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VIOLENT INTRUDER

A Study of the Ironic Identifications and Fusions In Isaac Babel's Works

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1973

Referee, Prof. Bargad

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DIGEST

The life of Isaac Babel is a study in contrasts. A Jew, he rode with the Cossacks during the Russian Civil War. A man who claimed great devotion to his family, he nevertheless exiled himself from them in order to write. A gregarious man, he delighted in mystifying his friends.

Babel's works capture his love of contrasts. In his stories, flesh and spirit, sacred and profane, victor and victim, individual and community, action and motive are identified, fused, combined and juxtaposed in such a way as to constantly create ironies and ambiguities.

This thesis examines the ironic identifications which Babel, in his three cycles, creates. In Tales of Odessa, the central point of identification and fusion is the relationship between the individual and the community. The Jewish community of Odessa unites under the kingship of Benya Krik. Benya appears to be the fabled hero through whose fabled exploits the community is protected and through whom the community vicariously lives. Babel elevates and identifies both Benya and the community only to expose the satire implicit in the comic, the bestial instincts which motivate Benya and the community as a whole.

In Red Cavalry, the narrator himself is a man of mysterious ambiguities who chooses at first only to illuminate the characters which dwell in the unfamiliar world he views. Ironically, these same characters with whom the narrator

identifies impel and call upon the narrator to justify and through the complexity of his own life.

Finally, in Tales of Childhood and Coming of Age, the narrator identifies not with other characters as heroes. Rather, seeking to reconcile his own wants and longings with the demands of others, he contracts with them to create a surrogate self which will reconcile these wants and demands. Yet these surrogate selves with which the narrator identifies are themselves destroyed, forcing the narrator again to confront the reality of his own life.

Behind all of Babel's works, there exists a vision of man as an animal who flees from the complexity of his own existence. Babel calls upon the reader not to flee but to confront the ironic fusions which are the hallmark of life, and, through celebration of these complexities transform them into art, poetry, song.

Foreward

Isaac Emanuel Babel was born in Odessa in 1894. His sole autobiographical statement, published thirty years later, is such a collection of exagerations and outright lies as to be virtually useless for biographers.

His diaries and manuscripts, kept during the Polish campaign of 1920 are mostly lost. Only fragments survive.

His letters to his emigré mother, sister and wife, written between 1924 and 1939, reveal a man passionately concerned with the well-being of his family. Conscious of censorship, however, he reveals in them little of his own life.

Those memoirs of Babel which exist are seriously flawed by the political biases of those who remember. All agree that Babel was a man who enjoyed the companionship of others but who equally enjoyed mystifying them with impossible stories.

Babel's stories purport to be autobiographical. Yet many of the events in them are contradicted by his daughter. Unfortunately, she knew Isaac Babel only briefly, and only as a child.

Isaac Babel was arrested in 1939. All the manuscripts discovered with him were simultaneously destroued by the Stalinist regime. He died sometime afterwards at a date, manner, and place equally unknown.

Between 1922 and 1932 Babel published over sixty stories,

which are divided into three cycles: Tales of Odessa, Red Cavalry and Tales of Childhood and Coming of Age.

Hence, of the life of Isaac Babel, only dates, many of which are in dispute, survive. The only legacy of his personality resides in his art.

Chapter One: The Odessa Stories
Identification of "Hero" with Community

The Odessa Stories, Babel's first mature work following his return from Budenny's Cavalry in 1921, first appeared as a whole in 1924. Because its publication tended to overlap in part the publication of individual stories from his later, more famous work Red Cavalry, The Odessa Stories have tended to be obscured by Babel's second work.

Indeed the two share one primary feature in common. Both are written in the genre of a cycle. In a cycle the writer is free to create each story as an artistic unit yet at the same time the units are thematically interlinked to form a whole. Babel, working in this fashion, not only satisfied his aesthetic belief that even extended fiction should be written in units short enough to be read in a single sitting, but also satisfied another equally basic need of his. Babel was always short of money, and the appearance of each story individually in a newspaper or literary magazine earned him enough income to survive.

Yet if The Odessa Stories are themselves linked in terms of genre to Babel's later works, much more sets The Odessa Stories apart as unique. First of all there is the setting: Odessa of pre-Revolutionary Russia.

The Odessa of Babel's youth was in itself the scene of a rapidly growing and changing population due to the increase in industrialization and commerce. Into it flowed Greeks,

Poles, English, French, and Hungarians, giving the city a highly cosmopolitan flavor. Yet the largest minority in the city were Jews, drawn to Odessa by a combination of the May Laws which restricted Jewish settling in rural areas, and economic advantage as well. The Jews of Odessa were a far cry from the Jews Babel was later to encounter in Poland. Far from being weak and powerless, their community was vibrant and strong. As Lionel Trilling writes of the Odessa of Babel's youth:

> all classes of the Jewish community seem to have been linked by a singular robustness and vitality, by a sense of the world and themselves in the world...

Babel underscores the significance of Odessa itself in a variety of ways. First Babel seems to have deliberately chosen scenes and settings -- weddings, funerals, pogroms -- scenes in which expanded vistas and large portions of the population fuse to form a kind of corporate personality. Moreover, Babel throughout much of The Odessa Stories employs a sophisticated narrative technique, erlebte rede, or "combined discourse" in rendering Odessa. The narrator remains anonymous, and, if not omniscient, is at least extremely well informed. Indeed his descriptions of events seems to be articulated in what might be the very thoughts of a central character. The general effect is to maintain a sense of the totality of the whole, while simultaneously creating the illusion of viewing things through the eyes of a single character. In such a fashion the distance between narrator, characters and setting seems drastically foreshortened:

> At the wedding feast they served turkey, roast chicken, goose stuffed fish, fish soup on which lakes of lemon gleamed nacreously. Over the heads of defunct geese, flowers swayed like luxuriant plumages. But does the foamy surge of the Odessa sea cast roast chicken on the shore?
>
> All that is noble in our smuggled goods, everything for which the land is famed from end to end, did, on that starry that deep-blue night its entrancing and disruptive work.

If Babel, through the erlebte rede technique, creates an implicit analogy and identification between setting and characters, he also elevates the characters into the heroic in more explicit fashion. He crafts enticing descriptions for them: Lyubka the Cossack, "Jew-and-a-half", "One-Eyed Rook". Moreover, in searching for similies, Babel chooses ones which reinforce the individual relationship to the entire Jewish community by invoking those symbols which bind the individual to the whole. Hence Reisl, the queen of cooks and dishwashers is not simply portrayed as "humpbacked", she is "tiny and humpbacked, as patinated with tradition as a roll of the Torah". Each of these characters knows each other well, so well that virtually no phrases of introduction are needed.

Above all the other characters, however, towers the figure of Benya Krik, the gangster-king of the Jewish community of Odessa. It is his heroic exploits in marrying off his sister, in dealing with the police, in executing outlandish holdups which The Odessa Stories largely recount.

Benya has achieved his eminence because his qualifications are four-fold. First of all, Benya is qualified because of his passion for experience. As Reb Arye-Leib, the spiritual

leader of the Odessa community exclaims:

> You are a tiger, you are a lion, you are a cat. You can spend the night with a Russian woman, and satisfy her. You are twenty-five. If rings were fastened to heaven and earth, you would grasp them and draw heaven and earth together.

