicken, one of them is sick." (p.34) Addressing God in another scene Tevye discusses his daughter and new son-in-law: "They work very hard, they are as poor as squirrels in the winter. But they are both so happy they don't know how miserable they are." (p.113)

Few of the characters in our novels, who experience poverty, look upon it as an uplifting estate, nor do they lift the condition above its reality with humor or satire. For the most part poverty is degrading and exasperating.

It may seem superfluous to set down what exactly we mean by poverty. Remembering, however, an exchange on a Jewish comedy record,

> Mr. A: How's your wife?
> Mr. B: Compared to who?

it seems necessary to give some limits and dimensions to our use of the term poverty.

For our purposes, poverty has a broader meaning than destitution,a word which implies the state of having absolutely nothing, (although we do, in our reading, encounter examples verging on destitution.) It also has, for our purposes, a narrower meaning than mere need. Need, even the need for material things, is not limited to the poor. By poverty we will refer to the state of lacking the material necessities for an adequate life.

Several of our novels, in addition to Jews without

Money, treat poverty as a major problem for their principal characters, although in no other one is poverty the sole adversary as it is in Gold's novel.

Poverty is the spring on the trap. One of its most devastating manifestations is the tenacity with which it holds people down. The Jews in Daniel Fuchs's Summer in Williamsburg are trapped in that poorest of ghettos by their poverty. Poverty seemed to anesthetize the inhabitants of Williamsburg. Their avenues of escape were few. They could, like Gold's Jews, turn to petty crime or racketeering. They could assume fantasy identities and roles. But neither alternative was a solution. The former required the abandonment of decency, the latter the loss of reason. The world that poverty created in Williamsburg was an ever-turning treadmill, a vapid wilderness.

> ...take the whole of Ripple street from morning to night and back again; take it and reproduce it faithfully and you would have a great formless mass of petty incident, the stale product of people who were concerned completely with the tremendous job of making a living so that tomorrow they would be able to make a living another day. Everything here was petty. Love was a hot joke, a soiled business in worn bed sheets, a sedative interlude in the omnipresent struggle of making a liiving... People in tenements lived in a circle without significance, one day the duplicate of the next until the end... People were born, grew tired and calloused, struggled and died. That was all and no book was large enough to include the entire picture, to give the completely truthful impression, the exact feeling. (p.377)

In Philip Roth's Letting Go, a distinctively middle-class novel, we find another kind of poverty. It is not the abject poverty of immigrants and victims of depressions--a

poverty which at times might even be uplifting and strengthening--but the limited poverty of the fallen middle class forcing its victims to hateful, irrevocable compromises. Gabe Wallach, a wealthy, neurotic teacher of English at the University of Chicago, sees his friends Paul and Libby Herz almost destroyed by their poverty.

Both Paul and Libby are the products of middle-class homes. Paul's was a lower middle-class Jewish home, Libby's an upper middle-class Christian home. Their marriage severs the ties with both families, and in their struggle to realize Paul's doctorate in English their poverty drives them to the limits of their dignity and sanity. They take a year off from their studies, hoping to amass enough money to support themselves for a subsequent year in school. They move to a miserable room in a slum. They share their abode with two pitiful old Jewish men, one of whom has been reduced by poverty to larceny, and the other to quixotic jabs at the worn windmills of unrighted wrongs. Paul's and Libby's savings grow, but are consumed when they ambivalently agree to an abortion for an unplanned pregnancy.

Their poverty has crippled them in much the same way as it did Michael Gold's Jews without Money. They happen to possess a higher degree of tenacity. They keep trying to climb the greased pole that separates them from Paul's PhD.

In their poverty Paul and Libby involve themselves in the petty and hopeless preoccupations of their dottering old neighbors. They acquire poverty values and poverty fears.

Gabe is never really able to relate to them properly because his material comfort has desensitized him to the needs of his friends. He does, however, find a job for Paul on the Humanities faculty at the University of Chicago. Paul, needing only to finish his dissertation to receive his degree, accepts the job. The Herzes come to Chicago, but poverty has taken its toll and continues to take it. Their life has been lived in compromises and they are unable to break the bondage of poverty. To Fuchs's Jews of Williamsburg and Gold's East Side Jews, Paul's instructor's job in Chicago and its remuneration would have been a kind of panacea. The Herzes, however, were living a poverty as degrading as that of their literary predecessors. Roth reviews in Libby's mind a shopping excursion shortly after their arrival in Chicago:

> The trouble with their furniture was that it had all been bought one afternoon at Catholic Salvage, a place she could not forget. How Paul had discovered it she still did not know, but one day after they had found an apartment, a bleak, but moderately priced four rooms on Drexel, they had taken a bus, and then changed to another bus, to the brick warehouse on South Michigan....They had already started up the metal stairs to the furniture section when Paul had gone back down to a piperack he had spotted in men's wear....tears already in her eyes, to see Paul picking out a blue pinstriped suit from among a half-dozen limp garments strung along the rack. When she saw that the jacket fitted with a little give and take here and there--she drew in her breath. Though she knew that it didn't matter, that it was what a person was and not what he wore that counted, she nevertheless had begun to pray: "Mary, Mother of God, please don't let him buy that thing." And her prayer had been answered. He came clanging up the stairs in his Army-Navy Store shoes to tell her that the

two suits he already had were plenty.

> Then they proceeded up one more flight and around the vast cement floor, where they picked out a kitchen table, four chairs, a desk, a sofa, a bedstead, springs, a mattress, a chest of drawers, a dresser, a mirror, three lamps, and a rug. Marching up another flight, they chose their dishes and pots and pans. And Paul walked right up and touched everything. In his coat and shoes he had stretched out on a half a dozen secondhand mattresses until he had found one with enough life in it....
>
> Paul looked up and smiled; Libby smiled too. She was full of admiration for her husband, not to mention wonder: How can he put his head down there? Ever since grade school she had defended the rights of all men, regardless of race; she had willingly (deliberately?) (sic) married a Jew; she had always spoken up for the underprivileged (and this even before she had become one herself). Yet she stood looking down at her husband and thinking: These mattresses have belonged to colored people. I don't want any... To her husband, however, she said nothing; all the while that Paul went around rapping, knocking, testing, she kept her hands in the pockets of her raincoat. She managed to get away without having had to touch anything. (pp.328-9)

CONCLUSION

Poverty has certainly been one of the preoccupations of the twentieth-century American Jewish novelist. We find it more central, of course, in the works of the proletarian novelists of the twenties and thirties. Henry Roth, Michael Gold, Meyer Levin, Ruth Seid, and Daniel Fuchs were products of the impoverished ghettos. They wrote from experience.

