POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THOUGHT CONTAINED IN THE JEWISH - AMERICAN NOVEL (1867 - 1927)

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ABSTRACT

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Arthur Joseph Gittlen

This dissertation is concerned with the Jewish-American novel written in English between the years 1867 and 1927 by Jewish authors about Jewish subjects and characters. While in the broadest sense this dissertation is concerned with both the esthetic and social characteristics of the Jewish novel during this period, its fundamental consideration is the several social and political attitudes that are apparent in the novels of this time period. Finally, this dissertation argues that esthetically poor literature--and certainly nearly all of the Jewish novels of this period regrettably fall into this category--serves, in this instance, the highly valuable purpose of providing an accurate and insightful record of an important American minority group as it moved from the virtually closed society of the Jewish ghettos of the larger American cities into the pluralistic society of the "American main stream."

Clearly implicit throughout this discussion of the Jewish-American novel is a concept of the Jewish people as a distinctive and unique subculture within human society

whose historical and comtemporary activities have influenced the artist's attitudes toward his art as well as his life. In tracing the development of the Jewish-American novel between the years 1867 and 1927 this study begins with the Southern rural novel and closes with the big city ghetto novel. The year 1867 was selected as the beginning point for an obvious reason: During that year, Differences, the first Jewish-American novel, was published. On the other hand, the reasons for drawing this study to a close after 1927 are somewhat more arbitrary. Beginning with 1928, and for a decade or more thereafter, Jewish-American fiction assumes a progressively Marxist character. Without exception, these works grow out of an exceptional set of human circumstances and esthetic considerations shaped by the dynamic international social movements of the twenties and thirties. Because of the complexity of this phase of Jewish-American fiction, and the number of works involved, I felt it to be an undertaking worthy of an extended analysis all its own.

The method employed in this study is primarily that of synopsis with explication and interpretation. A number of comparisons are drawn between works of one author and those of another. In the same manner the various works are examined as to their relative merits as pieces of art. Finally, however, this study is intended to demonstrate the valuable comments these thirteen works makes on what is considered by many to be the most varied and exciting period of Jewish-American history.

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By

Arthur Joseph Gittlen

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Dedicated to Wandee in appreciation of

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CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A JEW?

This dissertation is concerned with the American Jewish novel written in English between the years 1867 and 1927 by Jewish authors about Jewish subjects and characters. While in the broadest sense this dissertation is concerned with both the esthetic and social characteristics of the Jewish novel during this period, its fundamental consideration is the several social and political attitudes that are apparent in the novels of this time period. Finally, this dissertation argues that esthetically poor literature--and certainly nearly all of the Jewish novels of this period regrettably fall into this category--serves, in this instance, the highly valuable purpose of providing an accurate and insightful record of an important American minority group as it moved from the Old World mores practiced in the Jewish ghettos of the larger American cities into the mores of the "American main stream."

Let me introduce my remarks regarding the Jewish novel by stating that the arbitrary distinction that I have designated as the working definition of the Jewish novel does, without a doubt, excude more artists and fiction concerned with the Jewish theme than it includes. Of course, American

non-Jews write about Jewish characters and Jewish subject matter. In fact, in a number of cases, such characters and issues are the sole concerns of their fiction. Perhaps if the number of novels written by non-Jews in America about Jewish characters and issues were added up and compared with the number of Jewish novelists writing about the same topics, the former would outnumber the latter. Furthermore, if one examines the number of Jewish authors who allude to Jewish topics only as a secondary consideration of their fiction, and/or create minor Jewish characters interacting with non-Jews in non-Jewish concerns, it becomes increasingly clear that what constitutes Jewish subject matter in American fiction is a coat of many colors.

It is for just such reasons that some students of literature argue that there is no literary sub-genre such as the American Jewish novel. For example, they ask, at what point does a character in an American novel cease to be an American national, irrespective of ethnic background, and become identifiable instead as an American Jew distinctly separate from other Americans? Furthermore, they maintain, if the Jew is a separate sub-species in literature, then what of the Pole, the German, and the Irish American? Certainly all of these ethnic groups are represented in substantial numbers of fictional works in American literature, In effect, these critics are asking: Does each of these ethnic groups legitimately represent a distinct literary category in American fiction? And if such is the case, what criteria may be

used to determine their differences? In other words, in the case of the Jewish character, is his first and last name sufficient basis for distinguishing his "Jewishness"? Or is "Jewishness" only made clear if the author includes, along with the name, physical features traditionally regarded as Jewish characteristics? For example, characteristics which would include a careful description of a hooked nose, kinky hair texture, and, especially, intensity about the character's eyes?

It is the opinion of students of literature who refuse to recognize the Jewish novel as a literary sub-genre that so called "Jewishness" in a character is not convincingly revealed as a result of attaching a peculiar sounding name to that character, or by cataloguing certain of his physical characteristics. Furthermore, they argue that the question of how to determine "Jewishness" in an individual character in fiction is only the first of several increasingly difficult steps that the advocates of the sub-genre called the Jewish novel are required to take in order to make it clear at what point a work of American fiction as a whole may be judged Jewish.

Therefore, in recognition of these objections to the view that indeed a category known as Jewish American fiction does exist, I would take the position that students of literature who oppose accepting the Jewish novel as a sub-genre of American fiction on the grounds that it is practically impossible to distinguish "Jewishness" in characters and issues do appear--at first glance--to have a strong argument.

Admittedly, non-Jews, as well as Jews, talk about such subjects as anti-Semitism, Zionism, and intermarriage both in and out of fiction. Certainly, none of the physical characteristics or issues mentioned in the above paragraphs, in and of themselves--or even lumped together--necessarily spell out with any degree of certainty that the character or characters are Jewish.

To argue otherwise would be to assume that in fact the noun Jew when applied to either American, European, or Asian, labels a clearly identifiable species. Such, however, is not, according to many authorities, the case. For example, George Simpson and Milton Yinger raise the following question:

> Do the Jews constitute a Race? The answer to this question depends upon the existence of a combination of physical traits which would distinguish Jews from others. No such grouping of traits has been discovered by a reputable scientist. In every country Jews tend to approximate the local gentile type because of the intermixture which has invariably occurred. Usually a considerable part of a given Jewish population is physically indistinguishable from the Christian or Moslem inhabitants of the area.[1]

These same authors go on at length to discuss the lack of scientific findings which would support the position that some portion of the human group can be separated from the rest in so far as they possess characteristics which identify them as "looking Jewish". Simpson and Yinger conclude:

> ...that the Jews are a mixed people derived originally from Caucasoid stocks in the eastern Mediterranean area. Insofar as the original stock remains the basis of their inheritance, they can sometimes be identified as eastern Mediterranean people, but not as Jews.[2]

However, Simpson and Yinger were the first reputable social scientists to attempt to establish an acceptable and comprehensive definition of what constitutes the human

grouping known as the Jews. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, scientific findings attempted to demonstrate how the Jew might be convincingly identified in light of his racial, national, religious, cultural, historical, or linguistic origins.

For example, in 1886, Joseph Jacobs presented a paper before the Royal Anthropological Institute of London in which he attempted to classify the Jewish race on the basis of scientific measurements of anatomical and physiological features. In his paper, Joseph Jacobs divides persons who considered themselves as Jews into three categories:

1. A person who is Jewish both by virtue of his parents and the religion he practices.
2. A person who practices the Jewish religion, but whose parents were not Jews.
3. A person who was born a Jew, but does not practice the Jewish religion.

Jacobs felt that a thorough examination of the differences between and similarities of these various classes would lead to an understanding of "the anthropology of Jews." However, lacking significant data for the latter two categories, Jacobs found it necessary to apologize to the members of the Institute for his failure to produce definite statements regarding the anthropological make-up of the "Jewish community."[3]

In 1949, Melville J. Herskovits, comments on Jacobs' paper, declared:

> In all this we find adumbrated a recent dictionary definition of the Jew: "...any person of the Hebrew race or whose religion is Judaism."[4]

In other words, Jacobs' effort to describe a human group known as the Jewish race succeeded--at best--in producing a highly general definition of this human type. However, the failure of Jacobs' paper to provide a precise and convincing answer to the traditionally vexing question of 'What is a Jew?', should not be viewed as a total loss. Rather, Jacobs' three categories managed to initiate a shift in emphasis for future investigators away from the heretofore exclusively religious exploration of 'Jewish characteristics' --to explorations which tend to address themselves to biological and social/cultural considerations.

For instance, in 1936, J. S. Huxley and A. C. Haddon concluded that the Jews were not a race. What the investigators did conclude during their study of human physical types was that the Jews constituted a group of human beings identifiable as a people.

> The Jews can rank neither as nation nor even as ethnic unit, but rather as a socio-religious group carrying large Mediterranean, Armenoid and many other elements, and varying greatly in physical characters. Like many other groups its members are held together by external pressures of various kinds, partly by a long historic memory, partly by a religion. These factors, acting through long ages, have produced a common consciousness which is relaxed when the pressures are relaxed and intensified with the reverse process.[5]

Yet three years later, Carelton S. Coon, in his voluminous consideration of human taxonomy described the Jews as an ethnic group, who "...like all or most ethnic groups they have their 'look,' ...the Jewish look seems to be one of the

most noticeable and most easily distinguished of characteristic facial expressions found within the family of white people."[6]

In 1942, as a result of further study, Coon elaborated on his classification of the Jews as an ethnic group:

> Not only are the Jews different to a measurable degree from the other people among whom they live, but they are a population .... (Jews)...are united biologically as is the average intermarrying social or geographical unit found among white peoples; they have racial peculiarities which serve to differentiate the majority of them anthropometrically from their non-Jewish compatriots and neighbors.[7]

However, Coon's examination of the problem of whether the Jews are a race, people or ethnic group did not prove to be the last word on the subject. In 1945, Wilton M. Krogman, defines what he believes sets the Jew apart from the rest of the human race. In an article which he prepared for the World Encyclopedia Institute he states that, as a result of lengthy persecution, the Jew has developed, in an effort to compensate for his second-class citizenship, "a set of behavioral attitudes and responses that are often characteristic to the point of recognition and group definition."[8] He goes on in this same article to make it perfectly clear that these characteristic attitudes and responses that may be distinguished as Jewish traits are products of cultural influences and are not the products of biology. Finally, Krogman completes his discussion by asserting that: "A Jew belongs not to a race but to a Jewish community."[9]

However, Krogman's designation of the Jews as a historical/cultural people was hardly the last word on the

subject. For example, in 1942, Raymond Kennedy writing in particular about the American scene described the Jews in the United States as "a religio-national group occupying the status of a quasi-caste in American society."[10]

Furthermore, in addition to these and other sociological attempts to create a meaningful definition of the Jewish people, there have also been a substantial variety of unscientific definitions and generalizations about what Jews are and what they are not. These attempts to discuss the Jews have resulted in such observations as the Jewish people are "a social anomaly," "a peculiar people," "a unique social phenomenon," and a "chimeric people leading a life of reality."[11]

Melville J. Herskovits, writing on the problem of "Who Are The Jews?" has this to say: "Of all human groupings, there is none wherein the problem of definition has proved to be more difficult than for the Jews."[12] It is Herskovits' position

> ...that it is neither race, nor such an aspect of physical type as nasality, nor a 'Jewish look' that affords terms in which the question 'Who are the Jews?' is to be answered.
>
> ...In like manner, language, culture, belief all exhibit so great a range of variation that no definition cast in terms of these concepts can be more than partial. Yet the Jews do represent a historic continuum, have survived as an identifiable, yet constantly shifting series of groups. Is there any least common denominator other than the designation 'Jew' that can be found to mark the historical 'fait accompli' that the Jew, however defined, seems to be? It is seriously to be questioned. A word can mean many things to many people, and no word, one may almost conclude, means more things to more people than does the word 'Jew.'[13]

Up to this point only the problems the social scientist encounters in his attempts to pin down the specific meaning underlying the noun Jew have been considered. Obviously, other critical thinkers have considered the problem also. For instance, Leslie Fiedler, though not a social scientist, but clearly a social and literary critic, as well as author of several Jewish American novels argues that the Jew in literature is less important for whatever qualities he might possess that might be identified as 'Jewish,' and more important because:

> ...in the high literature of Europe and more slowly, in that of the United States, gentile and Jew have joined forces to portray the Jewish character as a figure representing man's fate in the modern, urbanized world.[14]

Fiedler closes his discussion on this matter by stating:

> In general, the point of such portrayals is to suggest that we live in an age of rootlessness, alienation, and terror, in which the exiled condition so long thought peculiar to the Jew comes to seem the common human lot...[15]

For the most part, in his discussion of the Jew in "Life and Death in the American Novel," Fiedler glosses over any concern for precisely identifying the nature of "Jewishness" as an unassailable characteristic of a certain number of people. Rather, Fiedler touches on the importance of any singular physical, social, or historical characteristics which might be distinguished as "Jewish," only in so far as the Jewish experience in the human community makes a commentary on mankind in general. As Fiedler himself has written: "[Jewishness] is an eminently marketable commodity."[16]

In the same article he adds: "(Jewishness is) a passport into the heart of Gentile culture."[17] In other words, the Jewish experience has often proven to be the human experience.

In so far as Fiedler's primary concern with "Jewishness" is not as a parochial topic, but rather as a typical experience of the human community, he does not differ appreciably from nearly all of those critics who have served notice that they are willing to grant that Jewish American literature has made a lasting, profound, and measurable impact on American literature.

For example, Irving Malin stresses in "Jews and Americans," (the first full length treatment of Jewish American authors and their fiction):

> ...that Exile, no matter how it is interpreted, is a crucial moment for all Jews. Because the Jew recognizes his alienation from the Promised Land, he remains an outsider from his society. The more deeply he embraces the idea of Israel, the more unhappy he is in Exile. It is not surprising that he becomes in Isaac Rosenfield's phrase, "a specialist in alienation."[18]

At this point in his discussion, Malin considers the parallel he sees between the Jew's sense of alienation and the alienation experienced by the American pioneer and frontiersman as they stood on foreign soil cut off from Europe and civilization. It is Malin's opinion that "the alienation theme is deeply American."[19] Furthermore, Malin maintains that the kinship felt by many American gentile readers in the twentieth century for Jewish fictional anti-heroes is a kinship born out of this mutual heritage of

alienation. In other words, once again, a Jewish literary critic argues that the 'marketability' of the Jewish theme comes out of the universality of its exile quality.

It would seem to me that all of the foregoing discussion still leaves us with the questions: If both the social scientist and literary critic seem unable or unwilling to define precisely the singular physical and/or social characteristics of the human species known as Jew, how then can the individual student of literature ever expect to be able to distinguish a Jewish character or be expected to accept such a distinction as this dissertation purports--namely, that there is in a fact a sub-genre in American literature titled, the American Jewish novel?

On the basis of the scientific evidence discussed earlier, it seems obvious that the social scientist has at best--and then only to a limited degree--been able to recognize distinguishing physical and cultural/social traits that apply to <u>some</u> Jews more often than non-Jews. Clearly, a precise statement of what is a Jew remains an accomplishment for the future. Certainly it would be something less than reasonable to expect that the layman should intelligently distinguish Jew from non-Jew when the professional cannot. Therefore, are some students of literature correct when they assert that the 'Jewish novel' is, upon close analysis, no more or no less than a novel about a man or men--independent of race and faith--seeking the sorts of goals and happiness typical of any man or men in similar surroundings?

I submit that the answer to such a question is a "yes" and a "no." Yes, certainly, the Jew both in and out of literature seeks "happiness" as his lot in the universe, and for the most part many of his individual goals as well as the individual means that he uses to achieve these goals are indistinguishable from the means and goals of non-Jews in similar or identical situations. And yet, at the same time, I submit that the Jew <u>is</u> distinguishable from his fellow men in so far as his Jewish subculture influences certain of his individual responses to and involvements in the larger American culture. Milton Yinger and George Simpson discuss a singular characteristic that, in my opinion, <u>does</u> make the vast majority of Jews distinguishable from their non-Jewish peers:

> The Jewish religion in its traditional form, more than language, tradition, or secular culture, distinguished European Jews from their Christian neighbors through the Middle Ages and into the nineteenth century. Through these centuries, and until the present time, Judaism has provided the basis for group solidarity among the Jews.[20]

Admittedly, as a study by Arthur Ruppin points out, 'the influence of Jewish religion on the life of the Jews is now incomparably weaker than in former times.'[21] For example, the current character of Jewish dogma in America reflects the secularization that is characteristic of all major religious faiths in modern America. To argue otherwise would be to argue sheer nonsense. The phenomenon of the Americanization of all major religious faiths is an undeniable fact of modern American life. And, certainly,

part of that Americanization of the religious faiths has resulted in the devaluation of many of the traditional tenets and practices of these faiths. Yet, as Will Herberg explains, the overall effect of this religious transformation has had an unique effect on the Jewish community. I quote at length from Mr. Herberg's discussion on this point because I feel his words clearly depict this religious feeling of 'Jewishness' which has managed to bind the Jews together into a recognizable community.

> The first and second generations of Jews in America repeated the common immigrant pattern: immigrant foreignness followed by an anxious effort to overcome that foreignness and become American. But the third generation of American Jews, instead of somehow finally getting rid of their Jewishness, as the Italians were getting rid of their 'Italianness' and the Poles of their 'Polishness,' actually began to reassert their Jewish identification and to return to their Jewishness. They too were striving to 'remember' what their parents had so often striven to 'forget,' but the content and consequences of their 'remembering' were strikingly different.
>
> We can account for this anomaly by recalling that the Jews came to this country not merely as an immigrant group but also as a religious community; the name 'Jewish' designated both without distinction. With the third generation, the foreign-immigrant basis of the ethnic group began to disappear and the ethnic group as such began to give way. Among the Jews, as among other immigrants, the advancing dissolution of the old ethnic group meant the returning identification of the third generation with the religious community of its forebears, but among the Jews alone this religious community bore the same name as the old ethnic group and was virtually coterminous with it. The young Jew for whom the Jewish immigrant-ethnic group had lost all meaning, because he was an American and not a foreigner, could still think of himself as a Jew, because to him being a Jew now meant identification with the Jewish religious community. What the Jewish third generation 'returned' to was of course, that which, as American, it could 'remember' of the heritage of its forebears--in other words, their religion--but in returning to the religion it was also returning to Jewishness, in a sense in which the Italian or Polish third generation,

> in returning to Catholicism, was not returning to 'Italianness' or 'Polishness.' The dual meaning of 'Jewish' as covering both ethnic group and religion made the 'return' movement of the third generation into a source of renewed strength and vigor for the American Jewish community.[22]

Nor is Will Herberg--in his dual role as social scientist and Jew--alone in this view of 'Jewishness' and its relationship to the Jewish community. Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, while granting on the one hand, that there is perhaps no longer a fountainhead of Jewish authority established in a teacher or sect within the international body described as Jewish, maintains, on the other, that despite disagreements between Orthodox and Reform Jews regarding the observance of ritual and religious dogma, a religious feeling, a "consciousness of a Keneset Yisrael (the congregation of Israel) which Solomon Schechter translated into 'Catholic Israel,' serves as the historical energy to draw together these religious sects into the general body known to the world as the Jewish community.[23]

Albert I. Gordon, in his discussion on what constitutes the Jewish community explores further this sense of community which serves to unite those Jews who otherwise feel no compulsive force to become involved with one another. Gordon describes the type of Jew who has no compelling urge to partake in temple or synagogue affairs, who does not observe the religious holidays nor practices the religious rituals of the Jewish faith, and yet is a human being who

feels drawn emotionally to identify with the Jewish community both internationally as well as locally. Gordon, in his discussion, then proceeds to answer the question: For what reason does this human being feel himself drawn to identify with the Jewish community? In other words, Gordon is asking and attempting to answer, why does a man who has no interest in the traditional rituals of the Jewish faith nor intellectual respect for its teachings of immortality in a God-centered universe, still feel most at home with the Jewish community?

Basing his answer on observations he made while studying the American Jewish community in Minneapolis, Gordon writes:

> In modern America there is less emphasis upon ritual and observance, less concern for the theological concepts and basic beliefs. The good Jew is generally regarded as the man who is charitable, who has a sense of social sympathy which prompts him to look upon all men as his brothers. The good Jew is one who has a highly developed ethical and moral sense, who practices these virtues in his home and in the market place, as well as in the synagogue. Finally, the good Jew is one who despite any personal denominational predilections works with and for a united Jewish community.[24]

In other words, Gordon takes the position that 'Jewishness' [in modern America] is most often and most clearly revealed by a particular expression of ethical and moral behavior. That is to say, a Jew is a human being who of his own volition acts--while under the aegis of a sub-group within the community composed of religious contemporaries dedicated to the same ends--in harmony with the moralism (man is fundamentally good), optimism (man is good and will

therefore be perpetuated), and idealism (man can be brought into harmony with the will of God) of the Jewish faith. Furthermore, Gordon seems to be saying that in modern America this ethical action on the part of the Jew most often takes the form of activity whose end is to foster the well-being of mankind.

In my opinion, Gordon's definition, as far as it goes, is an accurate expression of the Jewish-American outlook. But what is of importance here, and what must be examined before this question of "What is a Jew? can be finally resolved, is the question: How does this ethical attitude of one man's concern for another make for a uniquely religious experience called "Jewish?" Certainly, what Gordon describes in terms of the Jew's ethical and moral responsibility for his Jewish as well as non-Jewish brethren might equally apply to many individuals as well as sub-groups throughout American history.

Finally, part of Gordon's statement as included above de-emphasizes the modern American Jew's concern with theology and ritual. In other words, what Gordon describes as the uniquely modern Jewish American experience might as aptly and completely describe the experience of the Ethical Humanist.

However, if we begin rather than end with Gordon's analysis of the ethical-moral quality of Judaism, while in turn recognizing that most often this kind of conduct is organized and guided along specific religious lines, we arrive at what "Jewishness" means in contemporary America.

To be sure, it is indeed doubtful that the biblical Hebrew would have recognized his religious brothers in the Polish ghettos of the fifteenth century. Or for that matter, is it likely that the nineteenth-century, Yiddish speaking Russian Jew would have recognized the contemporary Americanized Jew. It must be remembered, however, that the apparent differences between the Jew of today and the Jew of yesterday are closely associated with exterior appearance (dress and speech) and the expression of liturgical and doctrinal devotion. Yet, despite these obvious differences between the Jew of the past and the present, it must also be remembered that the present ethical-moral characteristic of the American Jewish community reflects closely, in many ways, the original teachings of the faith.

Certainly the feeling of brotherhood, that is to say, the responsibility that one human being has for another, is clearly a historical and social fact of Jewish activity since the days of Abraham. Indeed, I am not arguing that either the concept or practice of brotherhood is exclusively Jewish. (Though there are those who argue that the ancient Hebrew was the first to pledge his allegiance to his fellow man.) What I am arguing, however, is that the responsibility that the Jew feels (and has felt) for his fellow man (Jew and non-Jew alike) is an attitude rooted in the teachings of the Hebrew scriptures and is historically reinforced in the practices of the Jewish community.