Passion alone, however, is not Benya's sole attribute. Not only does Benya feel; Benya knows. At the wedding of Benya's sister, Benya is informed that the police are that day planning a raid; but Benya is undisturbed. He knows and has already taken the protective action of ordering the police station burned down.

Thirdly, Benya is King because he protects not only himself, but also the interest of the Jewish community at large. In the middle of a pogrom, Benya stages a mock funeral for his arch-rival-victim Tartakovsky (alias Jew-and-a-Half). At the last moment, machine guns emerge from the coffin, and the pogrom is broken up.

Finally, Benya is King because he articulates the sentiments of the entire community and seems to try at all cost to refrain from unnecessary violence, a cardinal sin in the community code. Planning a raid against Eichbaum, Benya first drops him a note:

> "Monsieur Eichbaum," he had written, "have the goodness to deposit, tomorrow morning, in the entrance to No. 17 Sofievskaya Street, the sum of twenty thousand Roubles. If you fail to comply with this request, something unheard of will happen to you, and you will be the talk of Odessa. Yours respectfully, Benya the King.

Even when his warning is ignored, Benya maintains a sense of concern not only for his victims but the general

welfare as well:

> On the blood-flooded ground, the torches bloomed like roses of fire. Shots rang out. With these shots Benya scared away the dairy maids who had come hurrying to the cowshed. After him the other bandits began firing in the air. (If you don't fire in the air you may kill someone.) And now, when the sixth cow had fallen, mooing her death-moo, at the feet of the King into the courtyard in his underclothes galloped Eichbaum, asking:
>
> "What good will this do you, Benya?"
>
> "If I don't have my money, Monsieur Eichbaum, you wont have your cows. It's as simple as that."
>
> "Come indoors, Benya."
>
> And indoors they came to terms.

Moreover, when by accident someone is killed in one of his raids, Benya not only provides a lifetime pension for the victim's mother, but also stages the funeral for his victim. In his eulogy, Benya is able to perceive and articulate the 'true meaning' of the accident. Murmerstein, the slain Jew, is actually a victim of the Class Struggle. He died for the entire Working Class.

The upshot of all this is to elevate Benya Krik into a kind of comic folk hero. To him the fortunes of all the other characters, no matter how great, are dependent. Yet, because Benya protects his people against the common gentile foe who through pogrom and raid would destroy them all, any tensions which might exist within the group itself are either insignificant or unavoidable.

Perhaps. But then again, perhaps not. For against the story, "The King", Babel appends an ending which suddenly changes both the tone and the point of view.

> When Benya got home the little lamps in the courtyard were flickering out, and dawn was be-

> ginning to touch the sky. The guests had departed and the musicians were dozing, leaning their heads on their double basses. Deborah alone was not thinking of sleep. With both hands she was urging her fainthearted husband toward the door of their nuptial chamber, glaring at him carnivorously. Like a cat she was, that holding a mouse in her jaws tests it gently with her teeth.

Hence, with the wedding guests departed, the comic and the epic cease, if only for a moment, to brush shoulders to reveal instead another, more violent, truth -- the animal truth of the flesh.

And the reader realizes that he has been tricked. Accepting the comic-epic structure as true, he has failed to perceive the satire implicit in The Odessa Stories. He has only seen humor, not brutal manipulation, in the marriage of Deborah Krik, "a virgin of forty summers, distorted by her illness with her swollen crop and her eyes bulging from their orbits," to an unwilling husband. Similarly Benya's pious obedience to a common code and sentiments of mutual victimization have been taken at face value, rather than seen as the easiest expedient for a professional gangster. The reader sees and knows that he himself has been seduced by an atmosphere of enforced communality and gaiety. But the characters in The Odessa Stories , who seem to know everything, in reality never confront the extent to which Benya symbolizes not only their power but their plight.

In conclusion, Babel fuses and identifies in The Odessa Stories the fate of the entire Jewish community with each other and subsumes them under the figure of Benya Krik. He does this in a variety of ways: through choice of narrative

technique, scenes, and description of characters. All of these reinforce in the reader's mind the central theme that the fate of the individual is ineluctably bound up with the whole.

Babel moreover elevates both character and setting, creating the atmosphere of a comic-epic, seducing the reader into accepting the norms and actions of the community without question. Babel elevates only at the last minute to show the reader the satire implicit in the comic. The fusion and identification of the individual with the community becomes an ironic indictment of the blindness which binds the Odessa Jews under Benya Krik.

Chapter Two: Red Cavalry
Identification of Narrator with Hero

Red Cavalry, Babel's second major work, was published as a whole in 1926. Simon Budenny, the commander of the First Cavalry, to which Babel had been attached, denounced it even before its publication as a work of lies and artistic decadence. Maxim Gorki, Babel's lifelong friend and protector, was forced to defend Babel from these accusations in order to ensure its publication.

Red Cavalry consists of thirty-six stories, arranged thematically rather than chronologically. The narrator in his Odyssey with Budenny's Cavalry finds heroes in all the groups he encounters: Poles, Jews, and Cossacks. Each of the heroes has been cited by the group of his origin as a victim -- of heresy, exile, or disease. Yet ironically, each of the narrator's heroes is able to transform his victimization into a kind of "fortunate fall", and, through his art, poetry, and song, become the true embodiment of the qualities his group claims to represent. Hence, Pan Apolek, the hero the narrator finds among the Poles, is a visionary artist dwelling amid a land of material and spiritual decay. Finally, sequentially, the stories of the Red Cavalry are arranged in such a way that each hero embodies, at least in part, the dominant characteristics of the next group the narrator is to encounter. For example, Pan Apolek is paired with the narrator's experiences in Zhitomir, next to whose

inhabitants all share political although not artistic visions. Hence, through a process of identification with others and internal discovery, the narrator learns to confront and accept within himself conflicting characteristics, so that in turn he ceases to need acceptance from others.

"Crossing Into Poland", the first story in the Red Cavalry cycle, marks the beginning of this process:

> The Commander of the VI Division reported: Novograd-Volynsk was taken at dawn today. The Staff had left Krapivno, and our baggage train was spread out in a noisy rearguard over the highroad from Brest to Warsaw built by Nicholas I upon the bones of peasants.
>
> Fields flowered around us, crimson with poppies; a noontide breeze played on the yellowing rye; on the horizon virginal buckwheat rose like the wall of a distant monestary. The Volyn's peaceful stream moved away from us in sinuous curves and was lost in the pearly haze of the birch groves; crawling between flowery slopes, it wound weary arms through a wilderness of hops. The orange sun rolled down the sky like a lopped of head, and mild light glowed from the cloud gorges. The standards of the sunset flew above our heads. Into the cool of evening dripped the small of yesterday's blood, of slaughtered horses. The blackened Zbruch roared, twisting itself into foamy knots at the falls. The bridges were down, and we waded across the river. On the waves rested a majestic moon. The horses were in to the cruppers, and the noisy current gurgled among hundreds of horses' legs. Somebody sank, loudly defaming the Mother of God. The river was dotted with the square black patches of the wagons, and was full of confused sounds, of whistling and singing, that rose above the gleaming hollows, the serpentine trails of the moon.
>
> Far on in the night we reached Novograd. In the house where I was billeted I found a pregnant woman and two red-haired scraggy necked Jews. A third, huddled to the wall with his head covered up, was already asleep. In the room I was goven I discovered turned-out wardrobes, scraps of women's fur coats on the floor, human filth, fragments of the occult crockery the Jews use only once a year, at Eastertime.
>
> "Clear this up," I said to the woman. "What a filthy way to live!" The two Jews rose from their

places and, hopping on their felt soles, cleared the mess from the floor. They skipped about noiselessly, monkey-fashion, like Japs in a circus act, their necks swelling and twisting. They put down for me a feather bed that had been disemboweled, and I lay down by the wall next to the third Jew, the one who was asleep. Faint-hearted poverty closed in over my couch.