Post-World War II middle-class novelists, however, like Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth, seem to be no less aware of the perniciousness of the state than their ghetto predecessors.

Poverty is a state that was shared by Jew and gentile alike. Paul and Libby Herz might be taken as a metaphor of this shared poverty. The cures of poverty seem, as well, to be shared. Morris Bober shares his poverty with Frank Alpine in Malamud's The Assistant, Michael Gold shares his with the other ethnic communities in the ghetto.

The Herzes' poverty in Letting Go is of a different nature than the poverty that we experience on the immigrant, ghetto and depression level. Their poverty is probably temporary. Paul Herz may never finish his doctorate, but his credentials are already middle class; his life pattern is established.

In the Rabbi's eulogy for Morris Bober in The Assistant we see the Jewish response to poverty. It isn't an earth-shaking response and it really isn't the exclusive domain of the Jews. What poverty places in the heart of a man is want. Morris Bober passed the stage of wanting for himself, but his real heartbreak and sorrow were the unfulfilled wants for his daughter. The point at which poverty brings despair is that point when parents seem to lose hope for their children.

In Ruth Said's novel, Wasteland, the father ceased being the head of the family when he encouraged his children to abandon school in order to contribute to the support of the family. Jake and his sister Debby become the "men" of the family when their concern for the betterment of the next generation defeats the burden of poverty.

In his eulogy for Morris Bober the Rabbi says:

> He suffered, he endurred (sic), but with hope. Who told me this? I know. He asked for himself little--nothing, but he wanted for his beloved child a better existence than he had. For such reasons he was a Jew. (p.180)

For such reasons he was a little bit of every man.

III. JEWISH IDENTITY

Lord, I ascribe it to thy grace
And not to chance as others do
That I was born of Christian race
And not a heathen or a Jew.
(Isaac Watts; Divine Songs for Children)

Constable: You are a decent honest person, even if you are a Jewish dog.

Tevye: How often does a man get a compliment like that?
(Fiddler on the Roof)

In Call It Sleep, the only solace that David Shearl finds in the oppressive East Side ghetto is in the softness of his mother's bosom. David's life was one of fear and accommodation. He feared his father, not without reason. He was afraid of his peers, who seemed a heartier lot. The small delights of the street and the home--sugar candy from the Chinese laundryman and his mother's cookies--were scant relief from the almost constant terror in his heart.

Finally, David meets Leo. Leo is a "Polish-American," who to David is the symbol of invincibility. Leo is older and stronger; the kite that he flies soars over the tenements in the freedom of the sky; his skates

whiz him out of the ghetto to new, exciting places. Leo is everything that David would like to be: large, strong, tough, independent, and fatherless. Most important of all, in David's eyes, is the fact that Leo is a Christian who is protected by crossing himself and wearing a scapular. Leo is not afraid of anything when he wears his scapular. "Not afraid," David keeps repeating to himself. (pp.299-305)

In almost all of our novels we find repeated, time and again, ambiguity about being Jewish. On the one hand there is the feeling that being Jewish alienates a man from his fellow human beings. On the other hand there is a mysterious tie that binds the Jew and his fellow Jews.

Adam Amsterdam sums up the latter feeling for his son Richard in Myron Kaufmann's Remember Me to God. Richard is desperate to assimilate into the "Yankee" (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant New England upper class) circles of his Harvard classmates. He yearns for their acceptance. He has fallen in love with Wilma (Wimsy) Talbot, a quasi blueblood, and has announced his intentions to marry her. Adam tells his son how he was introduced to Richard's mother by a strange Jew, to whom he had poured out his heart on a trolley. He continues:

> And when I think of that I always realize what a kinship there is in the whole house of the children of Israel--how a couple of Jews will start telling each other their troubles even though they don't know each other....A Jew does not die in the ashcan, Richard. You don't see a sick old Jew lying on the sidewalk in the winter without a roof over his head. A Jew doesn't die alone like a dog. There's someone to say his name, at least, and cry a little....

> Even if Hitler lines them up against the wall and shoots them down, that pertains, because somewhere somebody sheds a tear, and sixteen million other Jews in the world are sorry about it. (pp.360-361)

But Richard Amsterdam seems to find his Jewishness a burden, a stigma. He is consumed with improving his manners, so as to appear as a gentleman rather than a Jew. His attempts at assimilation are superficially successful. He is invited to join the Hasty Pudding Club. He has a few blueblooded friends. His intended father-in-law, who is himself a person who married "up", was not impressed with his daughter's choice.

When Richard hears that Wimsy's father disapproves of her choice he is upset that "Talbot has made a snap judgment and classified him with all other Jews, instead of inquiring first whether Richard might be personally acceptable. He thought Wimsy should have told her father that his manners had been good enough to enable him to attend Cynthia Paul's debutante party." (p.393)

His final overture to assimilation is his intention to convert. He tells his father that "In the kind of New England life I want, church happens to be part of the fabric of it, and I'm big enough to admit it." (p.425)

Richard is finally rejected by the very institutions he seeks. A minister refuses him baptism, and tells him: "I'm trying to bring people to Christ, not to Beacon Hill." (p.563) He fails his comprehensives and does not earn his degree at Harvard. At the end of an abortive engagement

party, Wimsy's father calls Richard "climbing scum" and a "dirty little social climber". Wimsy's sister calls the family "a bunch of pigs". Wimsy's inability to defend Richard and his family indicates her tacit agreement. Yet as she drives the car from the curb in front of Richard's parents' home, Richard calls after her: "Wimsy! Dearest!" (pp.603-4)

Richard Amsterdam's attempted flight from his Jewish identity is extreme. His superficiality and insensitivity are so great that they often threaten the credibility of Kaufmann's novel. The final pages of Remember Me to God find Richard about to leave for the European Theatre of World War II. We are left with the feeling that, if he survives the war, he will probably redeem himself.