Therefore, I submit that Jews, wherever they might be in the world, are held together as a people (despite the fact that no precise definition of what is a Jew has been established on the basis of physical type or racio-religious group) by: (1) particular religious beliefs; (2) social practices and cultural traditions colored by religious beliefs; (3) values and attitudes that distinguish them from other religious groups of people.

Furthermore, even though the exterior differences between Jews of one historical period and another are striking, still the ethical moral tradition in the Jewish faith has proven the building block upon which Jews of all periods have built their religious, cultural and personal lives. In addition, this heritage of religious dogma and cultural experience has produced a traceable character which has set the Jews apart from other religious and societal sub-cultures. Finally, in line with these conclusions, it is clear from the many investigations made in the United States in this century to determine who and what is a Jew that indeed some unique set of social attitudes and responses, some unique set of religious practices and points of view do occur in sufficient numbers to suggest that the designation 'Jew' is still in the twentieth century a meaningful and viable configuration. Whether any one of these investigations can one day prove definitive in establishing how Jews resemble one another and differ from other groups of human beings is not my main concern here. Rather, I insist that the common

characteristics as I have listed them must serve as the basis for discussing what is a Jew and what is the Jewish community. Furthermore, for our purposes in this dissertation, I maintain that the distinctly Jewish character, as illustrated earlier, has continued into this century to serve as an immediately vital, shaping influence in the American Jewish community.

In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I shall attempt to describe how the ethical-moral tradition in the Jewish faith has shaped the attitudes and aims of a number of Jewish American authors. In saying this, I am also saying that what is perhaps most important in determining whether a work of American fiction may be judged Jewish is whether the setting of the concerns of the characters in the fiction produce a statement which emphasizes the ethical-moral values of the Jewish faith. Ultimately, of course, such a statement can be expressed in various ways. Specifically, it would be an error to describe the Jewish American novel as literature which invariably settles on exclusively religious issues. However much the religious issue is a part of the literature of the American Jewish novel, it is not the entire picture.

To be sure, I do not wish to suggest that the religious theme is not in the front line of issues employed by the American Jewish authors between the years 1867 and 1927. The importance of the religious theme in the Jewish American novel must not be underestimated; it is <u>a part</u> of nearly every novel written during this period. After all, the

historical identity which the immigrant Jew brought to America was religious, not nationalistic. In this light, the experience of the Jewish American immigrant was unlike that of all other American immigrants. Herman Bernstein, in his novel, Contrite Hearts develops the parallel between the Jew's religious sense of history and the apocalyptic quality of the New World when he has Cantor Isroel discuss with a Russian crony a letter he has received from a former 'chedar' pupil who has emigrated to New York City. The question is raised by the crony whether Jews in America with their new-found economic and political freedom are not losing their identity as Jews. To this question, Cantor Isroel replies:

> In America a man must do as the Americans do. When Moses went up to heaven for forty days he stayed there without food, like the angels; and when the angels came down to Abraham, they ate and drank like human beings.
>
> ...King David was a wise and good king--but he was also a shepherd, a fiddler, and composer of psalms. And yet all of this did not interfere with his being a great king, did it?[25]

In other words, America's meaning for the Jewish immigrant was both secular and religious. Religion and economic and political self-determination are the crucial concerns of the American Jew--both in and out of literature--during the years between 1867 and 1927. Thus, if the student of the Jewish novel in American literature was to ignore any one of these concerns it would be tantamount to cutting himself off from one of the indispensable aspects of the literary history of this period. These three concerns--

frequently side by side in the same work of fiction--account for the fundamental conflicts and struggles which the immigrant and the first generation American Jews experienced in their daily encounter with the American way of life.

The issue of religion as such was more consciously employed by the Jews writing in the closing decades of the nineteenth and earlier years of the twentieth centuries--recent refugees as most of them were from the orthodox ghettos and 'shtels' of Russia and central Europe--than, for example, by the substantial number of Jewish writers in this century who were either "fellow travelers" or members of the Communist party. A Jewish writer, like a non-Jewish writer does not write in a vacuum. Issues help shape his artistic and intellectual vision.

It is especially true that Jewish American novels written during the thirties are filled to overflowing with commentary on political grievance, social unrest, and judgments about the prevailing economic systems. Undeniably, in a number of cases the novel became a political platform from which the Jewish author roared his social bias and demands for change. Yet the Jewish novel is not unique in this sense. For instance, political and social protest are the conspicuous characteristics of 'The Great Depression' phase of American literature. The so-called 'proletarian novel' of this period in American literature--in large part written by native born American authors--is testimony that

fiction can be used as a vehicle to protest against prevailing social theories and practices.

In fact, the very nature of the novel is designed to permit an elaborate and critical statement about man in his world. Frequently, what the artist does not dare to say outright in public, he finds license for in his fiction. The literary arsenal available to the angry but chary artist is well-stocked. His weapons may include statements couched in deliberately ambiguous prose, or veiled behind the subtle but significant gestures of politically oriented characters, or perhaps disguised in esoteric symbols and/or jargon translatable to only a knowing few. Whatever the internal technique, in many instances, the novel has proven to be the mouthpiece of dissent.

Furthermore, the novel as a method of protest against prevailing--or imagined--injustice is particularly attractive to the minority writer. By definition, the minority writer--Jew or otherwise--is outside the pale of society. Subsequently, his minority status reinforces as well as accentuates his dissatisfaction with the nature of the social climate within which he is a minority figure. However, should a minority writer choose to express directly through speech or pamphlet any dissatisfaction he has with the prevailing system, he runs the risk of censure or even physical abuse at the hands of the majority. In general, though, a clever novel written by a skillful artist minimizes these risks and may even gain for him a receptive audience from among those very people who would otherwise reject his position.

In other words, social philosophy which grows naturally out of the dramatic experiences and attitudes of the characters in the fiction frequently manages to reach a sympathetic audience. The Jewish novel between the years 1867 and 1927 increasingly demonstrates this deliberate effort on the part of the Jewish writers to cause to grow radical and revolutionary ideas like humps on the backs of their flesh and bloody characters.

What I am saying is that the minority writer has long recognized that 'anti-establishment' sentiment frequently finds safe passage through the techniques inherent in the novel form. And though the novel is hardly a guarantee of impunity, still in many cases the artist does manage to make his point without censure from the opposition. But what is most interesting in all this from the standpoint of the Jewish-American novel is how in nearly all cases where the fiction has served as an instrument to abet the cause of social justice, the essential energy for the effort appears to spring from the ethical-moral teachings of historical Judaism. In other words, these historical teachings triggered the American Jewish novelist to search for and report about ways in which man might act responsibly toward his fellows as well as toward himself.

In no instance is this made more clear than in the Jewish American novels produced by the authors who wrote under the influence of political doctrine. Frequently the entire focus of these novels settles on dramatizing, discussing,

and solving man's involvement in society in terms of dialectical materialism. To be sure, nearly all Jewish American novels are concerned with the social issues of one kind or another. However, it remained for the Marxist and Socialist novelists to most emphatically and unrelentingly explore this concern in terms of specific political and economic ideologies. Furthermore, whereas earlier Jewish American writers had limited themselves to raising questions about man's place and experience in society, these blatantly political authors went one step beyond and troubled to provide answers to questions raised about man's place and experience in society.

Incorporating into their fiction the Old Testament view that man is basically good, these Jewish American writers proceeded to critically appraise, condemn, and reconstruct the New World society along doctrinal lines. Ironically, it was the United States of America, practically the only country in nearly two thousand years that had permitted the Jews to raise their voices, individually or collectively, above a whisper, whose policies and practices went in for the most abuse at the hands of these writers. Though the cruelties resulting to the Jews from the anti-Semitic policies of Poland and czarist Russia are mentioned in these novels, it is the alleged corruption of elected officials and the economic disparity between classes in a democratic society that are the major targets of this group of writers.

The literary concomitant resulting from this unilateral view of man in a democratic society is a cluster of dramatically unconvincing and structurally deficient Jewish American novels. Not a single one of these novels comes close to telling a convincing story. The reason for this singular across the board failure is related to these authors almost complete concern with promoting ideology while at the same time neglecting to recognize that a message in a work of fiction is only as compelling as the convincing characters and situations producing it.

Most intolerable of all in this collection of literary failures is the inability of the various authors to successfully integrate their ideological commentaries to the dramatic incidents and characters in the stories themselves. In novel after novel in this politically oriented collection, the main characters in the stories do not appear to be internally motivated to act as they are eventually caused to act. Instead, how and why they act appears almost entirely the result of their creators' need to make an ideological point. Invariably, in these novels the authors' concern for making fiction into a vehicle for propaganda, causes them to ignore any concern they might otherwise have had for telling a story in which the evolution of the hero's character and his ultimate fate are carefully prepared for and developed.

To be sure it is not uncommon to find that works of fiction which emphasize political and economic themes suffer from this overpowering lack of integration between art and

statement. Take for example the Marxist novelist. Usually he concerns himself with three areas of human involvement: the portrayal of the economic clash between employee-employer, most frequently dramatized in an industrial setting; the criticism of that segment of modern society, i.e., capitalism, which clings to anachronistic human values; the recognition of and concern for the truth found in Marxist ideology and its implications for the great masses of mankind living in a highly technological urban society.

Ideally, the Marxist novelist seeks to integrate into the drama of his story line the economic clash between employee-employer in order to demonstrate the disparities between how working men in modern society do live and how they should live. In addition, the novelist reveals and considers the principles of his ideology by applying them to this economic clash in order to make clear to his readers how given the proper economic and social conditions the individual worker will find himself respected down to the smallest detail of his personality and physical well-being.

During the summer of 1921, Michael Gold, a Jewish American advocate of proletariat art, stated in "The Liberator" what he believed to be the role of the creative artist involved in the struggle for the international, social and economic freedom of the working man. In a highly personal and emotional essay, Gold works to make clear his distinctions between the old order of artists and the new, and the moral worth of a creative artist committed to social

revolution. The essay opens with the line: "In blood, in tears, in chaos and wild, thunderous clouds of fear the old economic order is dying."[26] Relying on this same kind of intense, thrilling language, Gold continues for several paragraphs discussing how life is made up of both the good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly, and then, suddenly, announces the point of his thesis: The old order of artists were little more than emotionally sterile men who had deliberately divorced themselves from the concerns and problems of the common people, and only through a commitment to the Social Revolution which will free the common people from the dreary depths of oppression and suffering can the contemporary artist hope to live a meaningful and moral life.

Gold proceeds in some detail to make clear what advantages the creative artist can hope to find as a result of his total commitment to the Social Revolution. He speaks of how the old order of artists had remained contemptuous of the common people and their concerns, and had thereby transformed themselves as well as their art into spiritually sterile, morally worthless objects. Gold then contrasts these failures to the new order of proletarian artists whom he visualizes as creative heroes capable of producing insights into the meaning and beauty of life heretofore never believed possible.

In his essay, 'Towards Proletarian Art,' Gold clearly breaks with the romantic tradition which had dominated literature during the nineteenth century. Seeing "The Revolution, in its secular manifestations of strike, boycott, mass-meeting, imprisonment, sacrifice, agitation, martyrdom, organization..."[27] as an activity capable of being practiced on what amounts to a religious level, Gold feels the artist must involve himself with the masses and their welfare if he is to create literature which will amount to more than a composition of "some transient personal mood."

By identifying the new order of artists as men whose creative destinies were inexorably bound up in the Social Revolution, while at the same time denying a place of importance in literature to the solitary artist who chose to remain aloof from the plight of the common man, Gold sought in theory to transform the artist from a devotee of the inner life into an apostle of revolutionary movement. As a consequence, based on this and similar pronouncements, the Marxist hero of Jewish American fiction inevitably became a predictable figure whose personality and overall experiences varied hardly at all from one novel to the next.

Step by step the Jewish American Marxist hero's experiences in the New World are methodically worked out across page after page of the fiction. Most often this hero is a European born working man whose urban naivete and regard for his fellow human beings has left him ill prepared to cope with the ambiguous and exploitative demands made upon him in

a machine civilization. Generally in the novel the central thrust of the story makes vivid for the reader what happens to the working man who enters the New World's capitalistic economy with ambitions of making a worthwhile life for himself and his loved ones. Invariably, of course, in the Marxian novel all of the ambitions of the hero must meet with defeat as long as he continues to operate within the framework of a capitalistic system.

Typically, the authors of Jewish American Marxian novels were exceedingly careful to point out to their readers just why according to economic theory such defeat had to come about. In one way or another, though most often the point is made in a garment district sweathouse, the optimistic immigrant is repeatedly brutalized by a callous capitalist boss who manages through his dehumanizing methods to transform the immigrant hero into a wretched figure nearly resigned to live out his life squeezed and strapped into a dreary corner of the American economy. Page by page, day by day, the novel proceeds to document how the immigrant hero's life, down to his very breath, is measured in terms of dollars and cents while an impersonal economy moves to completely crush him and his helpless and hopeless family.

However, this scrupulous portrayal of the hero's decline in the New World is but one part of the literary content of these novels which were weapons of the Social Revolution. Practically without exception, part two of the literary content of these Jewish American Marxist novels

consists of an unimaginative and melodramatic account of the hero's conversion from a disillusioned working man into a Marxist crusader committed to the ideology which calls for international revolution on the part of the proletariat.

> ...A consideration of the process whereby a worker becomes class conscious...tends to follow a characteristic pattern. For the proletarian hero, the developmental process is a slow awakening to the injustice of capitalism as it operates within his own limited experience. The worker often attempts to rise from his class, only to find that his struggles are thwarted by his lack of money or his predilection for honesty. He blunders along, painfully puzzling out such questions as why he is periodically laid off, why men injured by machines are given no compensation or are cheated of it, why strikes are sometimes sold out by corrupt union officials, why police brutality has always to be expected. When, therefore, a Communist agitator or organizer begins to make the protagonist generalize from his experiences, the agitator's words are like a match applied to an already laid fire, which then blazes up in the red flame of revolt.[28]

What is most significant in this for our purposes is how clumsily and unconvincingly these radical artists manage these conversions. To watch the embattled worker of the New World transformed into a Marxist lover of blood at the barricades is to witness an author at work who in his eagerness to produce political statements disregards all the techniques fundamental to good writing. Blinded by his single-minded instinct for causing the actions of the novel to say things which in the same breath discredit capitalism and laud Marxist teachings, the artist permits his concern for plot, style, and even characterization to go by the boards.

To sum up: More than anything else the moral-ethical characteristics of the literature defines the activity in the Jewish novel in American literature. Furthermore, it provides

the student of literature with an established marker, a marker which proves to be indispensable in understanding why the fiction of the immigrant and first generation American Jew evolved as it did. That is to say, that unless the student of literature troubles to understand the religious antecedents which influence the Jewish-American writer, he cannot hope to evaluate realistically and intelligently why characters in Jewish novels attach importance to the things they do--whether as Marxists or an anarchists or as garment district capitalists.

Early Jewish fiction is not only profoundly moral but radically political. One of the effects of this is, in most cases, novels in which socio-political statements are tacked on to inchoate personae whose attitudes and actions are in the final analysis artistically unsatisfying. More often than not, what is most important to the early Jewish-American author is emphasizing through his fictional characters and situations the Jewish peoples' fight for complete and unqualified acceptance as human beings in an ideal community where all are unequivocally committed to the view that man is good and worth perpetuating.

Perhaps, a statement made by Mark Twain sixty-eight years ago will best serve to pinpoint the spirit with which these introductory remarks and the following chapters have been written regarding the Jewish novel and its place in American literature.

> If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race...Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian, rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dreamstuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?[29]

If what Mark Twain says here of the Jew is not without significance, then perhaps a study of the thought contained within the Jewish American novel has merit despite the obvious literary weaknesses in the works themselves.

FOOTNOTES

[1]George E. Simpson, J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, (New York, 1953), p. 53.

[2]Simpson, Yinger, p. 55.

[3]Joseph Jacobs, 'On the Racial Characters of Modern Jews,' in Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute, Vol. XV, 1885, pp. 24-25 (London), quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.), New York, 1949.

[4]Melville J. Herskovits, 'Who Are The Jews?,' in The Jews Their History, Culture, and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.), New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 1493.

[5]J. S. Huxley and A. C. Haddon, 'We Europeans; a Survey of Racial Problems, (New York and London, 1936), p. 147, quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, Philadelphia, 1949, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.).

[6]Carleton S. Coon, The Races of Europe, New York, 1939, p. 442, quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, (Philadelphia, 1949), (Louis Finkelstein, ed.).

[7]Coon, quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion.

[8]Wilton M. Krogman, Anthropology, physical (ms. of article prepared for the World Encyclopedia Institute, 1945), quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, 1949, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.).

[9]Krogman, quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.).

[10]Raymond Kennedy, "The Position and Future of the Jews in America," in Jews in a Gentile World, op. cit., pp. 419-420, quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.).

[11]Joseph Bram, "The Social Identity of the Jews," Trans. N. Y. Acad. of Sci. Ser. II, Vol. VI, No. 6, 1944, p. 194, quoted in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.).

[12]Melville J. Herskovits, "Who Are The Jews?", in The Jews Their History, Culture, and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.), New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 1153.

[13]Herskovits, pp. 1167-68.

[14]Leslie A. Fiedler, 'Life and Death in the American Novel,' Cleveland, 1962, p. 252.

[15]Fiedler, p. 252.

[16]Leslie A. Fiedler, 'On the Road; or the Adventures of Karl Shapiro,' Poetry, XCVI, 171.

[17]Fiedler, p. 171.

[18]Irving Malin, 'Jews and Americans,' Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1965, 1965, p. 14.

[19]Malin, p. 14.

[20]George E. Simpson, J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, New York, 1953, p. 53.

[21]Simpson, Yinger, p. 55.

[22]Will Herberg, "Protestant, Catholic, Jew," Garden City, New York, 1956, pp. 201-202.

[23]Louis Finkelstein, 'The Jewish Religion: Its Beliefs and Practices', in The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion, (Louis Finkelstein, ed.), New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 1352.

[24]Albert I. Gordon, 'Jews in Transition,' University of Minnesota Press, 1949, p. 172, quoted in George Simpson, J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, 1953.

[25]Herman Bernstein, 'Contrite Hearts', A. Wessels & Co., New York, 1905, p. 100.

[26]Irwin Granich ("Michael Gold"), "Towards Proletarian Art," Liberator, IV (February 1921), p. 23.

[27]Granich ("Gold"), p. 23.

[28]Walter B. Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United States, (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 180-81.

[29]Mark Twain, 'Concerning the Jews,' Harper's Magazine, September, 1899.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Charles Child Walcutt has written that "all literature is founded on some concept of the nature of man." Furthermore, he adds: "When a major new literary trend appears it either assumes or defines some new concept of man and therefore of his place in the world. Such a new image takes its shape against the background from which it has emerged and against which it has in some way reacted."[1]

Mr. Walcutt's description of the origins of literary developments in general is in several respects a remarkably accurate description of the origin and development of the Jewish American novel in particular. Admittedly, even a cursory exploration of the Jewish American novel as a sub-genre in American literature would reveal that the Jewish American novel is anything but a 'major new literary trend' in American letters. However, the Jewish American novel is a distinguishable and sizeable sub-genre in American letters, and the parallels in origin and development that can be drawn between it and those found in major literary trends are worth considering.

For instance, Mr. Walcutt speaks of 'a major new literary trend' inevitably defining a 'new concept of man'

or at the very least embracing a concept that currently exists. In the case of the early Jewish American novelists the source for their 'concept of man' was at once both ancient and current. In the first chapter of this discussion I explored at length the ethical-moral 'concept of man' that declares on faith that 'the nature of man' is essentially good and which has proven the cornerstone supporting a great measure of Judaism since its inception. Of course, it is a long time since the days of Abraham. Yet despite the challenges down through the centuries that quarrel with this view of man, the modern Jewish tradition clings to this concept. Furthermore, Judaism recognizes an additional step which evolves naturally forward out of this basic concept. Judaism takes the position that upon granting the initial premise which postulates that something is good, i.e., man--it, therefore, uncontrovertibly follows that something is a thing worth perpetuating. Such a view of man was originally and has remained the fundamental concept developed by most Jewish American novelists in their fiction.

In the various novels discussed in this study, the majority of them evolve from the initial premise that man is essentially good. Practically without exception the earliest American novels take this position. Clearly, therefore, it can be said that the Jewish American novelist has been deeply influenced by his ethnic heritage. However, it must also be noted that while the Jewish American novelist was writing with one foot firmly grounded in his ethnic past,

he was, in most cases, at the same time striding forward with his other foot in an effort to incorporate into his view of man ideas stamped out of the precious metal of his own time. In fact, in a number of instances, the authors writing Jewish American novels were so anxious to incorporate the social and political philosophy of their own time into the framework of their fiction that it resulted in novels which are mostly pedagogical and hardly dramatic.

In other words, I suggest that Mr. Walcutt's statement that 'background' does affect 'a major new literary trend' applies in the extreme to the instance of the origin and development of the Jewish American novel. A reading of this sub-genre of American literature reveals that two major influences dominate its pages. First of all, from its very inception, the ethical-moral influence growing out of the Old Testament has had a highly significant impact on the Jewish American novel. Secondly, there is evident on the pages of the Jewish American novels written during these years, an ever growing influence coming out of nineteenth century political, social, and scientific thought; the thought figuring most prominently on the pages of the Jewish American novels being that of a political character.

It was this combination of historical and contemporary influences which during these years influenced what issues would be raised in the Jewish American novels, the direction in which the discussion of these issues would be slanted, and finally the ways in which the 'dramatis personae' of

these novels attempted to resolve these issues in terms of their own lives. Furthermore, it may be argued with confidence that these historical and contemporary influences eventually moved byond the initial point of providing background from out of which Jewish American fiction emerged. Over a period of years these same influences assumed such prominence in the literature as a whole as to be more accurately described as the raw material from which much Jewish American fiction was shaped.

Such then are the main historical and contemporary influences which significantly oriented the direction(s) of the Jewish American novel. On the one hand, the Jewish American novelist continually wrote his fiction with the idea in the front of his mind that his hero was essentially a good creature. And, on the other hand, when that hero failed, for one reason or another, to match up in his fictional experiences to this ideal--something in the novelist's mind told him that the reasons for the failure could be overwhelmingly explained away within the context of nineteenth century political, social, and scientific rationalizations. In time, these nineteenth century rationalizations were narrowed down in the minds of the Jewish American novelists from such diverse ideologies as Nihilism and Humanism to an almost exclusive concern with the ideology of Communism. By 1930, practically the only Jewish American fiction being written was literature concerned with themes of economic and social protest viewed along Marxist lines.