Silence overcame all. Only the moon, clasping in her blue hands her round, bright, carefree face, wandered like a vagrant outside the window.

I kneaded my numbed legs and, lying on the ripped open mattress, fell asleep.And in my sleep the Commander of the VI Division appeared to me; he was pursuing the Brigade Commander on a heavy stallion, firing at him twice between the eyes. The bullets pierced the Brigade Commander's head and both his eyes dropped to the ground. "Why did you turn back the brigade?" shouted Savitsky, the Divisional Commander, to the wounded man -- and here I woke up, for the pregnant woman was groping over my face with her fingers.

"Good sir" she said, "you're calling out in your sleep and you're tossing to and fro. I'll make you a bed in another corner, for you're pushing my father about."

She raised her thin legs and rounded belly from the floor and removed the blanket from the sleeper. Lying on his back was an old man, a dead old man. His throat had been torn out and his face cleft in two; in his beard blue blood was clotted like a lump of lead.

"Good sir," said the Jewess, shaking up the feather bed, "the Poles cut his throat, and he begged them: 'Kill me in the yard so that my daughter shan't see me die.' But they did as suited them. He passed away in this room, thinking of me. And now I should wish to know," cried the woman with sudden and terrible violence, "I should wish to know where in the whole world you could find another father like my father?"

"Crossing into Poland" in many respects functions as a kind of visa into Babel's second work. The sense of extraordinary terseness, a quality found in "Crossing into Poland", is reflective of the entire work. Time and event, narration and action, all have been fused unto just over two pages. To create this feeling of a densely constructed

yet flowing present all superfluous words, even conjunctions, have been sacrificed. Hence, any phrase which, however slightly, impinges upon this sense of "here and now," the bones of peasants," the "occult crockery used by the Jews once a year" is rendered significant by the sheer fact of its inclusion.

Present too is Babel's use of bizarre imagery and metaphor. The bucjwhear rises "like the wall of a distant monestery," the orange sun reels "like a lopped off head" while moments later the "standards of the sunset fly." All these images reinforce in the reader's mind the feeling that within the work the normal seperation between natural and supernatural event has disappeared so that the two seem to have been forged into "foamy knots."

This then is the outline the reader is told at the border of Red Cavalry to expect in Babel's world In it the grotesque and the banal, the tranquil and the violent, the beautiful and the ugly are all intrinsically and artisticly interlinked. Characters, places, events, rise and fall only to resurface paragraphs or even stories later.

Yet central to any Babel story in Red Cavalry is the narrator. It is through his eyes, and his eyes alone, that the reader gains a world-view. Like the narrator of the Odessa Stories, the narrator of Red Cavalry is first encountered as an anonymous I. This anonymity mitigates against the development of any sense of intimacy between narrator and reader. As long as he remains with the troops crossing into Poland he seems disembodied. He identifies so strongly with the words

of the Commander that he reports his words without comment. Only at nightfall does he express longings, wants, or needs of his own. Entering the village of Novograd, he articulates his needs brusquely and shows no sense of empathy with the victimized. Hence, the narrator seems conflicted between a desire to identify and participate with the others and a desire to turn his back away.

This essential conflict re-emerges in the dream sequence of "Crossing into Poland." The reader discovers that even the narrator's dreams are staged on a battlefield where sides are drawn on the issue of which part of himself will go forward and which part will turn away. The reader knows what the pregnant woman does not: that the narrator speaks in the voice of Savitsky, hero and victor, who would force the brigade onwards. Yet the reader also learns what the narrator wakes to see: that through protest -- "He passed away in this room, thinking of me" -- the victim as well as the victor can rise to heroic proportions. Hence, in "Crossing into Poland," the normal identification of hero with the victor is broken up. The narrator identifies with the world he views in such a way that the experiences he encounters with others ironicly liberates and forces him to justify and comment upon the conflicts which exist within himself as well as in the external world.

Three groups: Poles, Jews, and Cosacks are encountered by the narrator in his Odyssey. Each group is not only different from the next but also mutually antagonistic. In each,

however, the narrator finds a hero who, through the charismatic force of his own character, is able to transform his life, work, and philosophy into an example which transcends the norms of the group to which to belongs.

The first of these heroes is Pan Apolek. Ironicly, the narrator discovers him in the church where he is billeted in Novograd. The church has become associated in the narrator's mind with the decadence of Poland itself. It is occupied not only by Apolek but by Pan Romuald, "a eunuch with a giant's body and a nasal twang," who betrays Budenny's forces. The church and the priest's home also embody these characteristics of feminine betrayal and seductiveness:

> I drank rum with him, The breath of an invisible order of things glimmered beneath the crumbling ruin of the priest's house, and its soothing seduction unmanned me. O crucifixes, tiny as the talismans oflight ladies; parchment of Papal Bulls; satin of feminine letters rotting in the blue silk of waistcoats:

Apolek, however, provides the antidote to the narrator's disgust with the rot of Poland's spiritual and physical decay:

> The wise and beautiful life of Pan Apolek went to my head like an old wine. In Novograd-Volynsk, among the ruins of a town brought swiftly to confusion, fate threw at my feet a gospel that had lain concealed from the world. Haloed with ingenuousness, I then made a vow to follow Pan Apolek's example. And the sweetness of medicated rancor, the bitter scorn I felt for the curs and swine of mankind, the fire of silent and intoxicating revenge -- all this I sacrificed to my new vow.

Apolek is a restless dreamer, an idealist and a visionary. His specialty (and in the eyes of the Church authorities, heresy) is that of creating for the townspeople icons whose features resemble their own. Apolek's popularity with the people

alone saves him from dying a martyr's death. Just as Apolek refuses to hide his art from the world, so too Apolek knows a religious truth he willingly discloses to the narrator. The mystery which Apolek reveals is nothing less than an apochryphal episode in the life of Christ:

> Thus began in the corner smelling of fir trees the story of the marriage of Jesus and Deborah. According to Apolek, this maid had a betrothed, a young Israelite who traded in elephant tusks. But Deborah's bridal night ended in misunderstanding and tears. The woman was overcome by fear when she perceived her husband approaching her couch. A hiccough distended her throat, and she vomited forth all she had eaten at the wedding feast. Shame fell on Deborah, on her father, her mother, and all her kin. Her bridegroom left her, mocking, and summoned all her kin. Then Jesus, seeing the anguish of the woman who thirsted for her husband and at the same time feared him, placed upon Himself the bridegroom's apparal and, full of compassion, was joined with Deborah, who lay in her vomit. Then she went forth to the guests, noisily triumphant, like a woman who prides herself on her fall. And only Jesus stood aloof. A deathly perspiration had broken out on His body; the bee of sorrow had stung his heart. Observed by none, He departed from the banqueting hall and made His way to the wilderness of Judea, where John awaited him. And Deborah bore her first child..."
>
> "Where is he?" I cried.
>
> "He was hidden by the priests," said Apolek importantly...