Many of the characters in our novels have this identity crisis. They suffer from their Jewishness, and, to a degree, they either deny or refuse to affirm their Jewishness. Arthur Levy in Ludwig Lewisohn's The Island Within intermarries and tries to share a sterile, neutral life with his non-Jewish wife. Bernard Malamud's Yakov Bok, The Fixer, tries to live outside the pale as a Christian, and is punished by being accused of the ritual murder of a young Christian boy. Jake Brown finds his life is a wasteland of self-hatred in Ruth Seid's novel, Wasteland. Eli Peck becomes Eli, the Fanatic in Philip Roth's short story, when he tries to persuade a group of Hasidim who have moved into his exurban community to divest

themselves of their ethnic accouterments.

The basic feeling shared by all these characters is that, in some way, Jewishness inhibits their interaction with the community at large.

Ruth Seid's Jake Brown is rather incredible in his extremism, but rather typical in his basic problem. He is estranged from most of the members of his family. He hates his father and is somewhat antipathetic to his older brother, a relatively successful salesman crushed by the depression, and to his sister, a promiscuous barmaid. He is a newspaper photographer using the name of John Brown. He has managed to conceal his Jewishness from his co-workers at the paper for years. The only family member with whom he has any relationship is his second sister Debby, who is a writer and a lesbian. At Debby's urging John visits a psychiatrist, with whom he works through his hang-ups.

Jake tells the doctor that he is ashamed of being a Jew:

> No, nobody at the paper knew that he was a Jew. He'd just never mentioned it. His name wasn't Jewish. He didn't look like a Jew, either. Why mention it? All right, maybe he was ashamed of being a Jew! (p.28)

His family and his Jewishness made him "different." (p.30) He couldn't stand being Jewish. But he comes to discover that it really wasn't being Jewish that was responsible for his shame. He was ashamed of his family, of its poverty, of his mean, dirty father, of his easy-living sister Roz, of his bombastic brother Sig, and even of his weak, defeated mother.

Jake's alternative to being Jewish was to lead his peculiar double life. For eighteen years he works as John Brown at the newspaper, sleeps around with gentile girls, from whom he secretes his Jewish shame. At the end of eighteen years he finds that he is living a life that is a wasteland, with a backache. He is withdrawn from his Jewish family, yet he can't completely cut the cord. He is haunted by the Passover Seder, and his place in it as the youngest son, reciting the four questions. As he sits at the Seder table one Passover, he sees himself as a stranger to these people who share the family.

At the same time, he is estranged from his other world as well. He is drifting, looking for moorings, and his salvation comes from his psychotherapy.

By the time Wasteland ends, Jake has made peace with himself and with his surroundings. He has accepted his family. He has introduced his friends to his barmaid sister. He has exposed his background at the paper. He has even given a pint of blood to the Red Cross, to mingle with humanity. He joins the Army at the advent of World War II. He is restored.

Wasteland is a neatly tied package. Despite the fact that it deals with emotional problems, they are confronted like complicated algebraic equations; neat, precise, and requiring only knowledge of the proper procedures to achieve solution.

What was so new about Wasteland, when it was pub-

lished in 1946 was the method of solving the problem. The proletarian novelists of the 30's and 40's looked to the workers' revolution, perhaps to education for solutions. Miss Seid anointed the psychiatrist as the miracle-working high priest of the Jew, whether materially poor or poor mainly in spirit.

What is characteristic of most of the Jews with identity problems that we meet in this study is the fact that they come off the pages of the books bigger than life. None of them are capable of being subtle, in their wrestling with the demon-angel.

Richard Amsterdam is unrelenting and direct. So clear is his goal that he becomes a neurotic express train, running down every vulnerable obstacle on the tracks. He is heartless, cold and hateful. He curses his parents and insults the Rabbi. Yet he is sycophantic and ingratiating in his dealings with his Yankee idols. He comes off the pages of Remember Me to God as a modern-day Jewish Faust who, after selling his soul at cost less ten per cent, is offered a chance to redeem himself by the fates, those three Jewish Bobbies in the sky.

In The Island Within all Arthur Levy wanted was to be "left alone and function freely within the society into which he had been born." His marriage to a Christian is marred by his growing sympathy and warmth for his background, which cannot be shared by his wife.

Arthur is a psychiatrist, and for that reason and

perhaps others, he never becomes a disoriented personality. What he finds lacking in his vapid, loveless marriage he finds, not in the bosom of another woman, but in his hidden longing to be Jewish once again.

Arthur's cure is a sort of Freudian deus ex machina, worked suddenly by a distant relative, a rabbi, who comes to ask Arthur to join him on a mission on behalf of the persecuted Jews of Rumania. He accepts.

For Arthur and Elizabeth, his wife, the decision to go on the mission means the end of their marriage. Every tiny step that Arthur had taken in the direction of his Jewish identity was a blow that deepened the wedge between them. What Arthur lost in terms of his wife and child was more than compensated for, we are led to believe, by his new and complete involvement in the continuing Jewish experience.

In The Island Within we again find a bigger than life representation. For Arthur, and indeed for all the major characters of the novel, there is no grey--only black and white--and all their judgments and decisions are made on that basis.

The madness of Eli, the Fanatic is another example of the extremes to which Jewish novelists drive their identity-seeking heroes. So great seems the tension and polarity between the pull of Jewishness and the desire to be comfortable in the surroundings of the general community, that Eli is unable to reconcile the two.

Again, Eli, his wife, and the people at the Yeshiva are bigger-than-life people. Their problems are bigger than life, and their identifying characteristics lack all subtlety.

CONCLUSION

The question that our authors seem to be asking is: "What does it mean to be Jewish?"

The answer seems to be: "Being Jewish means to suffer."

Suffering, of course, is a complex state. For Yakov Bok being Jewish means to suffer anguish. It means to be stripped naked for one humiliating inspection after another. It means having his legs manacled till they are raw and infected. It means crawling on his hands and knees like an animal. It means loneliness to the point of madness.

For Richard Amsterdam being Jewish means exclusion from the Yankee world he covets. For David Shearl Jewishness is impotent weakness, fear. For Jake Brown it is drifting in a wasteland. For Arthur Levy it is a challenge to identity and self-acceptance, rather than spending a life haunted by an inescapable inner summons from the past.

Most of these men seem to hold a balance in their hands. One pan contains the grains of assimilation, the other the grains of identification. Each grain seems to differ in weight, making it all but impossible to achieve a perfect balance.

The balance seems either to consist of compromise or

some idyllic social and emotional stability. For most the balance is too elusive. Only Jake Brown is capable of achieving it, so swiftly and so thoroughly that it detracts from the quality of Wasteland. The rest must make the decision to jump into one or the other of the pans. Richard Amsterdam's decision is delayed by the war. But we are left with the feeling that there is at least a modicum of hope that he will choose the Jewish pan. Yakov Bok and Arthur Levy jump into the Jewish pan. They are committed, regardless of the consequences.