Whereas the Jewish American novelists between the years of 1867 and 1910 sought to explore the Jewish man's problems in the New World from the perspective of various sociological and theological vantage points, later Jewish American novelists saw themselves as missionaries preaching the gospel of economic determinism, i.e., Bolshevist Communism. To be sure, such a singular view of man's problems in the New World brought with it distinct alterations in the structural make-up of the Jewish American novel.

Broadly speaking, the Jewish American novel during the years between 1867 and 1910 followed the pattern established by such pre-Soviet writers of fiction as Mikhail Yurevich Lermontov (1814-41) and Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol (1809-1852). This pattern of fiction provided that, first of all, the main character be introduced early in the pages of the novel. Furthermore, a precise historical as well as contemporary statement regarding the hero's personality and experience in the world was to be sketched on these early pages prior to the narration moving on to anything else.

With this part of the literary format fulfilled, the fictional pattern under discussion then called for a chronological exploration of the dilemmas facing the hero. Lermontov's, A Hero of Our Time, and Gogol's Dead Souls, are the archetypal instances in Russian literature which exemplify this fictional pattern, and which provided the structural dimensions necessary to give shape to the early Jewish American novels. In the world's largest community of Jews, i.e., New York City, there were at the close of the

nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries more Jews who were products of either a Russian birth or offspring of Russian born parents who had emigrated to the New World than Jews of any other national background. In many instances of Jewish culture and commerce, and particularly in the instance of Jewish American literature, these were the Jews who were responsible for the rich intellectual life and love of literature which has marked Jewish cultural history in the United States. As Hutchins Hapgood, a non-Jew and the first and finest chronicler of New York City's Lower East Side Jewish community wrote in 1902: 'Coming from Russia, as they do...the most educated and intelligent among the Jews of the East Side speak Russian...'[2] Hapgood goes on in his text, The Spirit of the Ghetto, to describe in detail the Russian Jew's dedicated concern with things of the mind and spirit. Hapgood's statements in the text are a vigorous overall testimony to the intellectual drive and enthusiasm for life which was so typical of numbers of the enlightened Russian Jews who had made 'The New World' their new home. It is this same enthusiasm for life and intellectual concerns which is so evident in even the esthetically poorest works produced by Jewish American novelists up to the year of 1927.

Possibly what is most important for our purposes here is the examination made by Hutchins Hapgood in the same study regarding the intellectual 'background' of the Jewish intelligentsia living on the Lower East Side of New York City

during the Jewish American literary gestation period of 1880 and 1890. The biographical sketches of authors interviewed by Hapgood during this study are those of Jewish Americans of Russian birth who wrote either in Yiddish or Hebrew. However, the observations made by Hapgood in respect to literary influences holds good, with certain qualifications, for the Jewish Americans of the same time period who wrote in English.

Hapgood repeatedly makes the point that nearly all of the 'background' sources which influenced the largest number of these Russian Jews emanated from the dual roots of Judaic and Russian thought. In addition, Harry Golden, a noted contemporary Jewish American commentator on topics concerned with early Jewry in the United States, observes in a preface to a new edition of Hapgood's study that Russian novels translated into Yiddish were the foremost literary staples of Russian Jewry living on the Lower East Side of New York City.

A comparison of Lermontov's novel, The Hero of Our Time, and Gogol's novel, Dead Souls, and to a lesser degree such works as A Sportsman's Sketches, by Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev (1818-83) and Mother, by Maxim Gorki (1868-1936) with the bulk of Jewish American fiction written between the years of 1867 and 1927 discloses striking structural parallels between the two literatures. The literary format described in part above, and indigenous to early Russian fiction, more than any other esthetic influence helped shape

the final form of the first three decades of Jewish American fiction.

Perhaps it is inevitable that a novel which is constructed in such a straightforward manner that the author has only to introduce the hero early in the story, tell considerable about him before any real action takes place, and then have him travel through the bulk of the novel down a road of life filled with dilemmas, should be the most likely choice of anyone writing his first full length work of fiction.

It has been argued that the beginning novelist most often turns to the picaresque format because it makes the fewest demands on his organizational and dramatic skills. In its most primitive form the skeletal framework of the picaresque novel need be composed of nothing more than a series of barely related adventures. Like learning how to walk, the beginning craftsman has merely, clumsly or otherwise, to learn how to place one adventure after another in a tolerably interesting manner.

However, putting aside the question of the merits of the form, there can be no debate over the observation that the picaresque novel typifies the fictional format frequently used by Jewish American novelists up through the year 1927.

Individually, of course, the Jewish American novelists of this time span differed greatly in their respective abilities to cloak their ideas about man around the shoulders

of dramatically plausible flesh and bloody characters. The difference between the best and worst of these writers is effectively pointed up by comparing what critic Issac Rosenfeld writes about Abraham Cahan's novel, The Rise of David Levinsky, with what critic Milton Hindus writes about 'The Art of Anzia Yezierska.'

In an essay, 'David Levinsky: The Jew As American Millionaire,' Isaac Rosenfeld states:

> I had long avoided The Rise Of David Levinsky because I imagined it was a badly written account of immigrants and sweatshops in a genre which--though this novel had practically established it--was intolerably stale by now. It is nothing of the kind.
>
> ...It was not by accident that Cahan, for forty years and until his death the editor of the 'Jewish Daily Forward,' and identified all his life with Jewish affairs and the Yiddish language, wrote this novel in English (it has only recently been translated into Yiddish). He was writing an American novel par excellence in the very center of the Jewish genre.
>
> It seems to me that certain conclusions about the relation between Jewish and American character should be implicit in the fact that so singularly Jewish a theme can so readily be assimilated to an American one. I am not suggesting that Jewish and American character are identical,...but there is a complementary relation between the two which, so far as I know, no other novel has brought out so clearly.[3]

In these several paragraphs, Rosenfeld makes it clear that his views about the novel are based on conclusions which consider the work both as a piece of art as well as a statement about the Jew in 'The New World.' As Rosenfeld himself declares in another essay: 'Necessary to any proper critical appraisal of any artist is a consideration of his artistic accomplishments.'[4] Specifically about Cahan's accomplishments Rosenfeld has this to say:

> It is a credit to Cahan's economy as a writer and to his grasp of character that at this point, in the sixty-odd pages which I have summarized, he has already drawn so convincing a picture of Levinsky, including all essential details, that Levinsky's subsequent adventures in the old country and America, his future encounters with poverty and with women, the rest of his intellectual development, and ultimate transformation into a millionaire, have all been fully prepared.[5]

Rosenfeld's point is the imaginative alliance Cahan manages between the raw materials of Levinsky's reality and that character's emotional makeup. In other words, the raw materials of Levinsky's environment are given meaning, in the dramatic sense, in so far as they are absorbed and shaped by Levinsky's personality. As long as the raw materials of a story remains alien to the protagonist's personality, as long as the experiences of the protagonist seem inauthentic in relation to the raw materials of his environment, you have two or more stories in one book. When, however, the raw materials of his reality are transformed by the protag—onist through the process of absorbtion and shaping into substances relevant and necessary to his characterization, the story is transformed from one of ordinary melodrama into convincing drama. From such a base, more important in a number of ways to the success of fiction than such consequential elements as dialogue, secondary characters, and even plot, an ordinary, commonplace story can become an extraordinary work of art, e.g., Madame Bovary, by Gustave Flaubert.

As Rosenfeld puts it in his essay:

> I have purposely refrained from treating David Levinsky as a fictional character and have spoken of the novel as though it were the actual memoir of an American Jew, in tribute to Cahan's power of characterization. Such immediacy of revelation is the novel's strongest quality, and Levinsky is made to talk about himself not only with an authentic accent, but with a motive in disclosure verging on something sly--precisely as such a man would talk.[6]

Anzia Yezierska, on the other hand, was an artist who, when pondering over how to assemble the materials of her craft, wondered:

> What shall I keep, and what shall I throw away? Which is madness and which is inspiration? I never know. I pick and choose things like a person feeling his way in the dark. ...I am never sure of myself.[7]

Milton Hindus in his essay, "The Art of Anzia Yezierska," makes much of her failure to successfully fuse the theme(s) of her novels with the characters in those novels. Again and again, Yezierska favored the picaresque format as the method for telling her stories. Yet, only occasionally can the reader distinguish a clear line running between her protagonist's unsatisfied loves and Miss Yezierska's bitter criticism of a social system which permits human beings to suffer social and economic oppression. Almost always, the themes of Miss Yezierska's novels seem virtually at cross purposes with her characters.

In one respect, however, the differences between these two Jewish American authors is slight. For while one can speak of <u>The Rise of David Levinsky</u>, as a brilliantly constructed picture of what any number of Jews must have felt as they faced the incredible new world of America, and for the most part the overall impression presented by the novels

of Miss Yezierska may be fairly described as a collection of terminal characters who are baffling, inarticulate and even fantastic, both to themselves as well as to the readers, still, at the same time, both authors do present interesting historical scenes and commentaries of a time in American history now forever gone.

With this in mind, the question naturally follows: What has all this to do with Jewish American fiction as a whole? In what ways, if any, do the failures and successes of these individual authors serve as a study in microcosm casting light upon the macrocosm of Jewish American fiction generally?

On the one hand, it might be assumed that such "distinct differences" between the two authors and their respective ability to wield an organically unified tale would be typical of any extended comparison of any number of Jewish American authors and their works. Such an assumption, however, would be entirely erroneous. In fact, just the opposite is true. The "distinct differences" that are found in the novels of Anzia Yezierska when compared to The Rise of David Levinsky, are not differences which typically appear when Miss Yezierska's novels are compared with the other Jewish American novels written during this time span. The truth of the matter is, Anzia Yezierska's novels are only the worst of what is at best a very bad batch of literary efforts. Outside of Abraham Cahan's novel, The Rise of David Levinsky, all Jewish American novels produced during

this time span must be judged to be pitifully lacking in the esthetic essentials fundamental to finished art.

Admittedly, this statement smacks of easy generalization and oversimplification. Furthermore, the truth underlying this contention can only be worked out as each author and his individual works are critically explored. However, this lack of artistic finesse which is so typical of Jewish American fiction as a whole is in no wise a justification for ignoring the works themselves. In many instances, the study of poor art has produced rich and valuable observations. Whatever may be said by the literary critic about the failure of early Jewish American fiction as literature, the literary historian may nevertheless contend that the insights gleaned from this fiction proves enormously valuable as commentary on this ethnic group as it emerged into the American mainstream. For instance, disguised in the throes of ungrammatical and clumsy use of language, frequently may be found--unbeknownst to the author himself--the singular cultural rhythms of the people he wishes to reveal. Even the strains produced on the overall esthetic balance of a novel as a result of an author's all too intense concern with statement, though bad art, frequently makes for good history; the intensity in the mind of the author producing the strain being something of a commentary on the temper of the times.

In order to justify the argument that bad art frequently produces good history, the reader need only turn over the pages of any one of a number of these poorly constructed

Jewish American novels and discover for himself the literal army of vigorous and varied characterizations and descriptions of the life and times of this period. This way of life in America is now, of course, entirely over. Yet the fictional accounts of this time continue to outlive their creators. And it is the verbal portraits of personages and events (often adapted from real life) found in these fictional accounts that prove so valuable a resource for historians attempting to reconstruct how this segment of American society actually lived. In 1902, Hutchins Hapgood recognized the "flash of life" apparent in these novels written by Jewish Americans when he declared: "Rather than for the art they reveal, they are interesting for the sincere way in which they present a life intimately known."[8] In other words, Jewish American authors of this time span are best remembered for producing the precious portraits of what has since become an extinct way of life.

It has been pointed out earlier in this discussion that the vast majority of these fictional efforts centered around social and political themes. The reason for this is apparent: The Jewish American author of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century was a direct descendant of a religious minority who had for centuries experienced "special" treatment at the hands of non-Jewish majorities. Literally, the Jew had throughout his stay in Western and Eastern Europe been segregated from the political and social opportunities enjoyed by his non-Jewish countrymen. Harry Golden describes it in this way:

> The Jewish immigrants from Russia, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, and Lithuania, who were the vanguard of the exodus, came here because they were persecuted in the old country--persecuted first by laws that made them third class citizens, and second, by the threat of physical violence that kept them and their women and children in constant peril.
>
> The Jews came to America to establish a new life. My mother told me that her life in Europe, though no idyl, was infinitely preferable to life in the New York ghetto. She told me of the joys of walking barefoot through the meadows of her village in Rumania. She told me of the beauties of the wheat fields and the distant mountains. In our ghetto tenement the halls stank, and through our front window we looked out upon a string of horse stables. Despite this, my mother said, she was happy that there was a new life for her children. Here in America they had opportunity.
>
> Life was pleasant, healthier, and more beautiful in the old country perhaps, but it always contained the seeds of menace and deprivation. No Jewish boy, she told me, no matter how smart, could expect to rise higher than apothecary, and that only by sufferance, special permission, and bribery. The crowded tenement was worth it, she said.[9]

It must be clearly understood at this point that to leave a home to find a home is a quest which ultimately yields more than a change in geography. Much as a man may want to, or need to, he cannot trade one place for another place and therefore leave his past behind. Man's sense of what he once was stays more or less with him throughout life. The emigrant who goes away from home to find a home is surely in error if he believes that his past is no more than an image recorded on the blackboard of his mind to be wiped away at will with a change of scenery. Like a swimmer who strokes from one side of the pool to the other, the side of the world the emigrant shoves off from influences the very direction in which he goes. Harry Golden's anecdote about his mother illustrates how, despite a change in

place, the attitudes the Jews held regarding the Old World affected the impressions they formed about the new. Nothing reveals this more clearly than the comparison he draws between his mother's love of freedom and opportunity in the New World, and her loathing of the persecution and peril that Jews generally had experienced in the Old World. Her willingness to make sacrifices in the New World, Golden points out, was based on the attitudes his mother had formed in the Old World as a result of living the life of a "third-class citizen." In the New World, she was more than willing to give up any contact with physical beauty in exchange for the privilege assured her children that they would be "equal in the eyes of the law."

When all is said and done, Mrs. Golden, like her fellow Jewish Americans, had been willing to give up to get, to change radically from one way of life to another way of life. Yet, as the anecdote makes clear, the old and new ways of life overlapped. Henri Bergson, a French Jew, has described how any and all change must inevitably reflect both the old and the new. Describing change as an expression of the life force in nature, he wrote:

> We find that, for a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.
>
> ...Succession is an undeniable fact, even in the material world. Though our reasoning on isolated systems (detached objects observed by science) may imply that their history, past, present, and future might be instantaneously unfurled like a fan, this history, in point of fact, unfolds itself gradually, as if it occupied a duration like our own.

Discussing the issue of change in man, Bergson adds:

> Doubtless we think with only a small part of our past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act. Our past, then, as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse; it is felt in the form of tendency, although a small part of it only is known in the form of idea.[10]

Traditionally, man has viewed change as something for the better. Certainly the European Jews coming to the New World saw change in this light. However, many of these same Jews rejected the notion that change "unfurled" over a period of time, that it was determined in part by causes in the past. Instead, these Jews preferred to believe that change happened--or could be made to happen--all at once. For instance, the anarchistic members of the Lower East Side community, godless and traditionless, described the ideal man as naturally "full of kindness, devotion, and love for his race."[11] Furthermore, they envisioned such creations as church and state as unnatural impediments obstructing man's quest after self-fulfillment. Give man free rein, they argued, and he would instinctively do and go right. Tear down the artificial and resurrect the natural became their battle cry.

> The anarchists desire no government whatever, believing that law works against the native dignity of the individual, and they trust to man's natural goodness to maintain order under free conditions. A man's own conscience only can punish him sufficiently, they think.
>
> The talk of these anarchists is distinguished by a high idealism and an unpractical and devoted attitude... They say they have no leaders, as that would be against individual liberty.[12]

Geographically distant from the restraints of the Old World, the anarchists believed themselves capable of including in the New World a godless utopia where man would be the ruler over his own destiny and as a consequence of his natural goodness would live in harmony with his fellow men. And on paper such views read well. The American Jew, whether anarchist or socialist, communist or capitalist, had run away from a European past filled with bitter memories. But what some did not realize was that in the process of running they had unavoidably carried with them much from out of their past. It was particularly hard, for example, for the American Jew to discard his sense of being a "third-class citizen." For centuries in Europe he had lived as a social and political isolate. Inevitably, the Jewish emigrant arrived on the shores of the New World somewhat sceptical of the practical possibilities of experiencing "equality in the eyes of the law." His painful past would not permit him to easily put aside his feelings of uncertainty regarding the possibility of this edict. And many Jews were not long in discovering on the teeming streets of lower Manhattan that though the spirit of the edict might be well-intended, still, the practical experiences of an immigrant struggling to make a place for himself in the New World indicated a substantial difference between the spirit and the fact of the matter.

Dreams that America was literally a nation where all men were millionaires were quickly discarded by the Jewish immigrants and, in some cases, replaced by various political

and economic philosophies that had in mind to recreate America in their image. Perhaps the Jew, more so than any other immigrant, was hypersensitive to the inevitable disparities which existed between what the letter of the law of the land promised and the fact of the matter. For nearly two thousand years the Jew had been a wanderer in lands all over the world, sometimes a citizen but more often not, a religious outsider looking in on a world he had little identity with--taking second best or whatever was available. His history has made of him a well-practiced intuitive political scientist. The immigrant Jew felt right and wrong out of a sensibility shaped by the pressures of a painful past.

It is therefore not difficult to understand why nearly all of the Jewish American authors between the years 1867 and 1927 concerned themselves in their fiction sometimes almost exclusively with themes based on political, economic, and social issues. Generally speaking, all Jews born in the nineteenth century, writers or otherwise, were conditioned practically from birth to be especially conscious of such institutions as church and state, institutions which historically had played such a crucial and preponderantly negative role in their destinies.

Eric Hoffer has written, "The ghetto was a fortress as much as it was a prison."[13] And indeed it was within the protective walls of the American ghetto fortress that so many Jews begin for the first time to express themselves

freely on issues concerning man's social and political destiny in the world. The old saying that "there is strength in numbers" was singularly true of the Jewish American community located on the Lower East Side of New York City. For it was here that the Jew, realizing that he did indeed have the legal right to free speech and dissent "in the land of the free," found that when he raised his voice to such issues as injustice and suffering, in turn, there were large numbers of fellow Jews available and willing to give him a sympathetic hearing. Furthermore, the Jew's appreciation of these speeches and dialogues on injustice and suffering was a genuine one; an appreciation born out of a very real and lengthy history of actual experience.

In other words, the unique aspect of the American experience for the American Jew was not that injustice and suffering existed--after all, to encounter injustice and suffering in the New World represented for the Jew merely a continuation of an historical fact of Jewish life. Rather, the unique aspect of the American experience was that for the first time since he had been driven out of his Palestinian homeland two thousand years earlier, the Jew had been given the right to voice his dissatisfaction with all or portions of the status quo. And, in addition, he had also been given the right to seek to change, through legal means, those institutions causing his dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Inadvertently, the gentiles' lengthy persecution and political disfranchisement of world Jewry had prepared the American Jew, better than any other immigrant group, for the

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role of social spokesman in a world where injustice and suffering abounded. Perhaps nowhere is this more clearly revealed than in the pages of the social protest fiction produced by the ghetto writers of the Lower East Side. Here, in novel after novel, the central energy for the protagonist's attitudes and actions is tapped from the reservoirs of Old Testament morality and old world suffering. In many of these same novels a clear dramatic pattern is pursued whereby the authors attempt to thread an Old Testament moral fiber into the fabric of their hero's New World social consciousness. In other words, the hero of Jewish American protest fiction is tough minded and unrelenting about his social consciousness because his entire history, religious and societal, has pushed him in that direction.

In short, the Jewish American social protest novel is basically a moral treatise, a work of fiction that sets out to discredit certain socio-economic beliefs while proselytizing in behalf of others and which therefore tends to read, as a result of this political orientation, more like a revolutionary pamphlet than a finished piece of art. However, it should be noted that the primary artistic weaknesses of the Jewish American Marxist novel are not strikingly different from those artistic weaknesses characteristic of all Jewish American fiction written between the years 1867 and 1927. With only a single exception, the Jewish American novelist writing during this time period pushed far into the background such crucial esthetic issues as characterization, structural unity and plausibility.

To a considerable degree, the stylistic and artistic failures indigenous to these novels grew out of their authors' profound concern for problem solving. Only Abraham Cahan managed to accommodate his deeply serious cultural and humanistic ends to his artistic means. In all other cases, the Jewish American novels of this period suffer from this artistic-philosophical dichotomy; the artists of the respective novels either unwilling or unable to solve the problems involved in the integration of art and statement. To be sure, the phenomenon of the artistic-philosophical dichotomy in fiction is by no means a singular characteristic of Jewish American fiction. Such a problem faces any and all serious writers of fiction. However, the central reason underlying this condition in Jewish American fiction in particular can be found by examing the historical background of the Jewish people. On the one hand, traditional Jewish involvement in social and humanistic issues caused the Jewish American author to feel very much at home in the socio-economic issues of his day. At the same time, however, there existed no equally strong traditional Jewish involvement in esthetic matters which might have served as a frame of reference for the Jewish American author seeking a means by which he might order his raw materials into art.

It will become clear upon tracing through the development of the themes appearing in Jewish American fiction between the years 1867 and 1927, that more than any other factor, a concern for such matters as economic and political

theory, sociology and religion, and not some preconceived esthetic theory, controlled the direction and the form these novels took. In America, the Jewish novel represented one of various vehicles available to the intellectual Jewish community at large whereby pronouncements on the state of modernity and man might be made. Unlike the European artist who from the eighteenth century on down to the present has found himself at odds with the temper of society at large, the Jewish American artist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was very much immersed in the mainstream of issues common to the hearts of the Jewish American community. In turn, his words were listened to eagerly by an entire intellectual Jewish community that never stopped talking about the same issues themselves.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream, (St. Paul, 1956), p. 4.

[2]Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto, 2nd ed. (New York, 1965), p. 181.

[3]Isaac Rosenfeld, An Age of Enormity, (Cleveland, 1962), pp. 274-75.

[4]Rosenfeld, pp. 275-76.

[5]Rosenfeld, p. 280.

[6]Rosenfeld, p. 283.

[7]Anzia Yezierska, Children of Loneliness, (New York, 1923), p. 26.

[8]Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto, 2nd ed., (New York, 1965), p. 223.

[9]Hapgood, pp. 4-5.

[10]Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, "trans." Arthur Mitchell, 2nd ed. (New York, 1944), pp. 10-12.

[11]Bergson, p. 8.

[12]Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto, 2nd ed., (New York, 1965), pp. 192-94.