Apolek's parable as well as his art illustrate his mystic vision of a fusion of the sacred and human, the spirit and the flesh. Just as true sacred art is paradoxically a showing forth of humanity in a spiritual form, so too Divinity shows and proves Himself most by His ability to empathise and identify with the conflicted nature of the human condition. Indeed, Jesus must even taste death in order to transform Deborah's plight into a "Fortunate Fall."

As for the narrator, his acceptance of Apolek's vision of

of the reconciliation of opposites prefigures his own reconciliation with the Jews, from whom he has separated. For although he rides with the Cossacks and had spoken of "the occult crockery the Jews use once a year at Eastertime" as if they were his opposite, the truth is that he himself is a Jew.

> On Sabbath Eves I am oppressed by the dense melancholy of memories. In bygone days on these occasions my grandfather would stroke the volumes of Ibn Ezra with his yellow beard. His old woman in her lace cap would trace fortunes with her knotty fingers over the Sabbath candles and sob softly to herself. On those evenings my child's heart rocked like a little ship upon enchanted waves. O the rotted Talmuds of my childhood! O the dense melancholy of memories.

Three stories, "Gedali," "The Rabbi," and "The Rabbi's Son," form a kind of sub-unit in Red Cavalry through which the autobiographical narrator works through his relationship with the Jewish community. Just as among the Poles the narrator found spiritual and physical decay, so among the Hassidic Jews of Zhitomir one finds a kind of philosophic vacuousness exemplified by the words of Gedali that "All is mortal. Only the mother is destined for immortality." Gedali himself is the owner of a Dickensonian curiosity shop. At first, the narrator's attitude toward him is demanding. Gedali, however, refuses on the grounds that he cannot distinquish between good and bad violence. Gedali's refusal awakens in the narrator not a sense of anger but of wistfulness. Grasping at their common heritage, the only bond that ties them together, the narrator suggests:

> "Gedali," I said, "today is Friday and its already evening. Where are Jewish busquits to be got and a Jewish glass of tea, and a little of that pensioned-off God in a glass of tea?"

But the tea is not to be found. The tavern where once Jews rejoiced is used only for mourning. The story ends:

> He buttoned his green frock coat on three bone buttons, flicked himself with the cock's feathers, sprinkled a little water on his soft palms, and departed, a tiny, lonely visionary in a black top hat, carrying a big prayerbook under his arm.
>
> The Sabbath is coming. Gedali, the founder of an Impossible International has gone to the synagogue to pray.

Hence, the example of Gedali shows the narrator that nostalgia alone cannot suffice to bring about a reconsiliation between himself and his people. The narrator can identify with Gedali's wistful humanity. But the narrator cannot identify and adopt an ethos and lifestyle which so totally divorces dreams from action, and reduces the importance of the present into sentimaental past or future fantsaies.

Moreover, Gedali is not the sole representative of Hassidism which the narrator finds in Zhitomir. At the court of Reb Motale, the last of the Chernopol dynasty, the narrator discovers Gedali's antithesis in the figure of Reb Mordechai, an attendant of the court. Mordechai is a professional schnorrer who lives off sentimentality and idle philosophic speculation. Asling the narrator for a contribution, Mordechai says:

> "My dear and so very young man," muttered Mordechai after me, pulling me by my belt, "if there were no one in the world besides the evil rich and the needy vagabonds, how would the holy ones live?"

Ironically, it is Mordechai who introduces the narrator to a third Jewish type, Elijah, the Rabbi's son:

> And suddenly I caught sight of a youth behind him, a youth with the face of Spinoza, with Spinoza's beautiful brow and the wan face of a nun.

> He was smoking, shuddering like a recaptured prisoner brought back to his cell. The ragged Mordechai crept up to him from behind, snatched the cigarette from his mouth and ran away to me. "That's Elijah, the Rabbi's son," he declared hoarsely, bringing his bloodshot eyelids close to my face. "That's the cursed son, the last son, the unruly son."

The narrator's identification with Elijah as a "captured prisoner" awakens within him a desire to return to Budenny's Cavalry. Elijah and the narrator meet again, however. In the second to the last story, "The Rabbi's Son", the narrator encounters him dying on a battlefield in part of the disastrous end of the Polish campaign:

> He died before we reached Kovno. He -- that last of the Princes -- died among his poetry, phylacteries, and coarse footwrappings. We buried him at some forgotten station. And I, who can scarce contain the tempest of my imagination within this age-old body of mine, I was there beside my brother when he breathed his last.

Just as Apolek combines and reconciles through his life and art the sacred and the profane, so too Elijah is able to reconcile in his philosophy of political action -- poetry, the flights of imagination with footwrappings, the needs of the flesh. This mystic vision finds its antecedents in the phylacteries. Ironically, the narrator finds on the life of Elijah, the last of the Princes, an example to which he himself falls heir.

Hence, through his encounter with Elijah, the narrator is able to reconcile his own role in the Revolution with his past. For indeed he has needed to seek a detente with those alongside him for whom he fights.

Ironically, these revolutionaries are Cossacks, professional killers, who seem the least interested in the vagueries of ideology. Their philosophy of action seems summed up in the advice the quartermaster gives to the narrator upon his arrival in the Cossack camp:

> Nuisance with specs. Can't do anything to stop it either. Not a life for the brainy type here. But you go and mess up a lady too, and you'll have the boys patting you on the back.

Although he styles himself a "violent intruder", the narrator cannot bring himself to "mess up" a lady. He kills her goose, instead, and in doing so wins a measure of acceptance from the Cossacks. Moreover, as the narrator proceeds, he learns, even with spectacles on his nose, to distinguish individual features within the Cossack community -- poets, comedians, dreamers, dandies. The Cossacks' deeds of violence may be terrible indeed. Vasily Kurdyokov pursues his father in return for his father's murder of Vasily's brother. Prischepa kills the neighbors of his own village in return for their having murdered his parents. Ironically, the stark brutality of the Cossacks' deeds are justified in their minds by an absolute committment to the ideal of "justice". Timofey Kurdyokov justifies the murder of his son Theodore, saying:

> "You, your mother's children, you of her root, the slut I got her with child and I'll go on getting her with child, my life is done for, I'll wipe out my seed for the sake of justice."

Yet the hero which the narrator finds in the Cossack community embodies not the attribute of justice, but that of

mercy and gentleness. Apolek had spoken of Christ, Elijah was seen by the narrator as the harbinger of the Messianic Age, but the narrator finds dwelling among the Cossacks a true Christ. Ironically, he is the fulfillment of Apolek's notion of Christhood. Like the Jesus of the Apolek parable, Sandy the Christ awakens to his divinity-humanity through the pleasures of the flesh. Both he and his father contracted venereal disease from the same itinerant peasant woman. Moreover, like Elijah, he separates himself from his father's house and finds employment as the communal herdsman of a village:

> He became renowned through all the neighborhood for his good nature and simplicity, and was called by the Cossacks Sandy the Christ. He served as herdsman right on till conscription came. Foolish old peasantswould come to the pasture to wag their tongues with him, women would run to Sandy to recover from the everyday brutality of the peasants, and because of his love and because of his illness they were never angry with him.