David Shearl, of course, is too young and too frantic to make such a decision. Identity is not his greatest problem. It was important to note, however, that even a young, frightened and confused boy should relate his suffering to his Jewishness.

If our authors' view of the Jewish experiences and the price of identification are accurate barometers of the universal attitude, there can be little question as to why there are very few committed converts to Judaism. There can be little dismay, as well, as to why rabbis and other Jews suspect and question the motivations and emotional stability of those who seek to embrace Judaism for reasons other than marriage. The Ger Tzedek, the committed convert to Judaism, asks, when he seeks Jewish identity, for a yoke that many natural-born Jews find impossibly heavy.

Nowhere are we confronted with Jewishness as the best of all possible states. Though we are confronted with

Jews who are compelled to be Jewish, we do not find salvation as the reward for embracing the faith and identity of the fathers.

Why should so many of our characters resign themselves so easily and commit themselves so thoroughly to their Jewish identity? Perhaps the reason is an undercurrent that runs through all of our works. All people suffer. The Christian encounters pain, not only through the suffering of Christ but in his daily life. Even Richard Amsterdam's Yankee bluebloods suffered. Richard was just too wrapped up in his own self-pity and self-hatred to see it.

Suffering is the indigenous birthright of humanity. Jews merely personify the suffering.

In Bernard Malamud's The Assistant, Frank Alpine is torn between good and evil, success and failure, love and hate. He sees this as so much a Jewish struggle and identifies his suffering so greatly as Jewish suffering that he embraces Judaism, seemingly to authenticate his painful struggle.

In his seemingly fruitless dialogue with Richard Amsterdam, Rabbi Budapester sums it up for all of our authors:

> How Providence assigns roles, we can't know, he said, but to contemplate the particular role given to the Jew is to see this about it--that the Jew is a summary, a distillation, a caricature of Man himself, because the Jew has borne Man's greatest aspirations, and given voice to Man's most awesome hopes, and suffered accordingly the most painful of failures. The aspiration to carry out the moral law and the daily failure to do so.

Aspiration, failure, and yet a continuing unwilling dialogue with God, century after century, generation after generation. Our persisting existence is a dialogue with God. Read our history, beginning with the earliest pages of Scripture, and isn't it all a story of man's divine possibility, his failure, and his endless efforts to try again? This is the story of humankind. But is's especially the story of the Jew, because the Jewish people have been assigned the greatest of tasks, and voiced the greatest of hopes, so that our failure has been proportionately great. Man in a nutshell, Man condensed, that Man may look at the Jew and see himself with greater meaning.... The Jews are Man in the extreme, Budapester said. Because the Jews have been at once the most magnificent and the most wretched of peoples, and this is the essence of Man. To be at once sacred and ridiculous, and to live always in danger of slaughter, as Jews do, as men have lived since Cain slew Abel. (p.538)

IV. THE NON-JEWISH WORLD

In the previous chapter we have paid attention to the Jew's own image of himself, within the frame of reference of the world at large. We have tried to concentrate on the Jew's conception of what it means to be Jewish.

We have reserved this chapter for the other side of the coin. The question that we will attempt to answer in this portion of our study is: "How do these authors view the non-Jew?" The answer is simple. If the authors of our novels are an indication of the attitude of the majority of American Jews toward their Christian neighbors, we can safely say that, for the most part, they regard them with disdain, hatred and fear. There are exceptions, of course, which shall be noted.

What is it about gentiles that makes Jews so frightened? We are offered many answers.

The most obvious answer is anti-Semitism. Jews have had a long history of suffering at the hands of "Christian neighbors". Rarely does enough time elapse between outbreaks of anti-Semitism in the world to allow Jews to feel genuine comfort in a non-Jewish milieu. Even if one area is relatively free from overt anti-Semitism, the pernicious problem seems to appear in another area.

Another reason for the discomfort that Jews feel living in a non-Jewish world is the fact that, in every society in the Diaspora, the identifying Jew, and indeed even the non-identifying Jew, is part of a marginal culture.

In every novel of this study there is reference to the Jew as a marginal person. Every novel bares some degree of anti-Semitism.

Laura Z. Hobson's Gentleman's Agreement and Jerome Weidman's The Enemy Camp were published over a decade apart. The former was published in 1947, the latter in 1958. Though they are both rather pedestrian novels the two show a rather interesting evolution in Jewish attitudes with respect to gentiles.

Gentleman's Agreement was published right after World War II. Its thesis is that there are many kinds of anti-Semitism. The most honest kind is the direct approach which restricted Jews from ownership of property in certain covenant protected areas, that restricted certain hotels, resorts and apartment houses to the exclusive use of white Christians.

The subtler levels of anti-Semitism consist of people who are lip-service liberals, giving tacit approval to these practices, while protesting them in the privacy of their homes and in their own liberal circles. Mrs. Hobson also tells us something that we have known for a long time: that there are even anti-Semitic Jews, those who refuse to identify themselves with the more obvious, "vulgar and

overdressed...ill-bred types." (pp.242-3)

Laura Hobson managed to solve all the anti-Semitic problems of the world by shaming the overt anti-Semites and bringing the few subtle ones to the light of truth.

Jerome Weidman, on the other hand, sees the Jewish problem in an entirely different light. His hero, George Hurst, is a shallow, intermarried, New York accountant, living in suburbia. He is successful and his marriage is happy. He is haunted, however, by an irrational fear and hatred of "shkutzim" (gentiles), which is the product of his East Side upbringing. This fear was learned from his ugly Aunt Tessie who salvaged him from an orphanage and raised him in two rooms behind her tailor shop on the ground floor of an East Side tenement.

The problem is verbalized and a solution offered early in the novel. His uncle is describing Aunt Tessie:

> Nobody knows better than Zisha Hurst how afraid his sister Tessie is...She's afraid of the world. She's afraid of people. She hides there in those two rooms on Fourth Street. That's why she never comes here to Albany, to visit her own brother. That's why she hates your friend Danny for going with the shkutzim. She's afraid to come out of her hole and look at the rest of America. She's afraid to go near people except they're exactly like she is... Don't be afraid of the world. Don't be afraid of people. And you'll grow up to be like Judge Brandeis! (p.162)

The two novels represent two extremes. For Laura Hobson the country is full of anti-Semites. Salvation can come only when the establishment does something about it. It can come only when the wealthy welcome Jews into their clubs, and as neighbors in Darien.