[13]Quoted as it appears in Hutchins Hapgood's, The Spirit of the Ghetto.

CHAPTER III

PART I. EARLY FICTION; THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

You are a Jew. You may as well tear the nose from your face as endeavor to solve your connection with your people. Whether for good or for ill, to break it, is an impossibility.

Nathan Mayer, Differences

Ever since I have been able to judge, Christ has been to me the loveliest and one of the best men that ever lived. He was never anything but what was great and good--what he preached was beautiful. It did not change my religion; it made me no less a Jewess in the true sense, but helped me to gentleness. To me he became the embodiment of Love in the highest,--Love perfect, but warm and human; human love so glorious that it needs no divinity to augment its power over us. He was God's attestation, God's symbol of what Man might be. As a teacher of brotherly love, he is sublime. So I may call myself a christian, though I spell it with a small letter.

Emma Wolf, Other Things Being Equal

Differences, the first American novel written in English about Jewish characters by a Jewish-American author, was published in 1867. Among other things, Differences was the first full-length work of fiction in American literature to deal with the various social and religious problems faced by a relatively small number of wealthy Jewish immigrants who lived scattered about the predominantly non-Jewish rural South. Differences asks the question: Can the members of a prosperous Jewish American family of French descent indulge themselves in the activities and liaisons of a Christian society without, at the same time, abandoning their religious identities?

Nathan Mayer, author of Differences, presents the Southern way of life as it existed in rural Tennessee just prior to, during, and immediately after the Civil War. To begin with the members of the affluent Goldman family are described as socially acceptable to their non-Jewish contemporaries. Throughout the story each one of the Goldmans is intended to serve as an exponent of a quality frequently sterotyped as indigenous to the "Jewish race." Furthermore, the activity of each member of the Goldman family represents a different kind of response that a Jew could make to the question of how far one had to go to achieve a secure place in Southern Christian society.

For instance, "very wealthy" Mr. Goldman is pictured by Mayer as being "very patient, a sharp, close calculator, as those of his race are apt to be," one who "did not know

much, but nevertheless honored knowledge in others," and who was above all else, a man who throughout his life remained loyal to the "differences" which distinguished Jews from other people.[1] Mrs. Goldman, on the other hand, is depicted as the kind of Jew who is willing to play down the "differences" which she feels sets her apart from the non-Jewish community. She is a practical woman, socially ambitious both for herself and her children, who is "ashamed of her business capacities, which were excellent," because in her mind they marked her as clever and ambitious and thus characteristically and unfortunately Jewish.[2]

However, it is not the self-effacing actions of European-born Mrs. Goldman, but the actions of her American-born son which Mayer holds up as the most reprehensible and extreme form of abnegation practiced by nineteenth-century Jews seeking acceptance from Southern Christian society. Charley Goldman, heir to the considerable Goldman fortune, deliberately turns his back on much that is Jewish in his endeavor to secure for himself a beautiful Christian wife and complete acceptance from Christian society. When pressed by an acquaintance about his repeated refusals to date Jewish girls, he replies:

> I cannot make up my mind to face continually the charges, just or unjust, which society has been in the habit of bringing against those of the Jewish--those of my father's--those of--our faith. Still, do not think that I am ashamed of people holding that persuasion, for I associate with a great many, and visit their clubs.[3]

Nor is Charley any less firm when his parents object to his plans for marrying a gentile.

> Most of the young (Jewish) ladies...I have found to be ill-bred, tainted by the pecuniary difficulties that overshadowed their childhood, or by the coarse disposition of their parents. Their acquaintance with the actual worth of money, and the operations of commerce have blighted their finer sensibilities, and I could not endure a wife, who, when I gave her a bracelet, would esteem my love to be equal to five hundred dollars, and when I presented her with a bouquet of camelias, to equal to ten. The worth of the purse so overshadows one in the estimation of these ladies, that the husband is a secondary consideration. I want a wife who has been raised in circumstances of such affluence, or whose soul has been so above the power of circumstances, that money is an article that does not enter into her calculations.[4]

Charley Goldman is representative of the Jew who overreacts in his attempt to free himself from the pressures of inferiority brought on by living in a society where the gentiles are in the majority.

If Mr. Goldman's principal quality may be described as loyalty, and Mrs. Goldman's as practicality, their son might be best described as an example of timidity. At one point in the novel, Mayer writes: "A Jew may as well tear the nose from his face as endeavor to solve his connection with his people. Whether for good or for ill, to break it, is an impossibility."[5]

Mayer's contempt for the Jew who turns his back on his people and their traditions is the major focus of the novel. On the other hand, he has nothing but good things to write about a surveyor named Welland who is proud and open about being a Jew, treats all men, rich and poor, black and white, Jew and non-Jew with decency and good sense, and is overflowing with physical and moral courage. Without exception Welland manages to say and do the right thing. He is

described as a Jew equally at home in performing the riskiest acts of courage or in executing the most refined social graces. Handsome and noble, Welland is the novel's example of all that Charles Goldman, his mother, and others like them can never be. Welland is the kind of Jew, Mayer seems to be saying, who gains respect and even love from both Jew and gentile on his own terms--terms which do not include hiding from the world his Jewish origin, and therefore terms which in no way compromise his individuality and right to free choice.

Generally speaking, however, Mayer fails in his effort to paint a convincing portrait of how a small and rather unique segment of Jewish Americana struggled to achieve a working union with their non-Jewish counterparts. To be sure, when he is describing wealthy Jews and the different kinds of problems they face attempting to integrate an almost feudal society, Meyer seems very much at home with his subject. Had he chosen to remain within the limited range of this unique microcosm, he would have succeeded in creating an interesting and thoughtful story of how Jews lived during that time and in that place. Unfortunately, however, Mayer interrupts himself far too often with discussions on such subjects as class problems, political life, economics, slavery, religion, domestic problems, war, rural and urban living, intermarriage, violence, romance, the role of the Jew in a Christian world, and on and on. In other words, his novel is peopled with more ideas and issues than seem

relevant. As a result the dialogue coming out of the mouths of his characters frequently seems inconsistent with their personalities.

A particularly striking example of such an inconsistency occurs toward the close of the novel. Charley Goldman has been taken prisoner by Northern troops. He is placed in the custody of a Jewish family living in New York City. The question of whether a Jew owes allegiance to the country he resides in arises. Charley heatedly defends his decision to fight on the side of the South during the war between the states.

> "But probably they forced you to enter the army?"
> "No, I entered of my own accord," replied Charley.
> "You must have known why. There is money to be made in every profession, if one is but smart. Did you make much?"
> "My salary--enough to furnish me in gloves."
> "You are joking. You never exposed your life for that, though I account it folly to expose one's life at any rate."
> "You are correct. I exposed it to defend my country's rights."
> "Pshaw. Don't throw such words at me. These are phrases for Gentiles. What has a Jew to do with country or right?"
> "Why not as much as the Gentiles?"
> "Because we have no country, and no acknowledged rights. Yes, they pretend to give us rights here, but it's only because they acknowledge the principal in general, and can't make a special exception. Our country is our money, and the power and influence it gives us: these are our only acknowledged rights."[6]

When Charley is accused of wearing a uniform to disguise his secret activity as a trader between the states, he replies:

> "I put it on to fight."
> "Fight? A nice occupation for a Jew."
> "A proper occupation for anyone whose rights are threatened."

> "But you have no rights or wrongs in the affair. The only right that has been left to us is to gain wealth, and the only wrong we can fear is to be deprived of it."[7]

In themselves these statements are interesting, even informative, but, in view of what we have been led to believe earlier in the novel about the personality of Charley Goldman, hardly consistent. Charley is anything but a hero. Unlike Welland, his antithesis, throughout the novel Charley generally avoids situations of risk. It is readily apparent from scenes during the earlier portion of the novel that Charley Goldman wears the uniform of the Southern states for two reasons. Charley identifies war with glamorous uniforms, cantering steeds, and admiring artistocratic maidens. Charley seeks admiration and war as the means by which he attempts to satisfy his need. Most important, the war between the North and the South, war so bloody that before its termination every able-bodied male in the South was called into uniform, leaves Charley Goldman no alternative but to join a local cavalry regiment. To do otherwise would identify him as a coward before the very Gentiles he wants so much to please.

Nevertheless, historically, Differences is of importance to the modern reader for at least three reasons. Foremost is that it is the first Jewish-American novel. Here, for the first time in American literature, the problems faced by Jews seeking to reconcile their sense of the past to the present is squarely faced, Furthermore, Nathan Mayer chose to write about a highly unique kind of immigrant

American Jew whose wealth permitted him to live in a special set of circumstances, a Jew who very much existed in the southern half of the United States during the nineteenth century, but whose existence was not generally recognized by other Jewish American novelists writing between 1867 and 1927. And finally, this novel is of value to the student of American history interested in such issues as the integration, assimilation, and religious autonomy of the Jew in pluralistic American society. Mr. and Mrs. Goldman, like their son Charley, all in their own way, seek to evolve from essentially foreign figures marked by "differences" into citizens possessed of a New World identity.

The process by which Jewish Americans have sought to achieve this goal was, and still is, an infinitely complicated one. The fact that Mayer permits Charley Goldman the latitude of identifying himself through marriage with Christian society and his parents' reactions to it is to the credit of the novel. By so doing Mayer focuses on a highly controversial aspect of Jewish American development. Jewish-gentile intermarriage throughout American history has "varied in time and place according to the fluctuations of social conditions."[8] Still enough evidence is available whereby it may be argued that numbers of Jews continually seek to free themselves from a sense of caste and problems of insecurity inherent in being members of a minority group by intermarrying with the dominant group.

The fact that Charley Goldman weds a gentile while Welland weds Charley's sister emphasizes that during the nineteenth century no clear and simple answer explains how Southern Jews resolved their "differences" in order to be acceptable to Christian society. Probably the view which most closely parallels Mayer's personal attitude toward intermarriage is revealed when Mr. Goldman, who unsuccessfully resists Charley's plans to intermarry, tells his son: "Charley, the son is the upholder of the family name, and his wife determines the religion of her children. But if the lady in question loves you, I doubt not that she will assume your faith."[9] Mayer seems to be hoping that Judaism will prevail and can be depended on to serve as the spiritual source even when worst comes worst and Jew and gentile slip across religious lines in wedlock.

Such, however, was not the attitude held by Emma Wolf, author of Other Things Being Equal, (1892), and the only other Jewish-American to write a novel in English about Jewish characters during the nineteenth century. Unlike Mayer, her predecessor by a quarter of a century, Wolf attempts in Other Things Being Equal, to glorify love and marriage between Jew and gentile in the New World. The novel itself is simple enough. It is a story of courtship and marriage involving Ruth Levice, daughter of San Francisco's leading Jewish merchant, and Herbert Kemp, society doctor and intellectual.

At first glance the novel appears to have much in common with Differences. To begin with, the main

characters in both novels are wealthy and socially ambitious. In addition, a character in each novel abandons his Jewish heritage for the sake of union with a non-Jew. Finally, the authors of both novels present more than one example of Jewish-Christian relationships in the New World. For instance, early in Other Things Being Equal, Ruth is lectured to by a maiden aunt concerning the unalterable "differences" between Jews and non-Jews.

> "What does possess your parents to mix so much with Christians?"
>
> "Fellow-feeling, I suppose. We all dance and talk alike; and as we do not hold services at reception, wherein lies the difference?"
>
> "There is a difference: and the Christians know it as well as we Jewish people. Not only do they know it, but they show it in countless ways; and the difference, they think, is all to their credit. For my part, I always feel as if they looked down on us, and I should like to prove to them how we differ on that point. I have enough courage to let them know I consider myself as good as the best of them."[10]

It is the tensions resulting from these unalterable "differences" between Jew and gentile that serve as the central energy of the story. Other Things Being Equal explores among others three questions: Is anti-Semitism second nature to all gentiles even in America? And as part of the same question: Is the subtle form of anti-Semitism practiced in the select circles of New World society any less cruel or damaging than the open harassment of Jews typical of so many nations of the Old World? Secondly, is the Jew in America a first- or second-class citizen? Finally, is a new kind of Jew unhampered by religious dogma emerging out of the free and inquiring atmosphere of the New World?

It is with the latter question that Miss Wolf spends most of her time. In a manner which anticipates the superwoman and superman characteristic of the fiction of Jack London and Frank Norris, Miss Wolf creates Ruth Levice and Herbert Kemp along the lines of perfectly formed and magnificently endowed physical giants.

> Socially, each was as high as the other. Mentally, the woman was as strong in her sphere as the man was in his. Physically, both were perfect types of pure, healthy blood. Morally, both were irreproachable.[11]

It is her view that a union between such a Jewess and gentile promises a future race of mental, moral, and physical giants. If the Jew was to realize a full and independent relationship with the non-Jewish citizenry of the New World he had to be willing to involve himself in the ways of life of the non-Jew--even to the extent of intermarriage. In particular, the abrupt change in Mr. Levice's attitude toward his daughter's request for permission to marry a non-Jew points this up. Throughout practically all of the story he is firmly opposed to such a marriage on both practical and emotional grounds. To his daughter he insists:

> "Child, you are a Jewess; Dr. Kemp is a Christian."
> "What difference can that make, since we love each other?" Ruth asked.
> "I can never bring myself to approve of a marriage between you and a Christian. There can be no true happiness in such a union. Think of every sacrifice, social and religious it enforces; think of the great difference between the Jewish race and the Christian."[12]

While to Doctor Kemp who criticizes him for throwing his "daughter into Christian society, put(ting) her right in

the way of loving or being loved by any Christian, knowing all along that such a state of affairs could lead to nothing," he replies:

> "Such an event as this never presented itself as a possibility to my imagination. If it had, I should probably have trusted that her own Jewish conscience and bringing up would protect her against allowing herself to think seriously upon such an issue."
> "But, Sir," Dr. Kemp said, "I do not understand your exception; you are not orthodox."
> "No, but I am intensely Jewish," answered the old man. --"As you say," began Levice, "we are not orthodox; but before we become orthodox or reform, we are born, and being born, we are invested with certain hereditary traits that are uncontrovertible. Every Jew bears in his blood the glory, the triumph, the misery, the abjectness of Israel. The farther we move in the generations, the fainter grows the inheritance. In most countries in these times the abjectness is vanishing; we have been set upon our feet; we have been allowed to walk; we are beginning to smile--that is, some of us. --Take any intrinsically pure-souled Jew from his coarser surroundings and give him the highest advantages, and he will stand forth the equal, at least, of any man."

With his daughter at his side, Mr. Levice goes on to explain how many, if not all, Christians see the Jews as subordinate in culture and ability to the Christian "race."

> "I speak of the majority, who decide the vote, and by whom my child would be without doubt, ostracized. This only by your people; by ours it would be worse--for she will have raised a terrible sin by renouncing her religion."
> "I shall never renounce my religion, father."
> "Such a marriage would mean only that to the world; and so you would be cut adrift from both sides."[13]

But, suddenly, on the last few pages of the novel, Mr. Levice's attitude toward non-Jews in general, and his daughter's relationship with Herbert Kemp in particular, is completely reversed. Speaking from his death bed in a

feeble but determined voice, Levice says to Herbert Kemp and his immediate family: "I strove to rid myself of the old prejudices, the old superstitions, the old narrowness of faith; it was useless, --I was too old, and my prejudices had become a part of me."

After a long pause during which time he looks down upon the "black mass of crowding, jostling, hurrying beings" from his window in the Palace Hotel, Mr. Levice adds: "But I feel, poised thus above them, that they are creatures of the same God. --Below me pray Christian and Jew, Mohammedan and Brahmin, idolater and agnostic. Each man is different because he was born into circumstances which make him the way he is."[14]

Mr. Levice even admits to having seriously considered whether Christ is truly God's son after all. What his final opinion on that matter might be, the reader is not permitted to know. However, before the novel closes and the old man dies, he compares his refusal to allow his daughter to marry Herbert Kemp that of "a blind fool who, with a beautiful picture before him, looks instead at a rusty nail in the wall behind."[15]

Such a reversal in Levice's attitude clearly indicates that it has been Wolf's intention all along to show her readers that "differences" such as Jew and Christian and the tensions growing out of such "differences" can be successfully eliminated by enlightened and reasonable people of all faiths in the New World. In the words of Arnold

Levice, who, in the absence of his lately departed uncle, consents to the marriage between his cousin and the non-Jew, Herbert Kemp: "Their happy marriage will be your [Mr. Levice] happiness, and the rest of the world will be as nothing to these two who love each other."[16]

PART II. A STEP FORWARD INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 1900-1910

To begin with it should be re-emphasized that early Jewish American fiction presents historical portraits of the kinds of experiences characteristic of a segment of Jews living in the New World that is otherwise practically unrecorded. To be sure, the materially comfortable way of life experienced by the Jewish characters in the earliest novels is representative of only a very small portion of the total number of Jews who lived in America during the closing years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth.

> When the ship arrived the immigrant found himself, dazed and bewildered, in a world with which his traditional peasant qualities could not cope. He had to get work immediately--work of any kind, at any pay, with whatever hours and conditions--in order to sustain life; he became, thus, a ready prey for exploiting employers, swindling fellow countrymen, greedy money-lenders. Sometimes he settled in the first big city he came to, huddling in a ghetto with his countrymen...
>
> The first-generation immigrant...was likely to live out his life on the margin of the new society.[17]

Even the South and the far West as the geographical settings of the novels is not representative of where the vast majority of European Jews settled when they arrived in the New World. As far back as

> 1880 there were perhaps 80,000 Jews in New York City. ...In the 1880's began the enormous migration

> from Eastern Europe, particularly from the Russian Empire, but also including sizable streams from the pre-World-War Austria-Hungry and from Rumania. By 1910, there were a million and a quarter Jews in New York City. They then formed more than a quarter of the population, a proportion they have maintained ever since. ...By 1924, there were almost two million Jews in the city.[18]

Between 1880 and 1930 the vast majority of American Jewry lived on the East coast in overcrowded urban areas where housing was inadequate and jobs were hard to come by. Furthermore, Lerner points out, they continued to live in just such a situation for a number of years to come. Yet the Jewish characters found in Differences and Other Things Being Equal indicate hardly the slightest concern with economic issues; to earn enough money to stay alive and keep one's family alive--the foremost crisis facing the vast majority of Jews living in America during this time--was a concern utterly remote from the lives of the likes of the Goldmans and the Levices.

> From 1881 to 1914 nearly two million Jews, mostly from Russia and Poland, fled from the brutalities and discriminations to which they were subjected in eastern Europe...The Jewish immigrants came in, for the most part, on the lowest levels of our economy. By the turn of the century, however, America began to feel the effects of the closing up of the frontier; her economy took on rigidity, a "stickiness," that it had not known before. Workers from abroad were not absorbed, and agitation for their exclusion which had already begun with the Chinese, grew in strength.[19]

The story goes that when a Jew arrived in America the first question he asked as he disembarked from the ferry-boat passing between Ellis Island and the mainland was: "Where is the schul (synagogue)" and with his next breath he was already asking, "So, where in this land of streets

paved with gold do I get gelt (money)?" And for a reply, more often than not the newcomer would hear, "Schuls are everywhere, just like in the old country. And gelt--that too, just like in the old country."

Even the skilled laborers among the Jewish immigrants had difficulty finding and keeping jobs equal to their skills because of "recurring depressions--and the hostilities of the middle class" who felt threatened by these recent immigrants.[20]

The direction that the Jewish-American novel was to take in the first decade of the twentieth century reflects more concern with economic issues than novels published in the preceding century. However, as Leslie Fiedler observes in his essay, "Genesis: The American Jewish Novel Through the Twenties," early Jewish-American fiction was for the most part an attempt by both characters as well as artists to shrug off their uncomfortable old-world feelings while seeking to put on at the same time a style of living befitting the New World. Fiedler rightly concludes that the primary concern of the Jewish characters in early Jewish-American fiction is intermarriage and integration. Time and again the main energies of the leading characters of these novels is devoted to securing answers to the question of what it would take before the Jew would fit comfortably into the American mainstream.

Considered as an overview on the matter, Fiedler's assessment of early Jewish American novels is satisfactory.

Yet, certain qualifications should be drawn if an accurate picture is to be presented. Seymour Lainoff, in his essay "American Jewish Fiction Before the First World War," comments on Leslie Fiedler's assessment.

> Viewed as a whole, this early fiction is not simply a call for liberation; it records hesitation and retreat as well. The novels sing paeans to America, but show uncertainty about what being an American demands. Anxieties and forebodings come to the fore. The spirit of this literature, on the whole, is reflexive--an attempt to leap beyond and then a recoil[21]

Considered together, these two writers appear to be saying that the early Jewish-American authors consciously explored how Jews might successfully overcome feelings of personal uncertainty and individual awkwardness in dealing with the new life in the New World. Lainoff, of course, moves a step beyond Fiedler's one-dimensional estimate and sees the quest for place and purpose in the New World so frequently dramatized in Jewish-American novels as exploration more than infrequently marked by instances of uncertainty and partial failure. And to the extent that he probes the spirit of this literature his assessment is fundamentally sound. Yet, what both men seem to overlook is that while the Jewish-American immigrant was consciously struggling both in and out of his art to successfully bring to an end his centuries-long cultural and social isolation from non-Jews, he was at the same time deeply influenced and directed by the ethical and moral qualities indigenous to the Jewish faith.

Any estimate of Jewish-American fiction is unsound and inaccurate if the critic fails to properly estimate how enormously influential the ethical and moral prescriptions in the Old Testament, in particular, the four ethical injunctions of the Ten Commandments, were on the decision-making process of Jewish characters. It is practically a truism of Jewish-American fiction written during the first three decades of the twentieth century that the leading character will consciously consider his or her actions in light of the ethical-moral teachings of the Jewish faith. In other words, it is characteristic of early Jewish-American fiction that no matter how far out on the limb a Jewish character goes in his campaign to achieve a oneness with the American mainstream, he will never entirely discard the value system growing out of Old Testament thinking. The influence of this association on the early Jewish-American hero and the artists themselves cannot be overestimated. No serious consideration of what happens in the fiction itself can take place outside the light of this considerable influence.