Sandy, like Elijah, reappears at the end of Red Cavalry, when even the narrator, brutalized by the war, is ready to kill a woman for a bowl of soup she does not in fact possess. Sandy saves the woman and gives solace to both by singing to them one of the ballads he had learned as squadron singer.

Sandy's example of showing gentleness to others prefigures the final lesson which the narrator learns: he begins to show gentleness to himself. A Cossack, Tikhomolov, is deprived of his stallion Argamak, and seeks to take the narrator's life as revenge. Realizing that there is no chance for Tikhomolov to forgive him, he stops "trying to live with-

out enemies". He transfers to the Sixth Division:

> I had to leave. I transferred to the Sixth Squadron, and there things went better. However it may have been, Argamak had taught me Tikhomolov's style of riding. Months passed and my dream came true. The Cossacks stopped watching me and my horse.

In conclusion, the narrator begins a quest in Red Cavalry for heroes in each of the three mutually antagonistic groups he finds alon the way: Poles, Jews, and Cossacks. Each group exemplifies qualities which the narrator despises: spiritual decay, philosophic vacuousness and brutality. Within each group, however, the narrator encounters in the form of visionaries, heretics, and itinerants, his heroes. They are men capable of accepting ostracism of heresy, exile, and disease. Hence, they are able to transform misfortune into gifts for others in terms of poetry, philosophy, art, and song.

Moreover, in discovering these heroes, the narrator not only ironically illuminates their lives, but they, through the force of their example, help him. They prefigure and point the way to the next experience the narrator is to encounter. They illuminate and help him to accept aspects of his own repressed experience. They teach him to identify without loss of self, to observe, in the midst of war, with a sense of humanity.

Chapter Three: Stories of Childhood and Coming of Age
Identification of Narrator with Surrogate Self

In Tales of Odessa, the identification of the fortune of the individual with that of the community proves to be the ironic obstacle preventing the inhabitants of Odessa from guaging properly either their own or their king's motives or acts. In Red Cavalry, the narrator does not identify with the community he encounters. Rather, he illuminates the ironies of specific characters and heroes. These identifications, however, ironically impel him to justify and accept the ironies implicit in himself and his relationships with others. In Babel's last cycle, Tales of Childhood and Coming of Age, the narrator does not identify with a hero or a community. Rather, he enters into a series of agreements or contracts, forging in the process a kind of surrogate self capable of satisfying his own wants and the needs of others.

The terms of the contract mea be quite explicit: one dovecot in exchange for entrance to prepatory school. Or it may be private and implicit: the elimination, if only for a day, of a troublesome Uncle and Grandfather, sealed between narrator and Aunt. Finally, it may be for services rendered: a new translation of Guy dW Maupassant's works, sealed between a budding young artist and his would-be patron.

Yet in the end, each arrangement breaks down, not because of the will of an individual party, but because of the violent intrusion of an unexpected element which destroys,

implicates, or heightens the very terms of the contract itself.

Three of Babel's stories, "Tale of a Dovecot", "In the Basement", and "Guy du Maupassant", illustrate this aspect of Babel's last major work:

> When I was a kid I longed for a Dovecot. Never in all my life have I wanted a thing more. But not till I was nine did my father promise the wherewithal to buy the wood to make one and three pairs of pigeons to stock it with. It was then 1904, and I was studying for the entrance exam to the preparatory class of the secondary school at Nikolayev in the Province of Khershon, where my people were at that time living. This province of course no longer exists, and our town has been incorporated in the Odessa Region.
>
> I was only nine, and I was scared stiff of the exams. In both subjects, Russian language and arithmetic, I couldn't afford to get less than top marks. At our secondary school, the numerus clausus was stiff: a mere five percent. So that out of forty boys only two that were Jews could get into the preparatory class. The teachers used to put such cunning questions to Jewish boys; no one else was asked such devilish questions. So when father promised to buy the pigeons he demanded top marks with distinction in both subjects. He absolutely tortured me to death. I fell into a state of permanent daydream, into an endless, despairing, childish reverie. I went to the exam deep in this dream and nevertheless did better than everybody else.
>
> I had a knack for book-learning. Even though they asked cunning questions, the teachers could not rob me of my intelligence and my avid memory. I was good at learning and got top marks in both subjects. But then everything went wrong. Kharlton Efrussi, the corn-dealer, who exported wheat to Marseille, slipped someone a 500-rouble bribe. My mark was changed from A to A-, and Efrussi Junior went to the secondary school instead of me. Father took it very badly. From the time I was six he had been cramming me with every bit of learning he could, and that A- drove him to despair. He wanted me to beat Efrussi up, but mother talked him out of the idea,...and I started studying for the second exam the following year, the one for the lowest class. Behind my back my people got the teacher to take me in one year through the preparatory and first-year courses simultaneously, and conscious of the family's

> despair, I got three whole books by heart. These were Smirnovsky's Russian Grammar, Yevtushevsky's Problems, and Putsykovich's Manual of Early Russian History. Children no longer cram from these books but I learned them by heart line by line, and the following year in the Russian exam Karavayev gave me an unrivaled A plus.

These three paragraphs, the introduction to "Tales of a Dovecot", in many ways are typical of Babel's style in his last cycle. The technique is that of the autobiographical narrator. Unlike the sophisticated erlebte rede technique of The Odessa Stories, or the taunt fusion of narrator and event common to Red Cavalry, the style here seems more expansive and less complex. The narrator can be none other than the author himself, who, in memior fashion, sadder but wiser, recounts significant experiences in his life.

Above all, the narrator here, unlike the narrator of Red Cavalry, is in touch with his wants, his fears, his dreams. Moreover, these wants, fears, and dreams have been given a "real" base, not only through the autobiographical narrator technique, which presupposes the narration to be reliable, but also because in each paragraph the narrator's subjective feelings are juxtaposed against data -- names, places, and dates which are undeniably "real".

Hence, while the core of the first paragraph deals with what are to become the terms of the contract, around it are framed the narrator's feelings -- "When I was a kid I longed for a Dovecot." -- plus some information -- "It was 1904..."

Similarly, paragraph two deals with the bargain itself -- "So when father promised to buy the pigeons he demanded top marks..." Around it are framed statements of the narrator's

own fears -- "I was only nine, and I was scared stiff of the exams," and the father's unreasonable demands and the consequences of these demands -- "He absolutely tortured me to death. I fell into a state of permanent daydreams..."

Finally, paragraph three centers on the first attempt at completing the bargain whose failure has the potential for violent repurcussions -- "My mark was changed from A to A-... he wanted me to beat Efrussi up..." Yet around it are juxtaposed evidence of the narrator's objective achievements, which serves to contradict his fears -- "I had a knack for book-learning... Karavayev gave me an unrivaled A plus."

In such a fashion, the centrality of the Dovecot is already established. It will serve as a refuge to mediate between tha narrator's fears and uncontrollable dreams and the demands of his father. The bargain is sealed, and finally it succeds. The narrator does gain admission to secondary school and Pyatnitsky, the assistant curator, grants him recognition of his new status in the presence of his peers:

> "Children," he said to the boys, "don't touch this lad." And he laid a fat hand tenderly on my shoulder.
> "My little friend," he went on, turning me towards him, "tell your father that you are admitted to the first class."