Weidman's salvation comes when the Jews stop their irrational fear and hatred of the enemy, who are really gentle, broadminded people like George Hurst's Bennington-educated wife.

These two novels are graceless and direct. Somewhere in the middle lies the sentiment of the bulk of the authors.

The major conclusion that we find in all our reading is that anti-Semitism and marginality do place the Jew in an uncomfortable position in society. There seems to be no logical or systematic way of dealing with it.

Joining the other side does no good. Richard Amsterdam tried it in Remember Me to God and in the long run he was spurned and discarded. Yakov Bok tried to live in the Christian world of Tzarist Russia and was punished and brutalized for it.

Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead gives us a rather clear picture of what it means to be a Jew in a society that is not Jewish. The entire action of the novel, except for flashbacks, takes place in the South Pacific during World War II. The story centers on a platoon of men, two of the members of which are Jewish.

One of the Jewish men, Roth, is gentle and weak. The second, Goldstein, is stronger, but only adequate. Throughout the course of the action that they face with their platoon they remain marginal. Everyone in the platoon is, to some extent, marginal. The platoon, microcosmic model of society that it is, is an assortment of

individuals. Roth and Goldstein, however, are a bit farther apart from the rest. Occasionally they work their way into the affection of some of their comrades, but mostly they are outsiders.

When members of his platoon are sharing some contraband liquor that was manufactured in the jungle, Joey Goldstein cautiously declines their offers of comradeship. He yearns to join them, to be one of the boys, but he suspects that the liquor might be impure and make him sick.

Roth is a frightened, fragile soldier. His weakness is a source of scorn from the other men. Near the end of the novel, Roth finds a crippled bird. He stops his cutting of bamboo poles on a jungle mountain to pick up the bird, and gently holds it in his hands. The other men, sensing a rare moment of tenderness in the middle of the jungle war, gather around Roth as he cuddles the bird. Croft, the sadistic sergeant, breaks into the circle and snatches the bird from Roth. For a moment Croft holds the bird in his hand, feeling the fragile life that he holds. He is torn by momentary weakness and compassion for the bird, and by his ever-present hunger to kill. After a moment of indecision, he crushes the bird in his hand and hurls it over the side of the mountain, into the valley below.

The bird is an omen. Crushed by dysentery and terror, Roth attempts a leap across a short pass. All of the other men manage the leap without too much trouble. Roth, however, is very weak. He hesitates to jump. He counts

to three but his legs are unable to move at the command of his will. Finally he pushes himself off the ledge and, missing the ledge on the opposite side, Roth, the delicate "Jew-boy" falls to his death below.

Gallagher, the most anti-Semitic of the men, feels remorse for Roth's death. He had encouraged him to jump. He had taunted Roth, hated him for his Jewishness. He was certain that he had killed Roth.

Throughout The Naked and the Dead both of the Jewish soldiers are extremely sensitive to the anti-Semitism that they sense and experience from the fellows. At the same time, the men in the platoon earnestly want to befriend the two Jewish soldiers. Neither side is completely able to give to the other without restraint. Each side has its preconceptions of the other. The gentile regards the Jew as weak, aloof and deviously untrustworthy. The Jew regards the gentile as a hostile stranger, bound to hate and hurt the Jew, despite momentary lapses into kindness and attempted communication.

The gentile's prejudging of the Jew renders Joey Goldstein incapable of proving himself. He shrinks away from Roth because he is unwilling to be labeled with Roth's apparent laziness and weakness, but he is never really able to prove himself. When Wyman, another soldier, drops an anti-tank gun, Goldstein is blamed for the accident. He is constantly identified Jewishly. He struggles to be recognized as a competent soldier. He never succeeds.

Meyer Levin in The Old Bunch traces the lives of a group of Jewish boys and girls, children of first generation Jewish families, growing up in Chicago. In almost a thousand pages he paints a verbal picture of Jewish life from 1921 to 1934.

His conception of the Jew in the Christian milieu is somewhat different from Mailer's a decade later.

"Competition is the breath of life," Levin tells us. "Everyone competes every minute of his life." (p.155) Levin's Jews for the most part do not seek admittance to the gentile society. They are happy to be Jews among Jews. But they nevertheless feel the compelling need to prove themselves. Some of the reasons are obvious. "Out of a couple of hundred premedics, only about fifty would be admitted into medical school." (p.158)

A symbol of all this competition is Sol Meisel. Sol loves bicycle racing and some of the most exciting moments in The Old Bunch are descriptions of these races. Levin seems to make these races an arena of life. Though some of the racers have names, they are more often referred to by their ethnic identifications. They are the polack, the dagos, the Greeks, the micks. Solly is the Jew. When he wins the race it is a Jewish victory, as well as a personal victory for Solly.

For Meyer Levin, the Jews in The Old Bunch confronted the gentile world by competing and succeeding in it. By winning. Unfortunately for Sol, his prowess on the bike wasn't matched with business acumen. The real winners in

The Old Bunch, which ends at the height of the depression, are the competitors who scored financial successes.

What is so interesting about The Old Bunch is the fact that the Jews are portrayed not as strangers in a homogeneous society, but as one group within a diverse culture. Essentially America, which serves as the background for the bulk of our novels, is a composite culture. Yet the Jews in these novels never seem able to differentiate.

In Jews without Money we sample a condensation of the feelings we meet through the pages of many of our novels.

> My mother was opposed to the Italians, Irish, Germans, and every other variety of Christian with whom we were surrounded.
>
> "May eight and eighty black years fall on those goys!" she said, her black eyes flashing. "They live like pigs; they have ruined the world. And they hate and kill Jews. They may seem friendly to us to our faces, but behind our backs they laugh at us..." (p.163)

CONCLUSION

It might seem that this chapter would have been the easiest to write. After all, it deals with the Jew and his life among gentiles. It deals with the way Jews seem to feel about gentiles and the way that Jews perceive the way gentiles feel about Jews.

The obvious conclusions are easy to make. They are not, however, necessarily the pleasant conclusions.

We could learn from Laura Hobson's Gentleman's Agreement that most gentiles dislike Jews, that they would

prefer not to live in the same apartment houses or neighborhoods with Jews, that they would like to exclude them from their country clubs and from important executive positions in their companies.