The Ten Commandments prescribe for the American Jew, as they had for the European and Asiatic Jews before him:

> The minimum standard by which man's collective life becomes an enduring possibility. In this sense the Ten Commandments are to man's social order what the opening chapter of Genesis is to the natural order; without each there is formlessness and the void. Just as Genesis is an explosive denial of the randomness of the physical universe, so the Ten Commandments take their stand against chaos in the social order... The importance of the Ten Commandments in their ethical

> dimension lies...in their inescapable priority. They do not speak the final word in any area they touch; they speak instead the first word which must be spoken if other words are to follow.[22]

Various ways in which the Jewish-American immigrant measured himself and his actions against such a formulation is made unmistakably clear in the five novels written in the first decade of the twentieth century. Leslie Fiedler observes the mood of the Jew in early fiction as being rebellion against the traditional, against the father's way of life. Furthermore, from this rejection of a former way of life came an energy and willingness for experimentation for weighing and testing the possibilities available to the Jew for entering American civilization. Such a rebellious mood and its concomitant quest for identity is emphatically reflected in Heirs of Yesterday, written by Emma Wolf in 1900. In the preface to her novel, Wolf quotes Issac Zangwill, the nineteenth-century British novelist of Jewish descent: "For something larger had come into his life, a sense of a vaster universe without, and its spaciousness and strangeness filled his soul with a nameless trouble and vague unrest. He was no longer a child of the Ghetto." In addition to which Wolf adds: "If it takes six generations from the hod, or pick and shovel, to make a gentleman of an ordinary American," asked the wag, "how many generations from the Ghetto does it take to make a gentleman of a Jew?"[23]

Wolf's second novel is the story of Doctor Philip May, the broad-shouldered, thirty-year-old son of a

prosperous Jewish merchant. Joseph May has but one wish in life and that is to see his only son enter into the Jewish fold. And it is around this concern that the novel revolves. From the beginning Doctor Philip is adamant in his refusal to become involved either professionally or socially with Jews.

> "I am not of this world (where Jews gather together in fellowship)," thought the scion of cultural modernity, even as, centuries before, another young Jew said of another world and found.--Golgotha
> "I may as well tell you at once," he said to his father, "that I shall not join any Jewish club."[24]

In response to his father's protests he describes his personal experiences with anti-Semitism and concludes: "Beyond the blood I was born with, pretty nearly all of the Jew has been knocked out of me."[25]

But Joseph May remains unconvinced and seeks to fault his son's rationale for remaining outside the pale. In this manner portions of the novel are given over to exchanges between father and son. For the most part, Philip listens patiently while his father enumerates the "irrefutable" reasons why "once a Jew always a Jew."

However, at one point in the dialogue Philip is unable to restrain himself and temporarily silences his father by comparing Judaism's progress in the world to how

> its followers read their prayer books--backwards. ...I should say that the Jew, per se, has never been given the latch key to the American Christian heart. At best he is received with a mental reservation. --In short, I have discovered that to be a Jew, turn wheresoever you will, is to be socially handicapped for life... The great middle class (of Jews), at least, hung between the Ghetto it has outlived and the Christian society it can neither live with nor

> without, presents the miserable picture of a people astray.[26]

Shortly thereafter Joseph May disinherits his son. But this in no way dissuades Philip from identifying himself exclusively with Christian society. Moving out of his home and into a bachelor's lodging, he applies for membership in the most discriminating gentile club in San Francisco. But the gentiles want no part of this "upstart Hebrew."

The extent of the hostility the club members feel toward Jews comes out in a discussion between a member and a Jewess whom he admires but who in turn admires Philip.

> "He's a Jew, isn't he?" he demanded insolently, with a sudden ugly gleam in his eye.
> "Yes--by birth."
> "The birth-sentence is life-sentence-isn't it?" he laughed daringly. "Then I wonder why he is trying to sneak into our Club with that disbarment."
> "What disbarment?"
> "Why, being a Jew?"
> "Do you belong to such a Club? What narrow doors you build! And is being a Jew a fault or crime?"
> "It's a misfortune--it keeps the unfortunates out of our Club."

Infuriated, the Jewess demands to know the basis for such prejudice.

> "Quien sabe? The reasons beyond me. It's one of those inherited reasons passed down, like a title, from father to son. Oh, it's a very aristocratic prejudice, I assure you."
> "I suppose you know you are saying rather extraordinary things to me--or have you forgotten that I am a Jewess?"

And Emma Wolf, anticipating attitudes evident in contemporary twentieth century novels depicting relationships between white men and Negro women has the Gentile say to

the Jewess whom he covets for himself:

> "Oh you," he said, his brilliant eyes recording his valuation of her--"you are a woman. Your sex unsects you."[27]

The tension growing out of Doctor May's desire to identify himself with gentile society and that society's unwillingness to have him proves to be an issue of considerable importance to the story. Deeply frustrated by his inability to successfully penetrate the social set that represents so much to him, and unable to realistically anticipate any change for the better in his situation, Doctor May retreats into himself, having for companions neither Jews nor gentiles. The net result of this impasse produces a nearly classic example of what Simpson and Yinger describe as the "Jewish Anti-Semite."

> The phenomenon of self-hatred--is a tendency found also among Jews--who feel caught in a status that is defined as inferior by the dominant group. This self-hatred is seldom an open and uncomplicated reaction. It is more often indirect, even unconscious, and accompanied by ambivalent feelings of superiority and chauvinism. Self-hatred is the product of three interacting factors: Those of high status define one's group as inferior; one experiences discrimination because of group membership; yet the attitudes of the majority prevent one from leaving the group. Those who try to solve the problem by accepting the definitions of the dominant group are caught in a difficult situation so long as prejudice continues.
>
> Under these circumstances one attacks himself (feelings of unworthiness and blame) or one's group (negative chauvinism) or some part of one's group (inferior part which endangers one's security because the majority draws no distinctions).[28]

In particular the line which reads "this self-hatred ...is more often indirect, even unconscious, and accompanied by ambivalent feelings of superiority and chauvinism"

seems especially characteristic of Doctor May. Throughout the story he "attacks...(his) group (negative chauvinism) or some part of (his) group (inferior part which endangers one's security because the majority draws no distinctions).

Consider, for example, the ambivalent ring to his words as he distinguishes between "Jews and Jews" in the presence of a fellow Hebrew.

> One sort mumbling and shaking out its prayers as at so many words a minute, keeping to the letter its minor fasts and great fasts, still happily believing themselves princes in Israel as soon as the praying shawl went around their shoulders, the others erect, cool, skeptical to the top bent of the age, scanning the pages of prayer book and life with the discriminating eye of intellect, but retaining, for all that, Ghetto ghosts and echoes in mien, or voice, or mentally.[29]

It is this ambivalent quality of Doctor May's "self-hate" which Miss Wolf focuses on a great deal of the time as she juxtaposes the Jewish physician and his attitudes to other Jews in the story. Especially pertinent are the views of a successful young attorney who discusses what being Jewish means to him and how it affects his relationship to non-Jews in the New World.

> Few Jews can stand adverse criticism, and that's what keeps so many of them from taking on the little outward graces that count for so much. But don't imagine I think we've cornered the brain and virtue market of the world. We're first-rate students because no power on earth can beat us in that intensity of purpose--born of the old-time restriction--of doing the best we can with our only unflinchable property--our brains; we are great financiers through enforced specialization; we are thrifty and industrious because we've had to fight for every right and possession inch by inch; we care for our poor as no others' poor are cared for, because we were once in misery--and because it was only on the condition that the Jewish poor would not become a burden on the community that the Jews were first granted settlement in the New World.[30]

A Jew, he concludes, cannot deny his past no matter how loud he may claim that he is not a Jew or how scrupulous he may be in his attempt to obscure his past. "Because it is a matter of race--and there is no way out of that except by the slow honeymoon route of intermarriage."[31]

The conflicting views of Doctor May and the attorney serve as the frame for the rest of the novel. Doctor May persists in his attempt to join gentile society. At one point a wealthy gentile socialite takes pity on him and suggests that his willingness to deny his birthright to gain his ends only enhances the initial contempt that a number of gentiles feel for him as a Jew. Saddened and discouraged by what he hears, Doctor May goes to a home where the Passover service is being conducted. Entering the home he sees gathered about the table, among others, his father and a number of attractive and successful young Jewish professional people. At first he is reluctant to involve himself in what seems like "some strange side-show out of the grand court of life," and he remains at a distance looking on.[32] Gradually, however, he feels the spirit of Passover as he is drawn into the scene by something "well-nigh supernatural." Philip May marvels at how the Jew endures in his beliefs "after so many ages, nay in spite of so many ages of hate, oppression--progress."[33]

It is at this point that Philip May sees himself and Jews in general in a new light. No longer obsessed with denying his heritage, he seeks instead to objectively

understand both the ethical and spiritual positions of his heritage. Doctor May deliberately exposes himself to things Jewish. He attends a reform movement service and is dissatisfied with the minimal amount of Hebrew, the organ music, and a non-Jewish professor from Stanford University delivering the sermon on the starving poor in Cuba.

Delighted by Philip's interest in things Jewish his father proposes his son for membership in the most select Jewish fraternal order in San Francisco. To the surprise of both he is blackballed. The Jewish community has branded Doctor May unacceptable. For a time he withdraws back into himself, resentful of both Jew and gentile alike. But his intellectual fascination with Judaism eventually draws him out. In an extended and thoughtful dialogue with his father-in-law to be on matters pertaining to Jewish people and Jewish thought the novel is brought to a close. Particularly relevant to the modern reader are the passages pertaining to Judaism as an ever pertinent and vital faith.

> "The entire reform movement is in opposition to things fundamentally and traditionally Jewish," Philip insisted.
>
> "It is all Judaism--robbed of provincialisms and anachronisms," replied Daniel.
>
> "It seems heretical--to the ancient idea."
>
> "The ancient idea of which you speak--the Talmudic idea--was that the Law was never to be a sealed matter--that it was always to remain open to the interpretation of the search of light of progress.--It seems to me I can hear the silent, continuous, unhampered stride of the Jew, keeping step with Time. As though he, the freeman, were moving on to the brink of the Universal--the Messianic religion which was meant to be the first and shall be the last--though we may then call it by

another name. For, one by one, the superstructure of Judaism, having fulfilled the mission of promulgation, will crumble away--one by one, her messengers, having fulfilled their time and office, shall lay them down to rest.--And when the great moment of coalition takes place, the Jew will be found in the van and waiting."

"In short, we shall be to the manner born--the others will be the parvenus?" Philip asked.

"Time was when I too thought that to be of the Chosen People was to be of God's elect--his darling, a peculiar treasure unto Him. But time has taught me the mockery of any divine nepotism. We were elect-through Abraham--who, myth or man, stands forth the great intermediary, the mouthpiece between God who is God--and Man.--But since the moment of Revelation, most men--deny it though they may--believe in a Something which we have given them--and which we call God...the sense of an existent Ideality, a perfectibility--whither the potentiality, the growth of man tends--and which still, as we advance, retreats like the horizon, beckoning us ever onward."

"And, as a race, what are we?" questioned Philip.

"As a race we are what our religion has made us. We cannot separate ourselves from this ancient heredity. There is a something in the roots of every one of us, a something which has got implacably mixed with our blood and is inseparable from it, which has made us what we are long before oppression came near us. The Ghettos were only the great storehouses in which this racial germ was perserved and forced to exotic intensity.--But what I meant to say was, that a Jew can only deny himself by word of mouth."[34]

Daniel's allusion to the Jew as suffering servant acting as history's messenger bearing divine precepts to mankind grows in significance when viewed by the modern reader in light of the massacre of six million Jews during World War II and the present threat of thermonuclear holocaust. During the dialogue Daniel emphasizes the notion that "Chosen People" implies not privilege but responsibility. It is with this in mind that his view of Judaism as an evolutionary faith working toward the brotherhood of all men under one God becomes meaningful.

"As John puts it, Moses made the Law, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Which, I take it, is an argument that, without Judaism as a basis, Christianity would be only a beautiful dream signifying nothing. Was not Christ a Jew--a Talmudist? Are not all his preachings, nay, his very phraseology, Talmudic? Only he is tenderer than the ironclad Law--necessarily ironclad for its time and surroundings. He speaks down to the masses always--the subtlety of Christianity lies in this world--tenderness. Judaism addressed itself to the strength of man, Christianity to its weakness. Therefore, Judaism was for the few, Christianity for the many.--Judaism speaks to the reason, Christianity to the heart. Judaism controls--Christianity consoles--. Judaism is a stern religion truly--but it endures. Why? --Because in the eternal flux and vanity of all things, forms, and ceremony and dogma, God remains. God is the keystone of Judaism. While God stands, the Jew stands."

"And that is all that is necessary?"

"All, Philip--to the enlightened. Just as the 'I am!' of the first commandment comprises--to the enlightened--all of the others. 'I am!'--What?--Justice. And what is Justice? In patois--Love. Christianity teaches one to bear life for the after-heaven's sake, Judaism to live life for life's sake. ...In making Jesus a God rests the inadequacy of Christianity. Make Christ a God and you absolve man from attempting to follow in his attitudes. Leave him a man, and you establish the divine precept of example--What Man has done Man may do... Strange that when the Christians are beginning to disclaim him as a God, the Jews are beginning to claim him as a God, man... I should have been of his party had I lived in his day, Christ's party, mind you--not Christianity's."[35]

Emma Wolf closes Heirs of Yesterday by having Philip May say to his fiancee:

"Once I said to myself, I am an individual, not a class."

"I understand," Jean answered.

"I said to myself, what have I to do with Ghettos? --I decided I would not be fate's social cripple linked by an invisible chain to a slavish past. I resolved to break the chain.--I discovered you can never break the chain.--I have been taught that breed is stronger than creed.--I know that the Jew is no longer a religion apart--only a race apart."[36]

Clearly, the first Jewish-American novel of the twentieth century "is not simply a call for liberation; it records hesitation and retreat as well." Admittedly, "the novel sings paeans to America" when on the final page Philip May, naval volunteer on board a flag ship belonging to the American fleet preparing to do battle with the Spanish armada, passes under the Golden Gate Bridge filled with schoolgirls singing the Battle Hymn of the Republic. "Viewed as a whole," Philip May is a classic example of a Jew "uncertain about what being an American demands." Time and again, "anxieties and forebodings" regarding the question plague him. As well as any other novel of the decade, Heirs of Yesterday reflects Seymour Lainoff's view that early Jewish-American fiction, "on the whole, is reflexive,--an attempt to leap beyond and then a recoil."

In The Fugitive (1904), the second Jewish-American novel published during the twentieth century, Ezra Brudno describes the experiences of Israel Abramowitch, a young man who comes from Russia to America in search of personal freedom and economic opportunity. The son of a pious merchant, Israel wavers between resentment for Jews who persist in clinging to a faith which makes them stand out as odd, and a hatred for the gentiles who oppress these Jews. Betwixt and between, unable to feel at home with either group, Israel is clearly the fugitive of the title.

To tell the story Brudno combines mystery, melodrama, documentary, violence and love. A sampling of the early pages indicates something of this variety. To begin with the reader is told that Yudel Abramowitch, Israel's father, hung himself when falsely accused by a Russian judge of murdering a Christian child for ritual purposes. Shortly thereafter, Israel's mother dies, heartbroken over her husband's passing. Brudno interrupts his story at that point to tell his reader that Joseph, Israel's elder brother, testified against his father during the murder trial and then married a gentile. In practically the same breath, Brudno describes Israel's life in a Talmud Torah, a home for Jewish orphans where he is exposed to free thinking youngsters and is made to suffer cruel indignities at the hands of sadistic instructors. Eventually he decides to run away from the orphanage and does so only moments before the entire town (through an act of God?) burns to the ground.

Israel becomes a fugitive. Clinging to the Old Testament that belonged to his father and that was given to him by his mother on her death bed, he resolves that "faith will make the weak, strong, the damaged well again."[37] He runs to the forest. Surrounded by several husky Christian swineherds he is brutally beaten. Broken and bloody he emerges from the forest only to be given a home by the same rich Russian judge (Israel learns later) who sentenced his father to death for a crime the judge

knew he did not commit. Furthermore, Katia, the daughter of the "Sudya" (justice of the peace) becomes the love of Israel's life.

However, romance, like practically everything else in this story, does not come about smoothly. When the "Sudya" discovers his daughter in Israel's embrace, the "enlightened" judge accuses the Jewish boy of treachery and ingratitude and casts him off the land. Once again Israel is forced to flee; this time as a fugitive from Christian society.

Israel becomes a drifter wandering from place to place, dissatisfied with himself and unable to identify with the people around him. Significant during his wanderings is the hostility he faces as a Jew living in Russia around the turn of the century. With the brief exception of the reign of Alexander II, during which time Jews were permitted such exceptional freedoms as attending gentile schools, Jews, for the most part, hardly crossed over from the "shtetl" (which served as something of a fortress against the outside world) into gentile territory. But gentiles were not reluctant to cross over into the "shtetl," especially when their personal frustrations and sufferings inclined them to seek outlets. Savagely beaten by Russian hoodlums during a pogrom, and spectator to the maiming and killing of women and children, Israel abandons an earlier notion to convert to Christianity. He books passage for America.

Brudno has titled this first section of his novel "Darkness." As Israel put the restrictive and traditional life of the "shetetl" behind him he moves toward "Light" the title of the middle section. It is in America itself, the land of "Liberty," that the final section of the book unfolds. America is not, however, despite all its promises of opportunity and justice, a nation without its ups and downs. Israel learns quickly, for instance, that money opens all doors. He discovers also that, generally speaking, things of the spirit are of secondary importance to Americans, both Jews and non-Jews alike. But despite the dark side of things America remains for Israel a place where for the first time in his life he is able to develop enough self-confidence to stop running. No longer is he the fugitive who backs off at the slightest provocation. When he sees a greedy German Jew undermining the business of a struggling Russian Jew he stands up for the latter. And when he is jailed and beaten by the police as a trouble-making anarchist he refuses to confess to trumped up charges and is returned to the streets a free man.

During the final section of the novel Brudno makes much of the considerable friction that existed between Jews of different nationalities, particularly the open disgust that German Jews of the time felt for Jews from other nations. It is on the basis of this that Israel decides that neither Judaism nor any other religion is of value in the New World. Instead he believes that the goal of all men, Jewish or gentile, must be happiness and

fellowship and that in order for this to come about the emphasis in daily life must be placed on eradicating religious differences between men.

> What do the terms Christian and Jew denote, after all? I love nature; I love art; I love humanity. What can any religion teach me in addition to these principles? --A philosopher is a philosopher--neither Jew nor Christian; or rather he is both.[38]

The novel achieves its dramatic peak when by chance Katia and Israel meet and redeclare their love for one another. No longer is the past, religious or otherwise, permitted to stand in the path of these two young lovers of the New World. "Opening her arms wide, Katia declared 'Israel! Oh, Israel!' while he clasped her to his breast!"[39] The descendents of two great faiths join hands. Nor will Israel permit anything to occur which might cause them to separate. He never speaks of the crime which Katia's father the "Sudya" committed against his father. She is innocent in his mind. No longer are the sins of the father to be visited on the children. Furthermore, Israel forgives "Sudya" Bailnick when he dies begging the young man's pardon. "Let the dead past bury the dead," declares Israel. "We are innocent blood."[40]

The past is permitted to rest undisturbed while the novel presses on to a more important concern. Katia has accepted "Israel" wholeheartedly; likewise, Israel refuses to use the past as a weapon against the descendents of his historical oppressors.

In a final note we are told that Israel becomes a physician and that he and Katia move into the Southland. Israel manages to establish a lucrative practice. Not only has Israel done well for himself, but others like him find fulfillment in the New World. "Fugitives (find) liberty in our glorious country," declares Israel. "They, too, have thriven in the great land of the free. I have been successful in my profession, and also in gaining the respect and friendship of my good American neighbors. --We live in harmony with God and man."[41]

Of critical interest is Ezra Brudno's statement defending his novel.

> I read over this narrative, and I have been struck with its brokenness, its lack of order, its coincidences. At first I thought this was a fault in my narrative, but after a little scrutiny I know it is a fault in life, for life is not a logical procession of events as novelists present. It is sometimes broken, incoherent, and at other times chance makes events fit, coincide. In this record of my experiences friends have appeared only to disappear. Such is life.[42]

Contrite Hearts (1905), is Herman Bernstein's tribute to America. Yet, at the same time that he lauds America as a land of unequalled freedom and opportunity for its Jewish citizens, he is sharply critical of those Jewish Americans who forsake their religious heritage. It is Bernstein's view that the so-called "new wisdom" of science and secular philosophy is not a substitute for the ethical and spiritual richness contained in Judaism. One can, he maintains throughout the novel, be a good and successful American and a loyal Jew at the same time.

The action of the novel centers around the lives of several young Russian Jews who for one reason or another migrate to America in hopes of improving their personal and political lives. Their stories unfold from two points of view. On the one hand, the reader is permitted a direct insight into the thoughts of these passionate young people who are, for the most part, religious and cultural apostates. With little exception the novel is polemical rather than dramatical. And the emphasis on talk is even more characteristic of the old Jews who remain in Russia unwilling to leave behind the land they were born in. It is their conversations which offer an alternative viewpoint of the emigres.

Most of the young people in the novel reject out of hand any and all aspects of traditional Judaism. As far as they are concerned the teachings embodied in the faith represent a romantic rhetoric not in the least consonant with the needs of informed young people growing up in a scientific and materialistic era. In lieu of religious traditions and teachings they turn instead to the writings of Wieniawsky, Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, and Tchiernishevsky. Armed with such iconoclastic arguments the apostates battle on such varied fronts as religious freedom and civil rights. Much is made in particular of the Russian Jew's military obligation. Perhaps the modern reader can hardly appreciate the astonishing terror experienced by a Jew contemplating service in the czar's anti-Semitic army.

Yet Jews living in America at the time Contrite Hearts was published hated the military in Russia.

> That they hate us on each and every step, that is not new. Are we not the "Chosen People?" --The people chosen to suffer in exile? Let them hate us. Do we ask them to love us, to respect us? Leave us alone, to live and die in peace. But they trample us underfoot as if we were worms; they block all our ways; they rob us of every means of subsistence; they shed our blood. And yet, go and serve in their army, be faithful to them.[43]

Such a problem, of course, is a young man's problem. And it is from a young man's point of view that Bernstein attempts to deal with the problem. It is possibly the best part of the novel. Mendel, a Russian-born Jew, is forced to choose between serving in the army and retaining his Russian citizenship and thus his right to remain with his family, and abandoning his military obligation and, of course, his family as well. In hopes of a better life he leaves the country. The decision is not an easy one and even when he leaves he departs with mixed emotions. And for good reason were he capable of looking into his future. The problems Mendel faces are many. With great effort he manages to secure the necessary rubles for passage to the New World. The trip is not easy, nor, for that matter, are his early days once he arrives in the New World. But as time passes he grows more convinced that what he has left behind is best forgotten. In a letter to his former teacher, a "chazin" (cantor), who has remained in Russia, he writes:

> This land is full of opportunities--for those willing to work. --At home we have a wrong idea about some things. Work is considered low, even degrading. A tailor or a cobbler is not regarded as a man at all.
>
> Here in America, it is different; all are equal. Everyone is free. And all roads to success are open to the able, the enterprising, the persevering.
>
> There is no difference here between Jew and Gentile. People flock hither from all lands, and within a few years the Jew, the Frenchman, the German, the Irishman, the Italian--all, all are proud that they have become Americans.[44]

Before closing his letter, Mendel makes mention of the Reform movement in America which he describes as a vital reflection of a Jewish society on the make unwilling to be hampered by the binding restrictions of Mosaic Laws and Talmudic and rabbinical interpretations of the Old Testament.