The narrator's mother, too, becomes a party, however relectantly, toward recognition of his new status. Hearing of his admittance:

> She was pale at that moment, she was experiencing destiny...My mother was pale; she was experiencing destiny through my eyes.

It is this theme of destiny which the narrator's new

status becomes shaped. He will become the saving instrument which will overcome not only the family curse, a curse to which his own father is particularly heir:

> All the men in our family were trusting by nature, and quick to ill-considered actions. We were unlucky in everything we undertook...Of all the family there remained only crazy Uncle Simon-Wolf, who lived in Odessa, my father and I. But my father had faith in people, and he used to put them off with the transports of first love. People could not forgive him for this, and used to play him false. So my father believed that his life was guided by an evil fate, an inexplicable being that pursued him, a being in every respect unlike him. And so I alone of all our family was left to my mother.

Even "Grandfather" Shoyl (in reality the narrator's Great-uncle) who had the most experience with the deceptions of the Gentile world, and whose "fat hands were mosit, covered with fishscales and smelt of worlds chill and beautiful" ultimately subscribes and lends support to the myth. Although the narrator considers him "silly," he too joins in to help the narrator celebrate his achievement and later volunteers to build the Dovecot himself.

Finally, a gathering of friends of the narrator's father, especially convened for the occasion of celebrating the son's success, bestows special recogniton and added significance to the son's sense of his special destiny:

> Besides the salesman, old Lieberman who had taught me the Torah and ancient Hebrew honored us with his presence. In our circle he was known as Monsieur Lieberman. He drank more Bessarabian wine than he should have. The ends of the traditional silk tassels poked out from beneath his waistcoat,and in ancient Hebrew he proposed my health. In this toast the old man congratualted my parents and said I had vanquised all my foes in single combat: I han vanquised the Russian boys with their fat cheeks, and I had vanquised the

> sons of our own vulgar parvenus. So too in ancient times David King of Judah had overcome Goliath, and just as I had triumphed over Goliath, so too would our people by the strength of their intellect conquer the foes who had encircled us. and were thirsting for our blood.

Hence, as the day approaches when the narrator is to receive his new dovecot and pigeons, his private fantasies have reached the status of public myth. Significant others have given him reasonable grounds to assume that in his hands will be transferred not only the salvation of the Babel household but the Jewish community as well.

Then, on the very day that, through the purchase of his pigeons, the narrator's new roles are to be assumed, the entire arrangement breaks down. For the year is 1905, and, ironically, just as the young Babel is contracting with his father, so too, the Russian people are receiving a new constitution from their emporer Nicholas. At first the narrator perceives the significance of these external changes only dimly as random accidents, divorced and peripheral from his central concern -- the acquisition of his doves:

> At night shots had been heard in the streets, and so mother didn't want me to go to the bird market. From early morning on October 20 the boys next door were flying a kite right by the police station, and our water carrier, abandoning his buckets was walking about the streets with a red face and brilliantined hair...

Ignoring his mother's advice for him not to leave the house, the narrator sets out on his quest. Reaching the town-square, he succeeds after some haggling with the pigeon-fancier Ivan Nikodimych, in acquiring his desire -- six doves which

he stuffs in a bag. Then:

> Toward twelve o'clock, or perhaps a bit later, a man in felt boots passed across the square. He was stepping lightly on swollen feet, and in his worn-out face lively eyes glittered.
>
> "Ivan Nikodimych," he said as he walked past the birdfancier, "pack up your gear. In town the Jerusalem aristocrats are being granted a constitution. On Fish Street Grandfather Babel had been constitutioned to death."

Ironically, the same constitution which the emperor would give granting Jews rights becomes the agenda for a new pogrom. Ironically too, the narrator, returning to his home, encounters none other than legless Makarenko, "who rode about town in a wheel-chair selling cigarettes from a tray. The boys in our street used to buy smokes from him, children loved him, I dashed toward him down the lane."

"'Makarenko,' I gasped, panting from my run and I stroked the legless one's shoulder, 'have you seen Shoyl?'"

But this day Makarenko too feels himself an instrument of destiny. Unable to participate in the looting of the pogrom, he sees himself as victimized:

> "God's picked on me, I reckon," he said lifelessly, "I'm a son of man, I reckon."
>
> And he stretched a hand spotted with leprosy toward me.
>
> "What's that you've got in the sack?," he demanded, and took the bag that had been warming my heart.
>
> With his fat hand the cripple fumbled among the tumbler pigeons and dragged to light a cherry-co-colored she-bird.
>
> Jerking back its feer, the bird lay still on his palm.
>
> "Pigeons," said Makarenko, and squeaking his wheels he rode right up to me. "Damned pigeons," he repeated, and struck me on the cheek.
>
> He dealt me a flying blow with the hand that was clutching the bird. Kate's wadded back seemed to

> turn upside down, and I fell to the ground in my new overcoat.
>
> "Their spawn must be wiped out," said Kate, straightening up over the bonnets. I can't a-bear their spawn nor their stinking menfolk."

The world of dove and dovecot collapses before the brutality of the reality of the pogrom. In their place the narrator experiences the truth of another world whose terrain is delineated by the remains of dead pigeons and bears little resemblance to the higher destiny he had promised:

> My world was tiny, and it was awful. I closed my eyes so as not to see it and pressed myself tight into the ground that lay beneath me in sooting dumbness. This trampled earth in no way resembled real life, waiting for exams in real life. Somewhere far away Woe rode across it on a great steed, but the noise of the hoofbeats grew weaker and died away and silence, the bitter silence that sometimes overwhelms children in their sorrow, suddenly deleted the boundary between my body and the earth that was moving nowhither.

The narrator returns home to find his house deserted by all except Kuzma the yardman and the corpse of Shoyl. It is Kuzma who delivers the "eulogy" over Shoyl, and by doing so raises him to a symbol of heroic protest:

> "He cursed the lot of 'em right and left," he said, smiling, and cast a loving look over the corpse. "If Tartars had crossed his path he'd have sent them packing; but Russians came, and their women with them, Rooski women. Russians just can't bring themselves to forgive, I know what Rooskis are."

As for the narrator, he seems to have forgotten even to ask where his parents are. It is Kuzma again who needs to remind him that he must return to his father. Just as the narraor has given up his fantasy of destiny, so his parents cease to enjoy special significance. Mother, Father, and child are e-

qual before the reality of the pogrom.

Hence, in "Tale of My Dovecot," a bargain is struck between father and son whose at first seem quite explicit: six pigeons and one dovecot in exchange for the son's entrance to secondary school. In the process, however, so many mutual longings for destiny are tapped -- on the part of the narrator, his family, and his family's friends that the narrator feels that he is to be the certain savior not only of his private fantasy life, but that of his family and people as well.

Ironically, the narrator's private fantasies broaden into public scope only to be exploded when, in the middle of the pogrom, both pigeons and the srchitect of the dovecot itself become victims of men who consider themselves equally men of destiny. Hence, the the narrator must settle for being equal with the significant others in his life: all are equally powerless before the violence of the progrom. Only Grandfather Shoyl rises to become a heroic figure of protest against injustice. At the age of nine, the narrator fails to achieve Destiny. At the age of twelve, the narrator experiemnts to see if visions Power will sufficie.