We might learn from Jerome Weidman's The Enemy Camp that Jews have an irrational hatred for gentiles, that they would prefer to live in different neighborhoods, and to interact with them as rarely as possible.

The conclusion that we draw from our readings is that there is more than a little truth in the theses put forth by Laura Hobson and Jerome Weidman. Though the novels are black and white studies, lacking shading and subtlety, they strikingly mirror that which we see in the works of other novelists.

Nowhere in the novels that we study do we see Jews expecting a true rapprochement with gentiles. Neither do they seem to expect gentiles to want to grow closer to Jews.

What we do see is the Jew hoping to exist in the society--to be comfortably Jewish in America, or elsewhere. He is not alway able to do this.

Mainly, we find the Jew rather the underdog in all of these novels. He is often weak and unable to survive.

A Jewish novelist who senses the impotence of Jews in the greater society must report this in order to be honest. When he does, he is often taken to be self-hating and anti-Semitic.

Norman Mailer offers in The Naked and the Dead Jewish characters who embody this impotence. Joey Goldstein, who is unable to bring his wife to climax, is surrounded by his fellow soldiers boasting of their sexual prowess.

Alexander Portnoy, although a caricature, is another symbol of this impotence. He babbles through the pages of Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint in constant terror of castration. He just doesn't know who wields the knife. Is it his mother? His father? A woman officer in the Israeli Army? Is it the fathers and brothers of the gentile girls he lusts after? Does it really matter?

After two thousand years in the Diaspora, the Jews are still weak strangers. After three hundred years in America, American Jews still see themselves as weak strangers. They have failed to come to terms with the general culture, or so it would seem to our authors.

It seems unjust to accuse an author of self-hate when he reflects this fact in his fiction.

Several years ago, Philip Roth wrote an article in Commentary, defending himself against the cries of "self-hate" that followed the publication of Goodbye, Columbus. In it he stated:

> The chances are that there will always be some people who despise Jews just so long as they are Jews; and of course we must keep an eye on them. But if some Jews are dreaming of a time when they will be accepted by Christians as Christians accept one another--if this is why certain Jewish writers should be silent--it may be that they are dreaming of a time that cannot be, and of a condition that does not exist, this side of one's

dreams. Perhaps even Christians don't accept one another as they are imagined to in that world from which Jews may believe themselves excluded solely because they are Jews. Nor are Christians going to feel toward Jews what one Jew may feel toward another. The upbringing of the alien does not always alert him to the whole range of human connections which exists between the liaisons that arise out of clannishness, and those that arise--or fail to--out of deliberate exclusion. Like those of most men, the lives of the Jews no longer take place in a world that is just landsmen and enemies.*

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*Philip Roth, "Writing about Jews", Commentary, December 1963, pp. 446-452, (p.451).

V. ALIENATION

Up to this point we have dealt with the Jew as a social being. We have seen him in relationships with other men, and in relation to social conditions.

Now we look at the Alienated Jew.

It is first necessary to explain what we mean by alienation. In using the word alienation we refer to the state of disengagement from society. When we refer to the alienated individual we are describing a person, alone and without society.

When we speak of an alienated Jew we are dealing with more than a man coping with the problems of his Jewish identity. Indeed, we have dealt at some length with Jewish identity in a previous chapter. It is, at the same time, possible that an alienated Jew may indeed have problems with his Jewish identity.

The focus of this chapter is Man-alone, Man either having deserted society in quest of his own individuality or Man orbiting society like a spaceship, trying to re-enter the atmosphere without disintegrating, often bouncing back into outer space.

What is it that alienates man from society? It must

be an inability to reconcile his own nature with his conception of society.

Such an alienated Jew is Augie March.

Augie March is a poor, Jewish boy in Chicago. Being such, he is at the outset of the novel alienated from the mainstream of the society in which he dwells. He is not embittered by his alienation. He is just seeking a "good enough fate". (p.28)

Augie's life is a series of adventures, in search of that fate. Since he has no idea of what he is looking for, he tries whatever comes along.

Everyone whom Augie meets in his adventure serves as a mentor or influence. From Grandma Lausch, an aged boarder in the March household, he receives advice to seek social and economic elevation. Unlike his brother Simon, who is determined to succeed, Augie is not interested in conventional success. He does glean from Grandma Lausch her penchant for larceny, which serves him in the years to come, though it often brings Augie to shame and derision.

Augie's adventures constantly reveal him making alliances with people and with the various institutions of society. He doesn't seem to find his fate in either. Whether he throws his hat into the political or commercial ring, Augie finds neither success nor satisfaction. Each of Augie's encounters tries to extract from our hero a commitment to a certain philosophy and/or a certain life style. Augie, however, treasures freedom above commitment, and

cannot accept the conditions of any binding relationship.

Augie's alienation is in the fact that he has placed himself above the harsh realities of the world. The people about him are constantly trying to lure him into their own compromises with the reality that Augie shuns. Throughout the novel Augie remains true to his quest for a suitable fate.

Throughout his saga, Augie remains an innocent. His brother Simon tries to lure him to materialism, but he sees materialism as a force that is destroying Simon. Thea Francel, whom he loves, tries to share her idyllic life with Augie in Mexico. But life with Thea in Mexico is sordid and violent. Augie is too rigidly humanitarian to adapt to these life-styles.

Throughout the novel, Augie remains the same and the world remains the same. Augie returns from Mexico to Chicago, still the free humanity that he was when he started off on his adventures. He finds the people that he left in Chicago unchanged. Still committed to materialism and larceny, they look upon the free Augie as a failure.

He visits his mother, who has been incarcerated in an old-age home. Simon, now wealthy, has luxuriously furnished his mother's room. But Augie sees the room as a cage, and the draperies and carpeting as "softenings of a cage." His mother asks about his plans:

"What are you going to do?" she said.

"Oh--something. I hope something interesting."

"What? Do you make a living, Augie?"

"Well, here I am. What do you mean, Ma? I am living." (p.422)

Although at the end of the adventure we find that he has accepted, at least superficially, some of the trappings of the conventional life which he scorned, Augie remains a hoping rebel. He says:

> Death is going to take the boundaries away from us, that we should no more be persons. That's what death is about. When that is what life also wants to be about, how can you feel except rebellious? (p.519)

Augie's life in conventional eyes might appear to have been an unqualified failure. Commitments to norms seem to be the conventional standard of judgment. But in Augie's eyes his alienated life is a success.