The Cantor's reaction to Mendel's point of view is surprisingly cordial, though in days to come his liberality returns to haunt him a number of times over. He tells a crony:

> So many Jews have left Russia and have settled in America. "Jewish" Jews will remain Jews even if they go through fire and water. Where the other Jews are, there will also Mendel be, and God will help him. America! You play with America, eh? There every man is free, and even our Jews have a voice in government affairs. I have read not long ago that some of the highest offices are held there by Jews. Four hundred years ago, when the Jews were driven out from Spain--may her name and memory be wiped off, just then when the Jews had no place whatever to go, the New World was discovered. It is a matter of Heaven. We see in this the hand of the Uppermost, who creates the remedy before the disease. It was evidently predestined that America shall someday become a refuge for the sons of Israel.

> "...In America, a man must do as the Americans do," added Israel, smoothing his beard. "When Moses went up to heaven for forty days he stayed there without food, like the angels; and when the angels came down to Abraham, they ate and drank like human beings."
>
> "Or," he added, "King David was a wise and good king--but he was also a shepherd, a fiddler, and composer of psalms. And yet all of this did not interfere with his being a great king, did it?"[45]

A possible answer to the Cantor's final question is soon forthcoming. Esther, Israel's eldest daughter falls in love with Bobrovsky, the local apostate. Bobrovsky breaks with Judaism out of bitterness. He has studied eight years in the regional gymnasium only to be denied permission to enter the university because he is a Jew. He leaves the "shtetl" and Esther runs after him. They take a room together in a non-Jewish lodging. Israel is heartbroken and publicly humiliated. But Israel's woe has only begun. A short time later, his second daughter deserts the family and the "shtetl" in the company of an idealistic musician. Israel, once proud and vigorous, turns old and bent overnight. Little Jewish boys, some his former pupils, laugh in his face.

The worst is yet to come. In a matter of months both of his daughters are abandoned by their lovers. Each girl is permanently troubled with feelings of guilt over her unfortunate love affair. With no one to turn to and unable to return home, each daughter independently makes her way to America. Unbeknown to each other they find work in the same Lower East Side "sweat shop."

Shamefully and joyfully they rediscover each other and decide to share a room in a tenement occupied by radical intellectuals from Russia. But their life is no happier here in the company of these loud talking, fierce sounding, young men and women.

> "How much better it was for us at home," thought Esther, "before we knew such names as Wieniawsky, Schopenhauer, or Karl Marx or Tchiernishevsky."
>
> Somehow it seemed to Esther that all those in the adjoining room, who voiced lofty sentiments, who philosophized, and theorized about the betterment of humanity, were egotists at the bottom of their hearts, each working for his own good. She felt that in leaving her home where faith in God reigned supreme--the faith which was mocked by the people in the adjoining room, she had left behind a calm, crystal stream, and found herself in a sea of unrest, alluring from afar with phosphoric brightness, but in reality turbulent and muddy.[46]

The novel is brought to a close on a somewhat happier, if unconvincing note. Cantor Israel is urged by his daughters to join them in America. Reunited, the family attempts to return to the Jewish life they observed in Russia. A prayer from Israel to God closes the book.

> He closed his eyes and prayed to God, offering Him his gratitude for bringing him to the New World, and begged Him to guide all Israel in the ways of righteousness, here in the land of freedom.[47]

Structurally speaking, the novel when observed as a whole is little more than a polemic focusing on three issues: Russia, a nation where Jews suffer enormously; America, the promised land; Judaism, its relevance in the New World. Regrettably, these fascinating issues are never integrated into a dramatically convincing novel. Like other early Jewish-American novels, Contrite Hearts

is committed almost entirely to examining "the conflict between old and new." The result of this tension between tradition and experimentation is "evident...in the initial idealistic revolt of the two sisters and their subsequent violent rejection of their earlier secular idealism." In short, Contrite Hearts mirrors "the reflexive pattern of liberation and recoil," the yearning for freedom on the part of the New World Jew while in the same breath perplexed, ambivalent and finally haunted with guilt over the moral ambiguities contained in this freedom.[48]

Worshippers (1906), by Henry Berman portrays a wealthy colony of Jews in Philadelphia around the turn of this century. By and large, Berman dedicates the first half of his novel to ridiculing the values of greedy businessmen, callous professionals, and their egotistical wives who inhabit the pages. Indefatigably, these worshippers of wealth and status talk, talk, talk in their native Russia (not Yiddish) about the arts, success, and martial infidelity, talk in fact about almost anything except Jewish culture or religion. Unlike the Jewish characters found in other novels thus far examined, the personae of Worshippers believe themselves too modern and literate to be bothered one way or another with religion. In Worshippers Berman caricatures the inordinate pride characteristic of such people who, blinded by their accomplishments, remain the eternal victims of their ceaseless boasting and self-adulation.

Out of the entire colony only Raman, a Yiddish poet and political radical, has a definite and worthwhile commitment to something outside himself. A free spirit who loves his fellow man above all else and who measures his value as an artist in terms of his ability to make truth and beauty available to the Jewish working class, he serves as a contrast to the sterile and selfish personalities of the colony. Unhampered by materialism, Raman, in addition to writing social tracts and poetry for his beloved working class, industriously seeks to plant the seeds of brotherhood and social responsibility in the hearts and minds of the Jews in the colony. But, unfortunately, he is unsuccessful. The Jews of the colony live their lives convinced that they are superior to all others outside their circle.

A major portion of the latter half of the novel considers what happens when Katherine Bronski, the attractive wife of a middle-aged, wealthy druggist, and Raman fall in love. Katherine, an enormously proud woman, considers herself a talented actress unappreciated by Philadelphia Jews. Only Raman, she decides, can understand and appreciate her. In a dash toward fame Katherine abandons her husband and runs off to an artist colony in the Jewish section of New York City. Raman, overwhelmed by his love for this woman, joins her.

For a time all goes well, but only for a time. Unable to make a place for herself in the legitimate theater,

Katherine grows moody and resentful. As time passes the Philadelphia of her past increases in attractiveness. She recalls not only the devotion of her loyal and wealthy husband, but dotes on memories of herself as a darling of Jewish society. Eventually, Katherine's love for Raman turns to loathing when she fears that he will remain an unknown Yiddish poet, an idealist with neither fortune nor followers. She is further put off by the poet's friends who are contemptuous of her on the grounds that she is a spoiled and immoral woman. Katherine returns to her husband who is delighted to have her back.

At first Raman is heart broken. After a time, however, he returns with all of his former enthusiasm to the problems of the Yiddish working class. As the novel closes, the reader is informed that Raman becomes a successful Yiddish dramatist. His art is recognized by both the radical intellectuals and the working men of the Yiddish community. Whereas Katherine returns to the colony where Jews live empty and narcissistic lives worshipping at the altar of wealth and status, Raman becomes the only character in the novel able to find meaning in the New World. Fulfillment comes as a result of his efforts to link his social conscience to truth and beauty.

Regrettably, what was perhaps grounds for the most thought provoking and imaginative Jewish-American novel up to that time stumbles at too many junctures and proves instead to be but another poorly drawn attempt by a Jewish

author to attach statement on top of story. Jewish-American fiction as it moved toward the close of the decade remained a sorry collection of artistic failure--novels terribly devoid of compelling and convincing action while burdened down with polemics and ideals.

> In God's name how can you and the rest of the Jewish community accuse me of acting irresponsibly and causing great harm when all I seek is permission to marry the woman I love?

The Tether (1908) by Ezra Brudno dramatizes the conflict over values which frequently occurred between Jewish American youths and their European born parents. Frustrated by his orthodox father's refusal to permit him to marry a non-Jew, David Sphardi, hero of the novel, explores the logic of the decision with his father's "enlightened" crony.

> "Ha, ha! Harm? Why, simply the harm of death--the death of a people, David. ...I am a man without prejudices, and am far from being orthodox in my belief; you know I love my Christian brother no less than the Jew; and, though an old man, I can understand the spirit of youth. But this is not merely a question of religious prejudices; it is a question of wiping out the race! --It is our race suicide," he repeated, his little eyes opening wide--"the suicide of a race that has struggled for life for thousands of years and not without success, and now--now when the world begins to recognize the justice of our claim--now we should willingly thrust our necks into the hangman's noose?"
>
> "But why continue as a race?"
>
> "Because the world is not ready."
>
> "The Jews will be treated as one family so long as they retain their identity as a separate people. --And the Jews will remain a separate people so long as they will retain marriage within the race only."[49]

David represents the voice of assimilation while his older friend favors pluralism. At no point in the

novel are the differences characterized by the above discussion satisfactorily resolved. The net effect of the action in the novel is a panorama of a turn-of-the-century generation gap in which the future of Judaism in the New World seems at stake. In most instances, the youth of the story regard their parents' emphasis on retaining their Jewish identity as economically unproductive and socially unattractive. Hutchins Hapgood in his remarkably perceptive study, The Spirit of the Ghetto, suggests a number of reasons to explain the increasing polarization taking place at that time between the generations. Reflecting, in particular, on the Russian and Galician Jewish community of New York City, an ethnic group whose make-up parallels remarkably well the inhabitants of the Jewish community found on the pages of The Tether, Hapgood has, in part, this to say:

> No part of New York has a more intense and varied life than the colony of Russian and Galician Jews who live on the East Side and who form the largest Jewish city in the world. The old and the new come here into close contact and throw each other into high relief. The traditions and customs of the Orthodox Jew are maintained almost in their purity, and opposed to these are forms and ideas of modern life of the most extreme kind. The Jews are at once tenacious of their character and susceptible to their Gentile environment, when that environment is of a high order of civilization. Accordingly,in enlightened America they undergo rapid transformation though retaining much that is distinctive, while in Russia, surrounded by an ignorant peasantry, they remain by themselves, do not so commonly learn the Gentile language, and prefer their own forms of culture. There their life centers about religion. Prayer and the study of the Law constitutes practically the whole life of the religious Jew.

> When the Jew comes to America he remains, if he is old, essentially the same as he was in Russia. His deeply rooted habits and the "worry of daily bread" make him but little sensitive to the conditions of his new home...His imagination lives in the old country and he gets his consolation in the old religion...
>
> The old Jew arriving in New York usually becomes a sweatshop tailor or pushcart peddler (the latter occupation being what David's father does to earn his living.) There are few more pathetic sights than an old man with a long beard, a little black cap on his head and a venerable face--a man who had been perhaps a Hebraic or Talmudic scholar in the old country--carrying or pressing piles of coats in the melancholy sweatshop, or standing for sixteen hours a day by his pushcart in one of the dozen crowded streets of the ghetto.

To this vivid and heart-rending description of the European born Jewish immigrant, Hapgood adds:

> The old Jew also becomes a member of one of the many hundred lodges which exist on the East Side. These societies curiously express at once the old Jewish customs and conditions of the new world.
>
> ...These influences leave the man pretty much as he was when he landed here. He remains the patriarchal Jew devoted to the Law and to prayer. He never does anything that is not prescribed, and worships most of the time that he is not at work. He has only one point of view, that of the Talmud; and his esthetic as well as his religious criteria are determined by it. "This is a beautiful letter you have written me," wrote an old man to his son. "It smells of Isaiah." He makes of his house a synagogue, and prays three times a day.
>
> ...In several of the cafes of the quarter these old fellows gather. With their long beards, long black coats, and serious demeanor, they sit about little tables and drink honey cider, eat lima beans, and jealously exclude from their society the socialists and freethinkers of the colony...There are no young people there, for the young bring irreverance and the American spirit, and these cafes are strictly Orthodox.

In contrast, Hapgood Hutchins has this to say about the young people of the ghetto:

> The shrewd-faced boy with the melancholy eyes that one sees everywhere in the streets of New York's ghetto occupies a peculiar position in our society. If we could penetrate into his soul, we should see a mixture of almost unprecedented hope and excitement on the one hand, and of doubt, confusion, and self-distrust on the other hand. Led in many contrary directions, that fact that he does not grow up to be an intellectual anarchist is due to his serious racial characteristics.
>
> Three groups of influences are at work on him--the Orthodox Jews, the American, and the socialist--and he experiences them in that order. --The first of the three forces at work on his character is religious and moral; the second is practical, diversified, non-religious; the third is reactionary from the other two and hostile to them.
>
> Whether born in this country or in Russia, the son of Orthodox parents passes his earliest years in a family atmosphere, where the whole duty of man is to observe the religious Law.
>
> ...In the Russian "chaider" the boy proceeds with a further study of the alphabet, then of the prayer book, the Pentateuch, other portions of the Bible, and finally begins with the complicated Talmud. Confirmed at thirteen years of age, he enters the Hebrew Academy and continues the study of the Talmud, to which, if he is successful, he will devote himself all his life. For his parents desire him to be a rabbi, or a Talmudical scholar, and to give himself entirely to a learned interpretation of the sweet Law...
>
> ...The important thing to notice is that (whether in Russia or America) the boy's early training and education bear directly on ethics and religion, in the study of which he is encouraged to spend his whole life.
>
> In a simple Jewish community in Russia--the boy loves his religion, he loves and honors his parents, his highest ambition is to be a great scholar--to know the Bible in all its glorious meaning, to know the Talmudical comments upon it, and to serve God. Above everyone else he respects the aged, the Hebrew scholar, the rabbi, the teacher. Piety and wisdom count more than riches, talent and power. The Law outweighs all else in value. Abraham and Moses, David and Solomon, the prophet Elijah, are the kind of great men to whom his imagination soars.

However, life in the New World introduces the Jewish youth to new values, new experiences, and as Hutchins

Hapgood points out, this results in a significant difference between the youth reared in America and his European counterpart--particularly in the areas of religion, economics, and politics.

> ...In America, even before he begins to go to our public schools, the little Jewish boy finds himself in contact with a new world which stands in violent contrast with the Orthodox environment of his first few years. Insensibly--at the beginning--from his playmates in the streets, from his older brother or sister, he picks up a little English, a little American slang...and learns vaguely to feel that there is a strange and fascinating life on the street.
>
> With his entrance into the public school the little fellow runs plump against a system of education and a set of influences which are at total variance with those traditional to his race and with his home life. The religious element is entirely lacking. The educational system of the public schools is heterogeneous and wordly...His instruction, in the interests of a liberal nonsectarianism, is entirely secular. ...He achieves a growing comprehension and sympathy with the independent, free, rather skeptical spirit of the American boy; he rapidly imbibes ideas about social equality and contempt for authority, and tends to prefer Sherlock Holmes to Abraham as a hero.
>
> ...The Orthodox Jewish influences, still at work upon him, are rapidly weakened. He grows to look upon the ceremonial life at home as rather ridiculous. His old parents, who speak no English, he regards as greenhorns. English becomes his habitual tongue, even at home, and Yiddish he begins to forget...In America the chaider assumes a position entirely subordinate--to the American public school.
>
> The Orthodox parents begin to see that the boy, in order to get along in the new world, must receive a Gentile training. Instead of hoping to make a rabbi of him, they reluctantly consent to his becoming an American businessman, or, still better, an American doctor or lawyer.
>
> ...The growing sense of superiority on the part of the boy to the Hebraic part of his environment extends itself soon to the home. He learns to feel that his parents, too, are greenhorns. In the struggle between the two sets of influences that of the home becomes less and less effective.

..."Amerikane kinder, Amerikane kinder!" wails the old father, shaking his head. The trend of things is indeed too strong for the old man of the eternal Talmud and ceremony.

An important circumstance in helping to determine the boy's attitude toward his father is the tendency to reverse the ordinary and normal educational and economical relations existing between father and son. In Russia the father gives the son an education and supports him until his marriage, and often afterward, until the young man is able to take care of his wife and children. The father is, therefore, the head of the house in reality. But in the New World the boy contributes very early to the family's support. The father is in this country less able to make an economic place for himself than is the son--as he speaks English, and his parents do not, he is commonly the interpreter in business transactions and tends generally to take things into his own hands. There is a tendency, therefore, for the father to respect the son.

...The little fellow who starts out on this laborious climb is a model of industry and temperance. His only recreation, outside of business, which for him is a pleasure in itself, is to indulge in some simple pastime which is generally calculated to teach him something...He is an acquisitive little fellow, and seldom enjoys himself unless he feels that he is adding to his figurative or literal stock.

...He is a rising businessman, and, as compared to the world from which he has emerged, a very tremendous entity indeed. It is not strange, therefore, that this progressive merchant, while yet a child, acquires a self-sufficiency, and independence, and sometimes an arrogance which not unnaturally, at least in form, is extended even toward his parents.

If this boy were able to entirely to forget his origin, to cast off the ethical and religious influences which are his birthright, there would be no serious struggle in his soul, and he would not represent a peculiar element in our society. He would be like any other practical, ambitious, rather worldly American boy. The struggle is strong because the boy's nature, at once religious and susceptible, is strongly appealed to by both the old and new. At the same time that he is keenly sensitive to the charm of his American environment, with its practical and national opportunities, he has still a deep love for his race and the old things. He is aware, and rather ashamed, of the limitations of his parents.

> He feels that the trend and weight of things are against them, that they are in a minority; but yet in a real way the old people remain his conscience, the visible representatives of a moral and religious tradition by which the boy may regulate his inner life.
>
> ...The ideal situation for this young Jew would be that in which he could become an integral part of American life without losing the seriousness of nature developed by Hebraic tradition and education. At present he feels a conflict between these two influences: his youthful ardor and ambition lead him to prefer the progressive, if chaotic and uncentered, American life, but his conscience does not allow him entire peace in a situation which involves a chasm between him and his parents and their ideals. If he could find, along the line of his more exciting interests, the American, something that would fill the deeper need of his nature, his problem would receive a happy solution.

Hapgood concludes:

> Although the young men of the ghetto who represent at once the most intelligent and the most progressively American are, for the most part, floundering about without being able to find the social growths upon which they can rest as true Americans while retaining their spiritual and religious earnestness, there are yet a small number of them who already attained a synthesis not lacking in the ideal...an ideal at once American and consistent with the spirit at the heart of the Hebraic tradition.[50]

David Sphardi, however, is not to become one of "the small number...who attains a synthesis not lacking in the ideal." Rather, David is pulled haplessly back and forth between Christian American society and the religious traditions and ethics he identifies with his father.

The story itself is relatively simple and straightforward. David is introduced at age fourteen. He lives in a Boston ghetto with his widowed father. Together they earn their living as pushcart peddlers. An attractive lad, David is asked to serve as a model for a

portrait to be painted by a young Brahmin by the name of Helen Truesdale. In return for his services Miss Truesdale tutors David in English. As time passes, David's relationship to the gentile woman deepens and she becomes his patron and closest friend. They conspire to enroll David in public school. David's father, however, sternly opposes public school fearing its secular orientation will alienate his son from matters Jewish. Eventually the father discovers David's secret attendance at the local school and delivers an ultimatum: Leave public school, he tells his son, and have nothing more to do with your gentile acquaintances--or be turned out from your home. Heartbroken but determined to become an American, David leaves home.

At public school David feels himself very much an outsider. This feeling comes across particularly strong during the Christian holidays or when such literature as Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice is studied in the classroom. He begins to put down on paper on what it is like to be a Jew in a non-Jewish world.

In the meantime father and son miss each other tremendously. Their love for one another runs deeper than their disagreement and a reconciliation takes place. David promises to remain loyal to the teachings and practices of Judaism no matter how involved he gets in essentially gentile America. Miss Truesdale encourages David to think about college and under the sponsorship

of several wealthy Jewish families who have taken an interest in this lad from the slums, David enrolls in Harvard. He is pictured as a quiet, unassuming lad, well-liked by his Christian classmates. He is, however, resented by his wealthy but unpopular Jewish classmates who begrudge him his easy popularity with gentile students.

For the most part, David is unable to make any lasting and meaningful alliances with either Jew or gentile. At one point he is befriended by Leopold Dunkelheimer, a self-impressed and crafty man who in a few years has risen from junk peddler to Boston's wealthiest Jew. Dunkelheimer, a German Jew, is the husband of an arrogant and ostentatious wife, and the father of a wastrel son and a lovely but empty-headed and materialistic daughter. The children befriend David in hopes that his popularity with Christian students will help their chances for membership in exclusive college clubs. But David senses their motives and refuses to be used. He deliberately isolates himself from any associations. On his twenty-first birthday he examines his life and asks himself the questions: Who am I. Where is my place in the New World? The remainder of the novel concerns itself with David's efforts to answer these questions.

Dreamer, poet, romantic, cynic, apostate, Zionist, David's life takes a number of turns after leaving Harvard. It ends on a bed in a sanatorium where he

has been sent for madness. With Miss Truesdale holding his hand, David Sphardi dies dreaming of birds, the sun, clouds, and mumbling the name of a gentile girl he once loved but forsook out of loyalty to his father. In a diary that he leaves behind David explains that he felt two forces pulling him all through life. In one direction he was urged through the heart to respond to oriental Judaism. At the same time he felt in his brain demands to go in the direction of the occidental, the cool reason of the Anglo-Saxon. The Tether is the story of how he dangles somewhere in between.

Ezra Brudno's novel is Jewish-American fiction's earliest example of an American tragedy. Like Clyde Griffiths in Drieser's novel, David believes that the American dream of happiness and success is a fact of life equally accessible to all. As a youth in Boston he does not count on his Judaism as a drawback. It is only with time that he realizes that his loyalties to his Jewish heritage and all the unique considerations growing out of it make it impossible for him to manage an unqualified adjustment to essentially Christian America. Thus, the young man whom Brudno has been careful to portray as highly promising early in the story goes mad by the close because he is unable to cope with the sorrow and failure that is his inevitable portion of the American dream.

It is not so much with the American dream as such

that Ezra Brudno quarrels. Rather, he is concerned with pointing out the fundamental differences between the Jewish heritage of suffering and self-denial and the American dream of opportunity and self-aggrandizement and the irreconcilable demands they place on the individual. As to the irreconcilability of the two ways of life Brudno leaves no doubt. In his opinion a Jew must be willing to turn his back completely on his heritage if he wants his New World dream to become fact. An example of such a person is Jack Bavarski, alias John Beaver, a grade school chum of David's. During a chance meeting between the two young men John explains how and why he has cast off his Jewish identity for all time.