Three years have elapsed in the narrator's life between the story, "Tale of My Dovecot," and that og "In the Basement." In the interim, the narrator has left Nikolayev to live with his Aunt Bobka, Uncle Simon and Grandfather Leivi-Itzhok in Odessa. The story begins with a statement of self disclosure on the part of the narrator:

> I was an untruthful little boy. It was because of my reading: my imagination was always working o-

> vertime. I read during lessons, during recess, on my way home, at night under the table, hidden by hanging tablecloth. My nose buried in a book, I let slide everything that really mattered, such as playing truant in the harbor, learning the art of billiards in the coffeehouses on Greek Street, going swimming at Langeron. I had no pals. Who would have wanted to waste his time with a boy like me?

It is the narrator's lonliness and feelings if worthlessness which lead him to befriend a fellow student, Mark Borgman. Seeking to impress Borgman, the narrator beguils him with his rendition of the death of Spinoza:

> The death of Spinoza, his free and lonely death appeared to me like a battle. The Sanhedrin was trying to make the dying man repent, but he wouldn't. I worked in Rubens. It seemed to me that Rubens was standing by Spinoza's deathbed taking a mask of the dead man's face.

The plan succeeds. Borgman, thoroughly seduced by the story of Spinoza, takes the narrator aside and the narrator immediately begins to enjoy Borgman's favor. Borgman is himself the class Spinoza, possessed, in the narrator's eyes, of a pwerful mind:

> He didn't even do his lessons, but just listened to them. This sober, self-controlled boy became attached to me because of the way I had of garbling every possible thing, things that couldn't have been simpler.

Borgman invites the narrator to his home, and here the narrator is equally beguiled by the animal magnificence of the guests at the home of his friend, whose father happens to be bank manager, the Argentine consul, and president of the stock exchange committee as well:

> Card addicts and sweet-tooths, untidy female fops with secret vices, scented lingerie and enormous thighs, the women snapped their black fans and staked gold coins. Through the fence of wild vine the sun reached

> at them, its fiery disc enormous. Bronze gleams lent weight to the women's black hair. Drops of the sunset sparkled in diamonds -- diamonds disposed in every possible place: in the profundities of splayed bosoms, in painted ears, on puffy bluish she-animal fingers.

Again the narrator finds his only unit of exchange in his imagination. He elaborates upon the adventures of his uncle and grandfather. Again seduced, Borgman invites himself to the Babel home. Here the difficulties begin. For, while Uncle Simon and Grandfather Leivi-Itzkhok are in point of fact "colorful" and well travelled, they are also mad:

> What did exist was different, and much more surprising than anything I had invented, but at the age of twelve I had no idea how things stood with me and reality. Grandfather Leivi-Itzkhok, the Rabbi expelled from his little town for forging Count Branicki's signature on bills of exchange, was reckoned crazy by the neighbors and all the urchins of the locality. My Uncle Simon I just couldn't stick on account of his loudmouthed eccentricity, his crazy fits of enthusiasm, the way he shouted and bullied. Aunt Bobka was the only sensible one. But Aunt Bobka was proud of my friendship with a bank-manager's son. She felt that this meant the beginning of a brilliant career, and she baked apple strudel with jam and poppy-seed tarts for the guest.

Hence, with the consent of Aunt Bobka, a way is found to "eliminate" the narrator's Uncle and Grandfather for the day of Borgman's visit. The Grandfather will be stowed with the neighbors. To make sure that Uncle Simon should not come home the narrator gives him three roubles -- more than enough, he figures, to keep him spending for the day.

Borgman arrives and Aunt Bobka, who has her own social pretensions, receives him as a gentile matron. The narrator then dazzles Borgman with Grandfather's possessions: "grammars in all languages, sixty-six volumes of the Talmud, and

an ingenious alarm clock." At this point, the narrator launches into his tour-de-force: Antony's funeral oration over Caesar.

Again Borgman is astonished. Yet precisely at the moment that the young Babel is re-enacting the role of the usurper Antony, Uncle Simon returns bearing his latest acquiaition for the house, a clothes hangar made of antlers and a red trunk with fittings shaped like a lion's jaws. Drunken, Uncle Simon returns only to strike Aunt Bobka. Trapped and powerless, the narrator continues the funeral oration only to empathise now with the deposed Caesar:

> The bank-manager's son crumpled his little peaked cap in his hands. I saw him double as I strove to outshout all the evil in the world. My death-agony despair and the death of the already dead Caesar coalesced: I was dead and I was shouting.

To make matters worse, Grandfather, an ironic Caesar's ghost, returns, and the sight of him convinces Borgman to flee:

> Borgman looked through the window -- it was at street level -- and he started back in horror: he had beheld my poor grandfather twisting his blue and ossified mouth. On the old man's head was his bent top hat. He wore a long black padded cloak with bone buttons, and his elephantine feet bulged from the inevitable torn boots. His tobacco-stained beard hung in tatters, swaying in the window. Mark took to his heels.

That night, in the face of his humiliation, the narrator decides to take the only "noble Roman" way out. Failing as Caesar, failing as Antony, he will play Brurus and commit suicide. Yet here too, he fails. Discovered by his grandfather in a waterbarrel where he is attempting to drown himself, the narrator is put to bed by Aunt Bobka:

> "How he trembles, our blessed ninny!" said Aunt Bobka. "Where can the child find the strength to tremble so?"
>
> Grandfather tugged at his beard, gave a whistle and stlaked off again. On the other side of the wall Uncle Simon snored, agonizingly Battler by day, he never woke up nights.

Hence, just as destiny failed the narrator in "Tale of My Dovecot", so power, in the form of power of the imagination, fails to be a viable mediating force. The narrator learns that imaginingand re-enacting the lives of powerful others -- Spinoza, Antony, Caesar, and Brutus -- cannot bridge the gap between the animal-like magnificence of the Borgman house and the brute strength of Uncle Simon. Yet surely, in the realm of art, there exists a vehicle where the individual may find solace for his longings, and protect him from the violence of others who intrude upon him. This attempt to forge reality from art is the theme of "Guy de Maupassant".

> In the winter of 1916 I found myself in St. Petersburg with a forged passport and not a cent to my name. Alexey Kazantsev, a teacher of Russian literature, took me into his house.

So begins Babel's story "Guy de Maupassant". The narrator no 20 and a budding artist again feels "flung out of ordinary life" and to make ends meet contracts with Raisa Bendersky, the wife of a wealthy Odessa Jew, to help her translate the works of Guy de Maupassant. To Raisa, who has been transformed by her husband's money into "a pink layer of fat on the belly, the back of the neck, and the well-rounded shoulders", de Maupassant is "the only passion" of her life. To the narrator, his works are "the magnificent grave of the human heart".

Yet, in the course of their collaboration, around the re-

lationship between unpublished artist and bored matron begins to gravitate the elements of artist and patron.

> Next morning I took back the corrected manuscript. Raisa wasn't lying when she told me that Maupassant was her sole passion. She sat motionless, her hands clasped, as I read it to her. Her satin hands drooped to the floor, her forehead paled, and the lase between her constricted breasts danced and heaved.
>
> "How do you do it?"
>
> I began to speak of style, of the army of words, of the army in which all kinds of weapons may come to play. No iron can stab the heart with such force as a period put just at the right place. She listened with her head down and her painted lips half open. In her hair, pressed smooth divided by a parting and looking like patent leather, shone a dark gleam. Her legs in tight-fitting stockings, with their strong soft calves, were planted wide apart on the carpet.