> What's so laughable, that a Jacqueline, for instance, as hard used as that by rough forces, will still refuse to lead a disappointed life? Or is the laugh at nature--including eternity--that it thinks it can win over us and the power of hope? Nah, nah! I think. It never will. But that probably is the joke, on one or the other, and laughing is an enigma that includes both. Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am sort of a Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe that you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America. (p.536)

What we learn from The Adventures of Augie March is that alienation is not necessarily a stigmatized, painful state. It may well be preferable to the compromises that are forced upon us by commitment.

Saul Bellow is the master painter of the alienated Jew. Augie March is a lovable, innocent picaro. Moses Herzog is another type of man. Augie's alienation makes him a blithe spirit. Herzog's brings him pain. Unlike Augie's alienation, which was his birthright as a son of a poor, blind, deserted Jewess, Herzog's is the product of his encounter with humanity.

Herzog had all the qualifications for contentment and integration. He was a successful professor and writer, a scholar with a wife and daughter, and a son by a previous marriage. But his life falls apart. He is cuckolded by his second wife, who divorces him to have a love affair with his best friend. Both of his children are in the custody of his estranged wives. He feels that no one understands him. He has no meaningful relationships with anyone. Even his mistress is not capable of eliciting commitment from Herzog, because he feels he cannot trust any woman after the treatment that he received from his second wife, Madeleine. He has every reason to suspect women, as his slavish devotion to Madeleine's every whim was the source of his destruction.

Having reached bottom, Herzog's quest is to find a condition whereby he can reenter his relationship with reality. What he seeks is a philosophy to live by. Like a husband during trial separations, Herzog tries to reestablish his communication with reality through endless letter writing. He writes to almost everyone. He even

writes to God and to people long dead.

Herzog's dilemma seems to be in finding what is meaningful for man in the light of finite reality. Whereas Augie March seemed to find his strength in himself, willing to the end to be a rebel, Herzog seems to be continually looking for a synthesis of self and society. He rejects the glamour of Augie's alienation, of Augie's almost entire reliance on self. He takes his few cautious steps to reintegration by reestablishing relationships, and affirming through love, friendship, and memories of the past, that there is a ground on which man can stand while seeking a cure for the aloneness of self.

Alienation is not a state peculiar to the heroes of Saul Bellow's novels. To some extent it is the state in which many of our heroes find themselves. Frank Alpine is an alienated human being, who reestablished his relationship to the universal by adopting Jewishness as his own. Yakov Bok is alone and naked in his ordeal, alienated, even physically, from any compass points of reentry. What he lacks in proximity, he compensates for in self. But Yakov Bok's self is a Jewish self. It is his Jewishness that gives meaning to his aloneness, and paves the road for his reestablishing ties with reality.

Gabe Wallach, the hero of Philip Roth's Letting Go, is a most alienated man. The entire novel is a saga of attempting to relate to his world and its realities in the most fundamental of ways.

Gabe is unable to reach anyone. His life is a series of impulsive sexual advances to other people's wives, of love affairs without commitment, of impossible gaps between his father and himself, and destructive heroics. At the end of the novel we find him no closer to reconciliation than the realization that it is necessary for him to look within himself for a way back. He writes a response to an invitation from Libby Herz, to Rachel Herz's first birthday party. Rachel is an adopted child. Gabe played a part in Rachel's adoption and was almost responsible for the Herzes losing her.

> The rain has slackened and I must go. I don't believe that for you and me to correspond on this matter or others, would be beneficial to either of us. But, of course, you are the one who knows that. I take it now that this was why you thought to have your card say nothing, just the time and place of the event, and its nature. Thank you. It is only kind of you, Libby, to feel that I would want to know that I am off the hook. But I'm not, I can't be, I don't even want to be--not until I make some sense of the larger hook I'm on.
>
> Yours,
> Gabe (p.628)

CONCLUSION

Augie March says that "everyone tries to create a world that he can live in...but the real world is already created." (p.378)

Such is the dilemma of the alienated man, and indeed the alienated Jew. When a man is unable to fit himself into the reality of the world, then he is disengaged from it. His options are several. He can retreat entirely into himself, spurn the world and, perhaps, even find a life of

worth in his total involvement in self. He can remake himself, compromising to fit into reality. He can strive and hope to find an overview of life and reality, and thus accommodate the two realities--the reality of self and the reality of the world.

Most likely, he must do a bit of all the above. The words that we use to describe the return of the alienated man--"accommodation" and "coming to terms with", among others--are words of compromise.

What the alienated man must admit is that there is, there must be, something worthwhile in life itself, and life is a state that is passed on and continued through the medium of the social animal.

All of our heroes affirm the need to live, and approach some degree of reconciliation through this affirmation.

What man is unable to come to terms with for himself may well be the task of his children. His accommodations may be incomplete or tenuous, but there is always hope that he may achieve it better through the life that comes after.

Alienation is not necessarily a morose state. It may well be an impetus for life. Augie tells us near the end of his adventures:

> At any time life can come together again and man can be regenerated...the man himself, finite and taped as he is, can still come where the axial lines are. He will be brought into focus. He will live life

with true joy. Even his pains will be joy if they are true, even his helplessness will not take away his power, even the wandering will not take him away from himself, even the big social jokes and hoaxes will not make him ridiculous, even disappointment after disappointment will not take away his love. Death will not be terrible to him if life is not. (pp.450-455)

VI. THE JEWISH QUEST

CONCLUSION

The several dozen novels made use of in this study are Jewish novels. They are the novels of Jewish writers about Jews. It is fitting, therefore, that we should attempt to glean from them some overview of the Jew and what these authors perceive to be the objects of the Jewish search, the products of the Jewish experience.

This quest, I believe, is to understand the role of the Jew in the world, in order for each Jew to understand his own role.

For some, if not most, the role of the Jew is simply to suffer. The role is to be at the center of moral crises, the sacrificial lamb in the rite of purification.

We find this role repeated time and time again in our works. It is a role that the Jews come by naturally in their wanderings in the Diaspora.

In Remember Me to God, Rabbi Budapester asserts that the Jew constantly finds himself at the "center of the human stage". (p.539) He points to the deification of Jesus as the greatest moralizing force in the history of the world,

and the rise of Hitler as the greatest force of evil in the world, and asks if there is any wonder that the Jew is in the center of both revolutions.

Even without seeking the particularistic characterization of the "chosen people," we seem to find that the Jews identify themselves as a special people with a special experience.