> I am an American--an American of Jewish extraction, if you will. The Jews don't regard this as an honorable sentiment, but I can't help it if I am more conscious of pride in saying I am an American than that I am a Jew.
>
> ...Why should I even bear a name that designates my Jewish origin? I am not great on religion, but I have a quiet belief in God and don't care to fight His battles. I am no different from tens of thousands of liberal-minded Americans, born Christians, who have a sort of creedless creed. My father likes his synagogue--well and good; maybe it's best for him. He lives his generation; I shall live mine.
>
> ...As a musician I met numerous families intimately, and they never made me feel that I was not their equal--I was an American, and so long as I behaved well they took me for what I was worth. I also met some American Jews and in less than five minutes I was made to feel that they had more money that I had or that I had committed a grave offense in not having chosen a father from Bavaria or at least Austria. They either sought to patronize me or snub me. The Jew loves charity, and if you are not a charity giver he insists upon making you a charity taker.

> When a man of talent rises among the Jews, they first try to kill him by silence; if that fails they employ abuse, vituperation, and ridicule; and if he still survives he may yet live to be claimed by them with pride.[51]

At no point in the novel does Ezra Brudno state in so many words that Jackie Bavarski's decision to abandon his Jewish heritage is the only realistic decision facing a man anxious to secure for himself a portion of the American dream. However, he leaves little doubt as to his true feelings on the matter when he permits David to die mad in a sanatorium babbling fragments about a lost love with a gentile girl whom his father refused to accept. David's love and loyalty toward his father and his father's wishes costs him his chance for love with Mildred Dalton, a non-Jewess and an overridding symbol in the latter half of the book of the American way of life.

Torn between freedom and obligation, David unsuccessfully jockeys between the Jewish and American traditions. His pathetic death plus the fact that Brudno titles the first and last sections of the book, "Father and Son," and "The Echo," seems to suggest that in the foreseeable future, at least, Jewish youth who remained consistently loyal to the requests of their Orthodox parents will find their futures in America less than bright.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Nathan Mayer, Differences, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1867, p. 34.

[2]Mayer, p. 34.

[3]Mayer, p. 219.

[4]Mayer, p. 228.

[5]Mayer, p. 220.

[6]Mayer, pp. 376-377.

[7]Mayer, p. 378.

[8]M. L. Barron, "The Incidence of Jewish Intermarriage in Europe and America," American Sociological Review, February, 1946, p. 13.

[9]Nathan Mayer, Differences, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1867, p. 230.

[10]Emma Wolf, Other Things Being Equal, 1892, p. 10.

[11]Wolf, p. 257.

[12]Wolf, p. 163.

[13]Wolf, pp. 175-176.

[14]Wolf, p. 255.

[15]Wolf, p. 257.

[16]Wolf, p. 258.

[17]Max Lerner, America as a Civilization, New York, New York, 1957, pp. 86-87.

[18]Nathan Glazer and Daniel Noynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963, pp. 138-139.

[19]George Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, New York, New York, 1953, p. 288.

[20]Simpson and Yinger, p. 288.

[21]Seymour Lainoff, "American Jewish Fiction Before the First World War," The Chicago Jewish Forum, XXIX, Spring, 1966, pp. 207-13.

[22]Huston Smityh, The Religions of Man, New York, New York, 1959, p. 248.

[23]Emma Wolf, Heirs of Yesterday, Chicago, Illinois, 1900, forward.

[24]Wolf, p. 29.

[25]Wolf, p. 31.

[26]Wolf, p. 35.

[27]Wolf, pp. 58-59.

[28]George Simpson and Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities, New York, 1953, p. 304.

[29]Wolf, p. 70.

[30]Wolf, p. 103.

[31]Wolf, p. 105.

[32]Wolf, p. 141.

[33]Wolf, p. 141.

[34]Wolf, pp. 236-238.

[35]Wolf, pp. 242-243.

[36]Wolf, pp. 283-284.

[37]Ezra Brudno, The Fugitive, New York, New York, 1904, p.

[38]Brudno, p. 375.

[39]Brudno, p. 378.

[40]Brudno, p. 388.

[41]Brudno, p. 389.

[42]Brudno, p. 390.

[43]Herman Bernstein, Contrite Hearts, 1905, p. 72.

[44]Bernstein, p. 95.

[45]Bernstein, p. 100.

[46]Bernstein, p. 178.

[47]Bernstein, p. 217.

[48]Seymour Lainoff, "American Jewish Fiction Before the First World War," The Chicago Jewish Forum, XXIX, Spring, 1966, pp. 207-13.

[49]Ezra Brudno, The Tether, 1908, pp. 277-78.

[50]Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto, 1902, New York, New York, pp. 1-47.

[51]Brudno, p. 277.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW DIRECTION

Witte Arrives (1906) by Elias Tobanken begins a new trend in Jewish-American fiction. For the first time a Jewish author expresses in so many words his thorough dissatisfaction with the American economic system. Furthermore, Tobenken is the first of what becomes a long line of authors to argue that a possible solution to this dissatisfaction rests with a radical political and social transformation.

Witte Arrives is the tale of the Witkowski family who emigrate from Russia to Spring Water, America. The novel opens on an optimistic note. Beginning with their arrival at Ellis Island the Witkowski family is impressed with the friendliness of Americans. Even the largest cities and their hurrying throngs are seen as things of wonder and beauty. "How different all this was from the gray, drab existence at home in Russia," one of them declares during a stop-over in Chicago.[1] They travel to Spring Water, a rural community where only three other Jewish families live. Promptly they shorten their name to Witte; all the better to fit into the community with. When public school is mentioned the elder Witte, unlike the fathers in the novels already discussed, is not threatened by the prospect.

> You will go to school here. But it will be a different sort of a school from the one you went to in Russia. Different studies, worldly studies...You see it is a different land we are in now, a better country--the best country on earth. It is not only overflowing with milk and honey, but with opportunities. Here there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile...If you study hard you can make anything you want of yourself...You can become a judge, a lawyer, a teacher--anything. This is a free land. The people are free and all are equal. All roads are free to everyone...Jews have the same rights as all other people...No differences, no distinctions...They are not discriminated against.[2]

For all but one of the Jewish families in Spring Water America proves to be a place where "milk and honey and opportunities overflow." The Wittes stand still while the Rosens prosper in produce, the Nathans rise from peddlers to shop owners, and the Goldmans run a hide and wool business. Prosperity comes to the Jews in Spring Valley who are willing to adjust their personal lives to what is fundamentally a Christian society. And though the elder Witte continues to believe in America as a land of equal opportunity for all, he is not willing to:

> give up much that is sacred to the orthodox Jew. He had to work on the Sabbath, reverse the order of the Lord and rest on the first instead of on the seventh day. In the big cities, in New York or Chicago, the Jew could still cling to the old order and get by. It was different in the country where there were only four or half a dozen Jewish families to a town. To stick to orthodoxy here meant to step out of the race for prosperity.[3]

Once again a Jewish novelist raises the question of how much of his past a Jewish immigrant must give up in order to gain his full share of the American dream. Certainly the elder Witte does make a number of minor adjustments to the American way of life, and for the first time

in a Jewish-American novel the problem of integration is treated in something other than a strictly legalistic light. Heretofore, the Jew in fiction who wished to accommodate his personal life to the social patterns characteristic of native Americans was faced with an either/or decision. Clearly, to remain true to the kind of life lived by the orthodox Jew in the Russian "shtetl" was, practically speaking, to cut one's self off from any involvement with the American mainstream. On the other hand, if the Jew compromised his commitment either to his religion or culture, he generally believed that he had turned his back on God.

Tobenken, however, is situationally minded, and in permitting Aaron Witte to distinguish between the custom of not cutting one's beard as opposed to the biblical law of observing the Sabbath, he recognizes the differences between the religious fundamentals and the traditional customs of the Hebrew faith. In this way the elder Witte is able to retain his self-respect as an Orthodox Jew while at the same time live at peace with his Christian neighbors in a land which he considers "the best country on earth."

However, while the earlier portions of the novel belong principally to the adventures of the father, the bulk of the novel is given over to an examination of the political and social transformation of the youngest son Emil. Early in the story Tobenken stresses the loving relationship existing between father and son and in

particular dramatizes the latter's devotion to Judaism. A secular education combined with Christian associations takes its toll, however, and by the time Emil completes his college studies his devotion to Judaism has apparently disappeared.

Emil leaves college and becomes a reporter in Chicago. He is appalled at the way large numbers of the city's population live.

> Tottering, grayhaired men, men in the prime of life, and boys, stood in line (on Christmas Eve) and submitted to humiliating scrutiny as they waited for beds in the municipal lodging house. Old age was stripped of all dignity here, manhood commanded no respect, youth emanated no charm. Witte, for the first time, became aware of the sinister power of circumstances. These men, Witte realized, were men like himself, like his father, like his friends. The differences between them lay solely in circumstances. An adverse turn of the wheel and he, his father, or his friends might be standing in the bread line.
>
> The helplessness of the individual in modern society impressed itself upon him with staggering force.[4]

Witte decides that "there is room for an Uncle Tom's Cabin of industry," and dreams of freeing the industrial slaves of American society.[5]

He returns to Spring Water for the Jewish New Year, but finds himself uncomfortable with his parents who seem entirely out of place in the New World. His father's speeches about a benevolent God and his mother's attempt to live as she did in the old world strike him as ridiculous and pathetic and he returns to Chicago and proposes to frail and unattractive Helen Brod, a dedicated Marxist

of Jewish extraction. They are married in City Hall unattended by loved ones from either side. Emil is reminded of an old Yiddish song.

> In a strange land,
> Among strange people,
> Who will bless us
> On our wedding day?[6]

The marriage is not a lucky one. Poverty and illness hound the couple constantly. Helen performs an abortion on herself. She tells her husband:

> Don't be afraid to leave me when duty calls, when your ideal, your career demands it--I can take care of myself. I want you to treat me as a comrade. I demand it of you. I shall not be in your way.[7]

The abortion is unsuccessful and a neighborhood physician while performing a dilation and cutterage declares:

> War on the unborn is not made by physicians. It is made by society. Do they pay their employees enough to raise families? Do they pay them enough to marry? It is the curse of our civilization that it is taking the joy and pride out of parenthood by the ghosts of unemployment and the terror of poverty.[8]

Suffering transforms Helen from a courageous and helpful companion into a morose and bitter personality. Emil hisself staggers under the pressures of poverty and suffering and grows depressed. The relationship deteriorates and Helen pleads with her husband to abandon her for his sake. At first Emil rails against the suggestion and berates the capitalistic system which has had such a deleterious effect on their life together. Discussing what he calls "job psychology" Emil blames the unending struggle to earn enough to pay for one's food and rent as the cause of the

workingman's misery and loss of self-respect. As a last resort Emil agrees to a separation in hopes that he will secure a job which will permit his wife and himself to live together in peace. He leaves for New York City, but not without:

> a great sorrow seizing him. He was leaving her alone without money, without friends, without a protector...It was cruel, cruel of him to leave her, cruel of the world to separate husband and wife for the sake of bread.[9]

Emil's trip to New York City opens no doors to a better way of life and he is stranded without food or funds. Meanwhile, he receives a letter from his parents expressing their unhappiness with life in Spring Water. Furthermore, they want to join Emil in New York. The father wished to "be among his people--among Jews... It was hard to spend one's declining years among goyim (gentiles)."[10] However, the mother dies before Aaron can do anything about his parent's request. He returns to Spring Water for the funeral and discovers that the Jews bury their dead separately in a piece of land "a short distance from the public cemetery."[11] While gazing at his dead mother's face Emil concludes that she had "that same submissive and resigned look which he had always seen in her face during her lifetime."[12] He attributes this to her total failure to adjust to the ways of the New World and her unwillingness to involve herself in its activities.

It is during the orthodox proceedings of the funeral that Tobenken vividly illustrates how differently the New

World has influenced the two generations of Jewish American immigrants. The funeral itself is simple. A tiny sack of earth from Palestine is sprinkled over Masha's face, "a symbol of the longing of the orthodox Jew for the land of his ancestors, of faithfulness to it even unto death."[13] Aaron's lament for his wife is deep and sorrowful. Characteristic of the orthodox Jew's belief that a great show of emotion is necessary to rid one's self of a profound sorrow, he weeps unrestrainedly before his mate's bier. Emil, on the other hand, goes through the motions of reciting the "Kaddush" (the prayer spoken to God by the surviving son in behalf of the deceased parent.) Without the slightest feeling of religious conviction Emil mouths the Hebrew words out of consideration for his aged father. This scene is particularly illumina—ting when considered in light of earlier portraits where Emil was depicted as a devoted and unquestioning son sitting at the knee of his learned, orthodox father.

Emil returns to New York City and eventually Helen rejoins him. A short time later she becomes pregnant. A neighborhood socialist and physician cares for Helen. Ochsner is described as that rare breed of man who combines scientific awareness and skill with a humanistic spirit. A frequent contributor of Yiddish articles to socialistic pamphlets, Ochsner represents the author's idealization of the ethical and intellectual energies of the old world mixing with the enthusiasm for living and commitment to

progress of the New World. Though not well-known to the medical world ("He was well-educated"), Ochsner functions on the Lower East Side in a capacity which incorporates the various talents of scholar, social reformer, patriarch and scientist. To Helen he declares:

> Babies need sunshine. That is the principal trouble with our babies in New York--they live away from the sun. Our landlords put a ban on sunshine in their tenement houses. They value space far too much to waste it. Why admit Old Sol free when you can let in a boarder in a windowless bedroom for six dollars a month? The ancients worshipped the sun. Would that we too learned to worship the sun, instead of worshipping the Almighty Dollar.[14]

But for all his good intentions and his wisdom of the ways of "the East Side which unraveled before his eyes daily," Doctor Ochsner is unable to save either Helen who dies while giving birth as a result of former injuries incurred during her abortion or the stillborn infant.[15]

Emil moves uptown away from his painful memories and mixes with a non-Jewish literary crowd. Before long, however, he finds himself ill at ease in the presence of gentiles.

> The real reason why he never invited Graves (an editor) to the house was that he was a Jew and Graves a Gentile--and the anti-social attitude which Christians were taking toward Jews in the old world had not been entirely overcome in the new. And friendship with a Gentile had best not be pushed too far. --Jews and Gentiles mixed at work, in the office, but after working hours they parted. The social life of the Gentile was not the social life of the Jew.[16]

Time passes and Emil becomes a well-known author and journalist. He protests vigorously in editorials against the exploitation of the working class and the economic

system in America which permits "caste and class lines in a democracy."[17] As the memory of Helen fades he finds himself keeping company with Barbara Graves, a gentile girl from an intellectual and well-to-do Brooklyn family. Eventually their mutual respect for each other and common interests develop into love. But, once again Emil experiences guilt and uncertainty over the mixing of the "races."

> What stood between Witte and Barbara was race. As a child in Russia Christian holidays inevitably brought drunkenness, fighting, and finally destruction and death, a calamity upon Jews. In America the prejudice against his race did not manifest itself in physical violence. But there were fine pinpricks, subtle discriminations.
>
> ...Jews and Christians alike still cherished age-long prejudices against each other.[18]

The remainder of the novel is devoted to an examination of Emil's intense soul-searching over his contemplated marriage to a non-Jew. Though deeply fond of Barbara Graves, Emil is unable to shrug off his feelings of uneasiness when in the company of other gentiles. He is particularly bothered by what he feels are the subtle pressures exerted by sophisticated Christians encouraging Jews to entirely sever their ties with Judaism. He is drawn to an article in a Yiddish journal which sums up his attitude on the matter.

> Christianity is not content with having the Jew merely thrown off his creed. It wants him to become a Christian. Do away with the Ram's Horn, with the Shofar, but only to listen to the ringing of church bells. Christianity wants a world of Christians.[19]

Walking along the streets of the Lower East Side, Emil observes that worshippers from the church and synagogue

pass each other, both carrying "a copy of the Book which first promulgated the injunction, 'love they neighbor as thyself.' They passed each other in grim silence."[20] Furthermore, he notices that hate is reflected in some eyes and "Sheeny" is tossed off by especially bitter Christian worshippers as they pass Jews on the street.

When Emil confronts Barbara Graves with his observations she replies, "Is there to be no end to it? Will the cross continue to be identified with persecution? Will the ringing of church bells continue to spell massacres, pogroms upon millions of people?"[21] Her comment, "Is there no way out?" triggers the conclusion of the novel. Reminiscent of the romantic resolution appearing in Other Things Being Equal, Tobenken sweeps away all obstacles between Jew and gentile when he has Barbara respond to her own question by saying, "Yes, there is a way out...Love--that is the way out... We must all follow the voice of love." Emil decides that "the hatred of Christian and Jew was not of her making--not of their making. Why should it be in the way of their love?"[22]

From a youngster who embraced the Judaism practiced by his father, and who later grew to admire radical political philosophy, Emil in the end rejects both of these ways of life in favor of a materially comfortable life with a gentile girl of genteel breeding and conservative background.

As in a number of earlier Jewish-American novels

the reader is moved to raise a number of objections to this unanticipated ending. Foremost, is the striking reversal in the hero's social and political attitudes. The picture of a revolutionary gone soft, selling out for membership in genteel society, no matter what his romantic feelings are for the girl, does not seem consistent with the earlier portraits of Emil as an idealistic and dedicated social reformer.

In any case, nevertheless, Witte Arrives, "in its very confusions...provides an insight into a cluster of Jewish hopes and dreads during this earlier period."[23]

Without a doubt, The Rise of David Levinsky (1917), the final novel of this decade, is one of the high points of Jewish-American fiction. Its thoughtfulness and structural excellence is without parallel among the novels published by Jewish-American authors between 1867 and 1927. Its author, Abraham Cahan, self-educated in Russian and fluent in Yiddish and Hebrew, migrated to this country from Lithuania in 1882. Schooled in the Russian revolutionary movement of the late nineteenth century, Cahan almost immediately became active in Yiddish workingmen circles agitating on the lower East Side of New York City in behalf of socialist teachings. However, his sympathy with socialism as a cure-all for the problems facing the Jewish American working class was only temporary. As time passed his Jewish identity, something which had been a liability for him in Russia while a member of a highly

secret revolutionary group and therefore something he attempted to play down, became in America his primary concern. Particularly significant during his thirty years in America was his consistent contribution in the area of Yiddish literature.

> As the best Yiddish editor in America, Cahan acquired a devoted and discerning sense of the moods and interests of the Jewish immigrants; as an English-language journalist, contributing to general New York newspapers within a few years of his arrival, he became the first interpreter of the East Side to native-born America. One of the most exciting discoveries, in this role of cultural ambassador and ethnic spokesman, was Yiddish literature. In the late nineteenth century, Yiddish--previously a vernacular tongue with no cultural prestige--became a medium of significant artistic expression.
>
> ...Cahan did more, perhaps, than anyone else to encourage Yiddish literature in America. In the 1890's, as editor of a socialist weekly, he publicized European Yiddish writers and offered an outlet for the best talent in the New York Ghetto. Later in the "Jewish Daily Forward," he published the work of virtually every notable Yiddish writer.[24]

A. Schoener has described that New York ghetto with which Cahan was highly familiar as "like a school." And it was from out of his early experience in that "school" as Cahan watched, sympathized with and analyzed the fascinating scene that he finally became the first Jewish American author to write a novel in English of real and enduring worth. As John Higham puts it: "All this experience contributed to The Rise of David Levinsky. Although created in English and cast in a Russian mold, it contained the essence of Yiddish culture and experience."[25]

The novel tells the story of the economic rise and spiritual demise of David Levinsky, a Russian Jew who

emigrates to America as a boy. While the bulk of the story illuminates David's life in New York City first as a homeless youth and later as a struggling and finally successful wholesaler and manufacturer of ladies' ready-to-wear, the earlier chapters of the novel concentrate on the deepest problems and values characteristic of the narrow little world of the orthodox "shtetl" in which David is raised.

Written in the first person, the novel methodically permits the reader a chronological insight into the significant and shaping incidents of and influences on David's life. From the very beginning the reader is informed that at the heart of Levinsky's life in the New World is his distinct sense of loss of contact with his Jewish past which shaped him so profoundly and permanently. And that loss is all the more vivid and painful in light of his enormous but otherwise empty material achievements. He is a man of great wealth, but his days are empty and loveless and life holds little meaning for him.

> Sometimes, when I think of my past in a superficial, casual way, the metamorphosis I have gone through strikes me as nothing short of a miracle. I was born and reared in the lowest depths of poverty and I arrived in America--in 1885--with four cents in my pocket. I am now worth more than two million dollars and recognized as one of the two or three leading men in the cloak-and-suit trade in the United States. And yet when I take a look at my inner identity it impresses me as being precisely the same as it was thirty or forty years ago. My present station, power, the amount of wordly happiness at my command, and the rest of it, seem to be devoid of significance.

> Indeed, I have a better recollection of many a trifle of my childhood days than I have of some important things that occurred to me recently.
>
> --I love to brood over my youth. The dearest days in one's life are those that seem very far and very near at once.[26]

Yet the boyhood painted by Levinsky as the story moves along seems in a number of respects like anything but the type of boyhood likely to breed fond memories. Poverty and suffering cling to David like a foul odor from practically his first breath on. David loses his father when he is three. His mother tries to keep the two of them alive by "peddling pea mush or doing odds and ends of jobs."[27] Their home is "a deep basement in a large, dusky room ... shared with three other families, each family occupying one of the corners and as much space as it was able to wrest."[28]

But even this kind of living would seem desirable by comparison when a short time after her husband's death, David's mother, "her face bruised and swollen and the back of her head broken," dies beaten by a group of young gentile soldiers and civilians who had earlier thrashed David and stoned him with broken eggs.[29]

Homeless and without funds, David is left to the mercy of the public dole. Shunted from one prosperous family in the "shtetl" to another, David barely manages to stay alive. At night he sleeps with the Talmud students under the benches of the local synagogue. It is here that David develops his first taste for the scholarship and

ethical behavior which influences him throughout his entire life. To David the Talmud is "primarily concerned with questions of conscience, religious duty and human sympathy--in short, with the relations 'between man and God' and those 'between man and man'."[30] His Talmudic education lasts seven years. During this time his life consists for the most part of sitting at a desk, "swaying to and fro over some huge volume, reading its ancient text and interpreting it in Yiddish."[31]

While studying the Talmud at the synagogue David spends some of his happiest and most meaningful moments.

> As you sit reading the great folio He looks down from heaven upon you. Sometimes I seemed to feel His gaze shining down upon me, as though casting a halo over my head.
>
> My relations with God were of a personal and of a rather familiar character. He was interested in everything I did or said; He watched my every move or thought; He was always in heaven, yet, somehow, he was always near me, and I often spoke to Him...
>
> If I caught myself slurring over some of my prayers or speaking ill of another boy or telling a falsehood, I would say to Him, audibly:
>
> "Oh, forgive me once more. You know that I want to be good. I will be good. I know I will."
>
> I loved Him as one does a woman.[32]

It was also during this period that David develops views regarding relations between the sexes. As a growing youngster devoted to the examination and study of holy books David sees relationships between men and women as:

> largely a case of forbidden fruit. ...In the eye of the spiritual law that governed my life women were intended for two purposes only; for the continuation of the human species and to serve as an instrument in the hands of Satan for tempting

> the stronger sex to sin. Marriage was simply a duty imposed by the Bible. Love? So far as it meant attraction between two persons of the opposite sex who were not man and wife, there was no such word in my native tongue.[33]

Eventually, however, his intense interest in and devotion to the Talmud wanes and he reaches a point where hardly anything in life holds his interest.