Yet ironically, just as art may be a weapon which in the hands may alter the real, so too war and the profits of wars bear their toll. Raisa's husband bears these scars:

> There were rumors about his being close to Rasputin. The enormous profits he made from war supplies drive him almost crazy, giving him the expression of a person with a fixed hallucination. His eyes never remained still" it seemed that reality was lost to him for ever. Raisa was embarrased whenever she had to introducehim to new accuaintances. Because of my youth I noticed this a full week later than I should have.

Nor does the money which Raisa gives the narrator leave him unaffected. The night she gives him a twenty-five rouble advance he gets drunk and, finding the courage to berate Tolstoy, declaims:

> "He turned yellow, your Count; he was afraid. His religion was all fear. He was frightened by the cold, by old age, by death; and he made himself a warm coat out of his faith."

Ironically, having made the analogy between the creation

of art and the waging of war, the narrator can only find examples in *others* where the undertaking of either resulted in a flight from the real. Yet the hidden agenda of sexuality does emerge even in the supposed venture in "pure art" begun by Raisa and the narrator.

Returning to the Bendesky's home with a completed manuscript, the narrator finds Raisa drunk. She invites him in, pours him three glasses of Muscatel '83, and they sit down to work! The story in question is *L'Aveu*, in which red-haired Celeste is seduced by the coachman Polyte, which in turn becomes the occasion for Raisa and the narrator's mutual seduction scene:

> Raisa held out a glass to me. It was the fifth.
> "*Mon vieux*, to Maupassant."
> "And what about having some fun today *ma belle*?"
> "You're funny," she mumbled through her teeth, recoiling.
> She pressed herself against the wall, stretching out her bare arms. Spots began to glow on her arms and shoulders. Of all the gods ever put on the crucifix, this was the most ravishing.

Not drunk, but feigning drunkenness, the narrator returns home following the seduction. But before going to bed he reads a biography of Maupassant's life:

> That night I learned from Edouard Maynial that Maupassant was born in 1850, the child of a Normandy gentleman and Laure Lepoiten, Flaubert's cousin. He was twenty-five when he was first attacked by congenital syphilis. His productivity and joi de vivre withstood the onsets of the disease. At first he suffered from headaches and fits of hypochondria. Then the spectre of blindness arose before him. His sight weakened. He became suspicious of everyone, unsociable and pettily quarrelsome. He struggled furiously, dashed about the Mediterranean in a yacht, fled to Tunis, Morocco, Central Africa... and wrote ceaselessly. He attained fame, and at forty years of age cut his

> throat; lost a great deal of blood, yet lived through it. He was then put away in a madhouse. There he crawled about on his hands and knees, devouring his own excrement. The last line in his hospital report read: Monsieur de Maupassant va s'animaliser. He died at the age of forty-two, his mother surviving him.
>
> I read the book to the end and got out of bed. The fog came close to the window, the world was hidden from me. My heart contracted as the foreboding of some essential truth touched me with light fingers.

The essential truth which the narrator learns is not made explicit, but the fusion and analogy which the narrator had made between war and art and had applied to others he can perhaps now see for himself. The impulse to create and destroy do not exist independantly from one another and the works of art that a man creates will never shield him from his other impulse, his animal self.

In conclusions, in Babel's last cycle Stories of Childhood and Coming of Age, the narrator, presumably Babel himself, learns by making contracts with significant others -- contracts which inevitably fail. Destiny, Power, and Art are, in and of themselves, no cure for the harshness of the world. Each of these longings is exploded ironically. For the violent intruder -- Marakenko as intrument of destiny, Simon as powerful battler, de Maupassant as Artist par excellance are themselves grotesque mirror images of the narrator's choice of surrogate self. Hence, the narrator learns in two ways: not only by the destruction of the dream but from the destroyer himself who exemplifies the dream made flesh.

CONCLUSION

The years 1922 - 1932 mark the fruitful decade in which virtually all the works of the Babel canon were composed. During that period Babel produced nearly sixty stories which divide into three major cycles. Moreover, each cycle contains characters, settings, and narrative techniques so completely its own that they could hardly be interchanged. As for themes: war and peace, society, adolescence, and romance are all touched upon. Hence, if one needs to look for a single motif which combines all three works one needs to speak in terms of tone. The common tone which binds all of Babel's stories together is irony.

In The Odessa Stories, irony is the result of a confusion in distance between narrator, major character and scene. The figure of Benya Krik so completely dominates Odessa and is so completely Odessa's own that both seem to join and fuse with the narrator -- who also considers Odessa his own. Babel elevates, only to detach the narrator form this fusion of character and setting, exposing to the reader to the violent side of Benya's and Odessa's acts. Hence, the reader, who had previously accepted Odessa as a playful comic place where everyone knows, sees instead a place where men are blinded, spontaneity is enforced, and brutality made real.

Irony, too, is a lynchpin of Red Cavalry. Here, the fusion of expected opposites is not between character and setting but between that of autobiographical narrator and the significant others he encounters in his path. At first, the narrator prefers

to keep silent about himself, to be content simply in reflecting upon the lives of those he meets. Hence, to the Jews he is a Jew, to the Cossacks another violent intruder in Poland. Yet this identification and confusion between self and others is broken up. Pan Apolek, the itinerant artist, Elijah, the revolutionary Jew, and Sandy the Christ, the syphilitic herdsman, each obligates the narrator to be his own man, to act independently, to create as well as to view.

Finally, irony is a motif of Tales of Childhood. Yet here the irony does not occur as the result of identification and confusion between the narrator and others so much as the narrator's identification and confused longings for a new self. The narrator of Tales of Childhood, however, does not find this surrogate self in others. He recognizes each of them: his father, Borgman, Uncle Simon, and Raisa as too demanding, unattainable, or mad. Rather, he creates or contracts for an intermediate reality: a dovecot, Marc Antony, or Maupassant through which he can vicariously experience his longings for Destiny, Power, and Artistry, yet come to terms with the demands of others. Ironically, these intermediate realities, too, fail and fall whem, quite unexpectedly, the reality of Destiny in the form of a raving cripple, Power as a Drunk, and Artistry in the ghost of De Maupassant va s'animaliser enters in to destroy the terms of the contract. The narrator, ineluctably alienated from the object of his longing and learning from the Destroyer himself, must reassemble a presentation of himself from himself, not from his ideal.

Babel asks the reader to accept these ironies. Behind them stands a vision of society, whether derived of men living a common code, searching for models in others, or contracting for surrogate selves, as a constant flight from the real.

Babel leaves little room for doubt as to why men choose to fly from the face of themselves. For his images of his solitary men, while sometimes pastoral and holy, are other times deformed, and mad. Yet, his heroes do not fly from the dual nature of themselves. Rather, in accepting the impulses of life and death in themselves, they can see it in others and transform these contradictions into art. The only alternative is to escape into a life of self-deception, artifice and ruse, hence, simultaneously giving permission to others to do injustice, to violently intrude and destroy the ruse. This destruction is ironic as well. For, in Babel's works, the face of the violent intruder bears the features of the unencountered self.

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