Homeless, always the strange minority in the lands that he inhabits, the Jew has been singled out, time and again, as a focus for the turmoils of the world. Rabbi Budapester wants Richard to acknowledge the special role of the Jew in the world.

> At times it seems to me that humankind is like a body, and the nations the limbs, while the Jews are the blood of humankind, circulating about, a vital part of every limb, yet conveying nourishment from one part to another. And of course, when the body is sick, it's bled, there's some bleeding, which is to say that Jews die. We are the Lamb of God, Richard, the blood and barometer of humankind. I can assure you that Jesus was neither the first Jew nor the last to die for the ills of the human species. (p.539)

This is an idea which is expressed continually in our readings. Poverty was not the exclusive fate of the Jews, but in Jews without Money, Michael Gold found poverty his Jewish birthright:

> Mother! Momma! I am still bound to you by the cords of birth. I cannot forget you. I must remain faithful to the poor because I cannot be faithless to you! I believe in the poor because I have known you. The world must be made gracious for the poor! Momma, you taught me that! (p.158)

One of the roles that we find Jews constantly taking for themselves is preserver of that which is Jewish. I have avoided using the term Judaism because Judaism itself is not always what seems the ultimate issue in being Jewish. For many it is the cultural-racial continuity of being Jewish that needs protecting. For others it is simply Jewish particularistic identity.

Seeing himself in the light of the greater, non-Jewish world, the Jew becomes intensely aware of what it means to be Jewish. Definitions that at times are confining become relaxed. In Charles Angoff's Journey to the Dawn the Polonsky family came to America, together with their landsleit, with very definite ideas of what a Jew was. A Jew was a bearded, pious man, who never worked on the Sabbath and never ate forbidden foods. This was the definition that the immigrant Russian Jews brought with them from the Shtetle (the rural Jewish villages of Russia). As time went on they broadened their definitions. They forgave the Jews who wandered from the rigid confines that had defined Jews in the old country. This is manifested in a conversation between young David and his school friends. They are discussing gentiles:

> ...But they are different. You can see it in their faces, in the way they walk, the way they laugh. When they laugh you feel that they are not really enjoying themselves. When a Jew laughs, you know that he's really happy.
>
> Well, I don't know, said Moses. I mean about what you said, Frank, that you can tell a goy from his looks and the way he walks and things like that. Did you ever go to Temple Israel?

> Yes, answered Frank.
>
> Well, didn't you see a lot of men and women come in and go out that looked like Christians, yet they were Jews?
>
> But they're Reform Jews, said Frank.
>
> That makes no difference. Jews are Jews, said Moses. My father says that if you show a piece of herring and a baigel to a Reform Jew he will grab it as quickly as an orthodox Jew. Sure, Jews are Jews, and taking off a hat in a synagogue doesn't change anything very much. (pp.238-239)

Throughout the novel, and in Angoff's subsequent novels, the definition of the Jew is flexible for the principal characters. However, although his surrounding, his livelihood, his values may change, the Jew somehow manages to remain a Jew.

This is one of the characterizations that we find in many of our novels. The elastic boundaries of Jewishness. Whatever disguise the Jew tries, he remains basically the same. He is not a person with a different identity. He is a Jew in disguise. To David Polonsky's family in Journey to the Dawn, a "Reform Jew is like a child who covers his head with a quilt to ward off the thunder and lightning. Reform Jews can't fool people and, of course, they can't fool God." (p.239)

Naturally, all of our authors cannot handle the idea of Jewish identity with Angoff's casual ease. For Ludwig Lewisohn in The Island Within Arthur Levy's identity is a rigidly structured commitment to being Jewish. He could accept no compromise, no social commitments to the outside world that would inhibit his becoming a full-time Jew.

In Bernard Malamud's The Assistant, the universality of the Jewish condition seems to be personified in Frank Alpine, who by virtue of his own suffering and alienation becomes first a vicarious Jew and finally a circumcised, converted Jew.

On the whole, however, we find the Jewish experience not a shared experience in our novels. It is particularly the experience of the birthright Jew. Just as Richard Amsterdam is excluded from the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant world he longs to join so we find, with very few exceptions, "restricted" signs guarding the portals to the Jewish experience as it is viewed by our authors.

The Jew, in all of our novels, seems to be driven by one desire. This is the desire to survive. Whatever the work, survival is, ultimately, the final need, the final goal.

Who or what is to survive, and how this survival is to be achieved is the variable in all of the works. For some the survival is individual survival: emotional, personal, physical, or intellectual. For others it is the survival of the Jews as a group.

The means of survival, the ways to survive, are as diversified as the number of authors we read.

The individual Jew is offered every variety of social and psychological therapy. The Jewish People is offered a variety of therapeutic regimens as well. We have alluded to these in previous chapters.

Finally, we must answer the question which is implied in the title of this thesis. Is the Jew a paradigmatic representation of humanity?

The answer, I believe, is an elusive "Yes and No!"

Certainly the poor Jew suffers like the poor gentile. Certainly the wounded Jew bleeds in a like manner to the wounded gentile. Certainly the disturbed and disconnected Jew clutches at the same straws of hope as his non-Jewish counterparts. Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, and Myron Kaufmann at the times that they wrote The Naked and the Dead, The Assistant, and Remember Me to God, respectively, regarded the Jewish experience, in part, as the intensified human experience. Likewise, in the works of other authors there are lines, paragraphs and pages which, when taken in their small context, might lead us to conclude that the Jew does serve as human paradigm.

But, in fairness to what seems to be the general mood and tenor of the intentions of the authors, the Jewish experience, we must conclude, is rather a unique experience of the Jew. Although the conditions encountered in our novels are conditions that gentiles might similarly encounter, we do not find that the Jewish encounter is the signal encounter for humanity.

During the Nazi holocaust, millions of gypsies, homosexuals, prostitutes and political prisoners from practically every country in Europe were slaughtered along with the six million Jews. In the thousands of volumes written

by Jews and regarding Jewish victims, little mention is made of the other victims, except in passing.

The extermination of six million Jews, probably the most dramatic and infamous of all the chapters of the Jewish experience, was after all a Jewish experience.

The Jew in our novels lives his life and copes with his world as a Jew. However flexible our authors may make the definitive boundaries of the terms "Jew" and "Jewish," the Jew in our novels lives, primarily, a Jewish life, and encounters a predominantly Jewish experience.

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