> My former interest in the Talmud was gone. ...My surroundings had somehow lost their former meaning. Life was devoid of savor, and I was thirsting for an appetizer, as it were, for some violent change, for piquant sensations.[34]

It is at this point "that the word America first caught (his) fancy."[35] Like many other Europeans of his day, Jewish or otherwise, David envisions America "as a land of milk and honey."[36] But possible prosperity is not the only reason why David finds himself enchanted with the word "America." As a result of the lawlessness and anti-Semitic riots which swept Russia for a period of years after the assassination of Czar, Alexander II, David begins to fear for his life.

> Thousands of Jewish families were left homeless. Of still greater moment was the moral effect which the atrocities produced on the whole Jewish population of Russia. Over five million people were suddenly made to realize that their birthplace was not their home. Then it was that the cry "To America!" was raised. It spread like wild-fire, even over those parts of the Pale of Jewish Settlement which lay outside the riot zone. ...This was the beginning of the great New Exodus.[37]

With the words "Be a good Jew and a good man" and "Do not forget that there is a God in heaven in America as well as here" ringing in his ears, David embarks for America.[38] And his first view of America from the rail

of the ship is equal to all that his dream of "a new world in the profoundest sense of the term,...the notion of something enchanted" ever was. "It was all so utterly unlike anything I had ever seen or dreamed of before. It unfolded itself like a divine revelation."[39]

But for David "the green one" the dream is short lived. "I went wandering over the Ghetto. Instead of stumbling over nuggets of gold, I found signs of poverty."[40] His first job is to load up a pushcart with cheap wares. But David "hated the constant chase and scramble for bargains and hated to yell and scream in order to create a demand for my wares."[41] Unnerved by the pressures of earning a meager living in a way that did not satisfy him, and generally disillusioned with a new world that in many respects was repugnant to him, David courts Satan with open arms. Seeking "novel sensations" he borrows money and pawns his few possessions in order to frequent sometimes several times a day the whores that line the alleys and tenement hallways of the ghetto streets. His sexual misconduct runs on for months. David's early life in America amounts to "months of debauchery and self-disgust."[42]

Eventually, however, he grows restless; sexual interests give way to intellectual ones. "I attended school with religious devotion. ...The prospect of going to school in the evening would loom before me, during the hours of boredom or distress I spent at my cart, as a promise of divine pleasure."[43] The public school house

becomes for Levinsky, as it did for the majority of male Jews living in the ghetto, "the synagogue of my new life."[44]

> The East Side was full of poor Jews--wage earners, peddlers, grocers, salesmen, insurance agents--who would beggar themselves to give their children a liberal education. Then, too, thousands of our working men attended public evening school, while many others took lessons at home. The Ghetto rang with a clamor for knowledge.
>
> ...COLLEGE! The sound was forever buzzing in my ear. The seven letters were forever floating before my eyes. They were a magic group, a magic whisper.
>
> ...Every bit of new knowledge I acquired aroused my enthusiasm. I was in a continuous turmoil of exultation.
>
> ...My old religion had gradually fallen to pieces, and if its place was taken by something else, if there was something that appealed to the better man in me, to what was purest in my thoughts and most sacred in my emotions, that something was the red, church-like structure on the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and Twenty-third Street.
>
> (The schoolhouse) was the synagogue of my new life.[45]

Unsuccessful as a peddler hawking his wares from street corners and desperate for an income, David signs on as an apprentice cutter in a cloak-maker's shop. He is pressured into becoming a union member, but steadfastly resists. Even a former Talmudist who has been converted from Judaism to Socialism has no effect on the young Levinsky.

> ...His words fell on deaf ears. I had no mind for anything but my college studies.
>
> "Do you think it right that millions of people should toil and live in misery so that a number of idlers might roll in luxury?" (the Talmudist) pleaded.
>
> "I haven't made the world, nor can I mend it," was my retort.[46]

And for a time David's ambition to go to college and become an educated man continues to dominate his every move and thought. He even dreams of a "college match" whereby he will become engaged to a Jewish girl who will work and support the two of them until he can complete his study. Such alliances, Levinsky tells the reader, are not unusual among Jewish immigrants. By a quirk of fate, however, David's plans are incredibly altered when he resolves to punish his harsh and selfish employer by opening up a shop of his own. The dream of college is pushed into the background of his mind as "breathless with hate" David envisions himself "a rich man," a powerful man, a successful competitor in what "was a great, daring game of life."[47] Though from time to time David seeks to rationalize his new dream of "building up a great cloak business" by telling himself that someday he will go to college anyway, this "new scheme" remains an irreversible turning point in his life.[48]

David Levinsky becomes a man obsessed--a man driven to achieve success in business at any cost. Very quickly, for example, he conveniently forgets what it was like to suffer at the hands of an oppressive and avaricious boss. He hires sewing-machine operators who "were willing to work fourteen or fifteen hours a day for twelve dollars a week."[49] His employees do not belong to the union. Furthermore, in his efforts to get ahead, David pushes himself to his physical limits. "I toiled at my machine literally day and might, snatching two or three hours' sleep at

dawn, with some bundles of cut goods or half-finished cloaks for a bed."[50] For a time the going remains difficult and David's prospect for success as a businessman unencouraging. But slowly he establishes credit as "good pay," and gains new confidence and daring. The name of David Levinsky becomes known among not only Jews in the garment district and small department stores, but among gentile manufacturers and ready-to-wear retailers as far away as "out West."

Only on rare occasions, during moments outside the shop and in the company of one of his less than a handful of friends, does Levinsky admit to any second thoughts regarding his decision to become a businessman.

> "It was the devil that put it in my head to become a manufacturer," I said, bitterly, yet with relish in the 'manufacturer.'
>
> "Well, one can be a manufacturer and educated man at the same time," she consoled me.
>
> "Of course. That's exactly what I always say," I returned joyously. "Still, I wish I had stuck to my original plan."[51]

But these moments of self-doubt grow rarer as his business grows larger. People become impersonal objects for Levinsky, tools to be used to satisfy his incredible egotism. "I was too selfish to endure the pain even of a moment's compunction. I treated myself as a doting mother does a wayward son."[52] Puffed up by his own success David shows no more concern for the feelings of the husband whose wife he uses to satisfy his physical drives than he does for the feelings of the Yiddish workingmen who struggle for their existence in his lower East Side sweatshop.

> In my virulent criticism of the leaders of the union, I had often characterized them as so many good-for-nothings, jealous of those who had succeeded in business by their superior brains, industry and efficiency. One day I found a long editorial in my newspaper, an answer to a letter from a socialist. The editorial derived its inspiration from the theory of the Struggle for Existence and the Survival of the Fittest. ..."Why, that's just what I have been saying all these days!" I exclaimed in my heart. "The able fellows succeed, and the misfits fail. Then the misfits begrudge those who accomplish things." I almost felt as though Darwin and Spencer had plagiarized a discovery of mine.
>
> ...Apart from the purely intellectual intoxication they gave me, they flattered my vanity as one of the 'fittest.' It was as though all the wonders of learning, acumen, ingenuity, and assiduity displayed in these works had been intended, among other purposes, to establish my title as one of the victors of Existence.
>
> A working-man, and every one else who was poor, was an object of contempt to me--a misfit, a weakling, a failure, one of the ruck.[53]

Eventually, the union organizes a substantial number of sweatshop workers. Negotiations between the workers and shop owners prove unsuccessful and practically all of the shops are struck. However, by cheating and lying Levinsky contrives to secretly keep his shop working and in the process manages to steal away a number of sizeable accounts from his larger and well-established competitors. Ultimately David acquires more orders for cutting than his shop working round the clock can possibly produce. "The lockout and the absolute triumph of the union was practically the making of me. Money was coming in in floods."[54]

Encouraged by prosperity, David takes to the road carrying samples of the hottest numbers from his line.

Face to face with "Yankee Americans" in their small-town shops, Levinsky recognizes "differences" in himself that distinguish him--despite his bulging wallet--as a foreigner. Ashamed of these "differences" and determined to "add to the real American quality in him,"[55] David deliberately affects "a Yankee twang," and memorizes "every new piece of slang that attracts his attention."[56] Everything that distinguishes David as a Jew and therefore as someone not one hundred percent American is a source of pain for him. For instance, when in the company of gentile Americans, all "drummers" like himself, David grieves about his "Talmudic gesticulations, a habit that worried me like a physical defect. It was so distressingly un-American."[57]

However, neither his fascination with indigenous Americans nor their refined English and matching appearances deters David for long from his preoccupation with business. As a result of combining "greenhorn" non-union tailors and patterns filched from the suitcases of his competitors, David's cutting grows to the point where he is able to move his office and factory to a spacious and comfortable Broadway address. Hardly into his thirtieth year of life, David Levinsky is the owner of a thriving factory the likes of which he never imagined when but a handful of years before he decided to go into business in order to punish a greedy and cruel boss.

The years pass and David's firm continues to flourish. But his personal life does not. "Matrimonial aspirations"

have not worked out for Levinsky and at the age of forty he finds himself "in something like a state of despair."[58] Gradually his original obsession for making money has been replaced with an equally passionate desire to "settle down," to grow roots, to have a wife and child--someone to work for.

> I had no creed. I knew of no ideals. The only thing I believed in was the cold, drab theory of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. This could not satisfy a heart that was hungry for enthusiasm and affection, so dreams of family life became my religion. Self-sacrificing devotion to one's family was the only kind of altruism and idealism I did not flout.[59]

But David's success in business has encouraged his belief that only a very exceptional woman would be worthy of carrying his name and bearing his child. "I was worth over a million, and my profits had reached enormous dimensions, so I was regarded a most desirable match, and matchmakers pestered me as much as I would let them, but they found me a hard man to suit."[60]

More years pass and David remains unmarried. His prosperity assured and business no longer the challenge it once was for him, loneliness becomes David's constant companion. "I am lonely, Amid the pandemonium of my six hundred sewing machines and the jingle of gold which they pour into my lap I feel the deadly silence of solitude."[61]

Even such items as a winter and summer home replete with servants, automobiles, and horse-driven carriages, and business deals that "exceed a million dollars at a

single purchase," or considerable stock in leading New England cloak mills and department stores and mail-order houses throughout the nation fail to satisfy the empty feeling that haunts Levinsky as he grows older.[62]

> The gloomiest past is dearer than the brightest present. ...My sense of triumph is coupled with a brooding sense of emptiness and insignificance, of my lack of anything like a great, deep interest.
>
> No, I am not happy.
>
> ...I give myself every comfort that money can buy. But there is one thing which I crave and which money cannot buy--happiness.
>
> ...I dream of marrying some day. I dread to think of dying a lonely man.[63]

But by the end of the story Levinsky remains a single and increasingly lonely man. To be sure, he is exposed to a number of potential mates. As a matter of fact he is especially attracted to a lovely gentile woman in her forties whom he considers "a woman of high character" and intellectually stimulating. Yet his sense of the "difference" between a Jew and gentile prevents him from proposing to her.

> In my soliloquies I often speculated and theorized on the question of proposing to her. I saw clearly that it would be a mistake. It was not the faith of my fathers that was in the way. It was that medieval prejudice against our people which makes so many marriages between Jew and Gentile a failure. It frightened me.[64]

During an especially happy and warm moment between himself and his companion Levinsky laments: "It's really a pity that there is the chasm of race between us. Otherwise, I don't see why we couldn't be happy together. But then, I hastened to add, ...that chasm continues to yawn throughout the couple's married life, I suppose."[65]

They remain friends while Levinsky continues to grow richer and older and lonelier. And in his closing remarks to his readers he declares:

> There are moments when I regret my whole career, when my very success seems to be a mistake.
>
> I think that I was born for a life of intellectual interest. I was certainly brought up for one. That day when that accident turned my mind from college to business seems to be the most unfortunate day in my life. ...That's the way I feel every time I pass the abandoned old building of the City College.
>
> ...At the height of my business success I feel that if I had my life to live over again I should never think of a business career.
>
> ...I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume at the Preacher's Synagogue, seems to have more in common with my inner identity than David Levinsky, the well-known cloak-manufacturer.[66]

Possibly, after all, what is most important to the contemporary reader of this novel as he follows the material rise and the spiritual fall of David Levinsky are the insights into the cultural and social life of the Russian Jewish scene on the lower East Side around the turn of the twentieth century. John Higham in his introduction to the Harper Torchbook edition of The Rise of David Levinsky, describes the hero as "partly an individual, partly a specific type. Yet he combined a variety of traits characteristic of his ethnic heritage, he met the standard problems of cultural adjustment that immigrants faced, and his life touched virtually every segment of New York Jewish society."[67]

To be sure, the novel provides the reader interested in Jewish social history with a highly charged and

constantly changing panorama which combined the most distinctive, the most quaint, and the most authentic facets of this unique milieu. Though David's career in the New World remains consistently at the forefront of the story there is at the periphery of the action portraits of such individuals as political radicals, Hebrew poets and scholars unable to adjust to the complexities of a fast paced urban world, and a stunning record of the business ethos which permeated the thinking of large numbers of the Jews coming to America from eastern Europe. In fact, here, as Cahan pieces together his tale, is a stunning microcosm of the amusing and sad, the successful and tragic. In other words, this novel reveals something of practically all aspects of the extraordinary life characteristic of the lower East Side ghetto during the close of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries.

The Rise of David Levinsky remains even today, in spite of the sizeable number of ensuing Jewish American novels depicting this fascinating portion of American history, the most comprehensive, intense, and convincing work of its kind. William Dean Howells described Cahan as an author "who will do honors to American letters."[68] And most certainly he was the first Jewish American author to produce a sustained work of fiction capable of meeting head-on whatever artistic standards critics might apply to it. Seymour Lainoff puts it this way:

American Jewish fiction before the First World War, putting aside the faults of individual novelists, is tendentious, abstract, and troubled. Not until Abraham Cahan, in The Rise of David Levinsky (1917), do we find an author self-confident enough and dispassionate enough to write significant fiction.

...American Jewish novelists before Cahan seem to suffer the dilemmas of a too rapid transition from a traditional set of values to a more emancipated set. Their novels reflect the conflict of their authors. The triumph of The Rise of David Levinsky, its claim to being the first American Jewish novel of real substance, rises from the fact that Cahan studies this too-rapid transition, this conflict in sets of values, objectively. The dilemmas are no longer the author's, but those of David Levinsky, a representative American Jew. Cahan as a novelist, unlike the authors preceding him, does not seem mangled by the process of Americanization. He rises above conflict to achieve artistic clairvoyance, whereby he can mirror the conflicts of the American Jewish community itself.[69]

FOOTNOTES

[1]Elias Tobenken, Witte Arrives, New York, 1916, p. 8.

[2]Tobenken, p. 16.

[3]Tobenken, p. 20.

[4]Tobenken, pp. 123-124.

[5]Tobenken, p. 128.

[6]Tobenken, p. 171.

[7]Tobenken, p. 184.

[8]Tobenken, p. 193.

[9]Tobenken, p. 208.

[10]Tobenken, p. 207.

[11]Tobenken, p. 228.

[12]Tobenken, p. 231.

[13]Tobenken, p. 232.

[14]Tobenken, p. 242.

[15]Tobenken, p. 242.

[16]Tobenken, p. 256.

[17]Tobenken, p. 289.

[18]Tobenken, pp. 298-99.

[19]Tobenken, p. 300.

[20]Tobenken, p. 300.

[21]Tobenken, p. 301.

[22]Tobenken, p. 303.

[23]Seymour Lainoff, "American Jewish Fiction Before the First World War," The Chicago Jewish Forum, XXIX, Spring, 1966, pp. 207-13.

[24]Abraham Cahan, "Introduction," The Rise of David Levinsky, ed. John Higham, New York, 1917, p. xi.

[25]Cahan, p. xi.

[26]Cahan, p. 1.

[27]Cahan, p. 4.

[28]Cahan, p. 8.

[29]Cahan, p. 52.

[30]Cahan, p. 28.

[31]Cahan, p. 28.

[32]Cahan, p. 38.

[33]Cahan, pp. 42-43

[34]Cahan, p. 59.

[35]Cahan, p. 59.

[36]Cahan, p. 61.

[37]Cahan, pp. 60-61.

[38]Cahan, p. 81.

[39]Cahan, p. 87.

[40]Cahan, p. 95.

[41]Cahan, p. 107.

[42]Cahan, p. 125.

[43]Cahan, p. 133.

[44]Cahan, p. 169.

[45]Cahan, pp. 168-169

[46]Cahan, p. 174.

[47]Cahan, p. 189.

[48]Cahan, p. 190.

[49]Cahan, p. 210.

[50]Cahan, p. 210.

[51]Cahan, p. 262.

[52]Cahan, p. 282.

[53]Cahan, pp. 282-283.

[54]Cahan, p. 285.

[55]Cahan, p. 287.

[56]Cahan, p. 291.

[57]Cahan, p. 327.

[58]Cahan, p. 376.

[59]Cahan, p. 380.

[60]Cahan, p. 380.

[61]Cahan, p. 526.

[62]Cahan, p. 522.

[63]Cahan, p. 526.

[64]Cahan, p. 527.

[65]Cahan, p. 528.

[66]Cahan, pp. 529-530.

[67]Cahan, p. vi.

[68]Cahan, (as quoted in the introduction), p. ix.

[69]Seymour Lainoff, "American Jewish Fiction Before The First World War," The Chicago Jewish Forum, XXIX, Spring, 1966, pp. 207-13.

CHAPTER V

PASSION AND POVERTY

The decade of the 1920's in Jewish American literature belongs almost entirely to the writings of Anzia Yezierska. Practically like a machine, quick and prodigious, this foreign-born Jewess assumed the task of giving expression to the sordid experiences, bitterness, and romantic dreams that made up the lives of virtually the entire young adult population living on New York's lower East Side.

Born in a mud hut in Sukovoly, Russia, Miss Yezierska's obsession with the crises and frustrations growing out of lives lived in poverty dominates her fiction on practically every page. Her childhood in the land of the czar is a study in economic and religious hardship; however, her early life in the New World was hardly less horrible. At sixteen, her first year in America, she became a seamstress working sixteen hours a day in a Delancey Street sweatshop in order to support her family. In the tradition of the old world, the elder Yezierska, something of a Talmudic scholar, considered working with his hands for wages beneath his intellectual dignity. The task of feeding her parents and sisters fell to Anzia. Eventually

she left the sweatshop and took employment with a prosperous immigrant family where in return for working from before dawn to after dusk as cook and maid she received room and board and a small wage which she turned over to her parents. Refusing to be crushed by hard work and long hours Yezierska squeezed minutes from hours and moments from minutes teaching herself to read and write in English while all the time imagining herself to be a Cinderella immigrant who weds a sophisticated American-born gentleman.

Such was the stuff that much of Anzie Yezierska's fiction is made of. Virtually all of the plot lines and heroines of her four novels grew out of these--her youthful galley-slave daydreams. However, Miss Yezierska was thirty-three before she saw her first tale of ghetto life in America published. "The Fat of the Land," which appeared in a collection of short stories titled Hungry Hearts, was called by one American critic the best short story of 1919. It is the tale of Hanneh Breineh, a husbandless woman who lives in a cold-water flat with five ragged children whom she eternally, though good-naturedly, curses and swats as they crowd about her for a bit of body warmth or a "stickel" of bread. The only consolation in the midst of her otherwise endless days of suffering is knowing that she lives in a neighborhood where, like herself, all the people are "suffering Jews." Frequently, during the dreary days and dark nights

cooped up in the barren flat with only her fatherless children for companionship, Hanneh listens enraptured as if to a thrilling symphony as the laments and curses, the daily dramas born of sorrow and disillusionment, are played out through the paper-thin walls of the adjoining flats. "I am not alone. Misery is everywhere," is the thought she constantly leans on. The fact that all around her are her "own kind" hurting as she hurts proves to be bread and coal where otherwise there is none.

Eventually, one by one, and despite their oppressive beginnings in life, all of Hanneh's five children leave the lower East Side and manage to secure for themselves a sizeable piece of the American dream of material riches. But, each child's material gain comes at the expense of Hanneh's personal happiness. As the family circle grows smaller she experiences an internal emptiness akin to a spiritual barrenness. She yearns longingly to return to the "old days" when the children and the mother, as their neighbors, "suffered together." When the last child leaves the flat Hanneh's final hold on the feeling of belonging that characterized her earlier life departs with him. Ironically "the fat of the land," the days of prosperity and success for the Breineh children, introduces the mother to the most barren years of her life.

Significantly, the theme of this long-forgotten short story adumbrates in a number of cases some of the most ambitious Jewish American fiction coming out of the sixties. "The Fat of the Land," penetrates deeply into

the heart of the disenchantment that a number of contemporary Jewish American literary heroes feel for their world around them. Saul Bellon's Herzog, for example, is just such a protagonist. At all times he fears taking one step forward into the mainstream of the society without first reassuring himself that with the next breath he will be able to take one-and-one-half steps backward into the Yiddish ghetto society that no longer exists except in his mind.

On the surface Moses Herzog appears to be a man who possesses all the innate ability and learned skills necessary for competing successfully in a highly complex and competitive society. Throughout the early part of the book the reader repeatedly reassures himself that surely a piece of the American dream can be had by Moses Herzog if only he will get off his haunches and set his mind and talents in quest of it. But as the novel progresses it becomes clear that Herzog's mind is elsewhere. The busyness and clamor and fundamentally "goyish" temperament of the modern American world is distasteful to Herzog. Internally he rejects this setting; over the years he has selectively obliterated practically any positive feelings (outside of the purely physical) he might have once had for a world where all is constantly changing. Instead, Herzog, like his mother before him, chooses to see the world through two separate sets of lenses.

> Mother Herzog (in the New World) had a way of meeting the present with a partly averted face. She encountered it on the left but sometimes seemed to avoid it on the right. On this withdrawn side she often had a dreaming look, melancholy, and seemed to see the Old World.[1]

To be sure the visual settings upon which mother and son focus are somewhat different, but fundamentally the reasons why they drift out of the present and return to a time past do not differ a great deal between the two generations. Both look back upon their intensely Jewish pasts with a desperate sense of loss. Herzog recalls his days in the Jewish ghetto of Chicago as:

> My ancient times. Remoter than Egypt. No dawn, the foggy winters. In darkness, the bulb was lit. The stove was cold. Papa shook the grates and raised the ashen dust. ...The Caporals gave Papa a bad cough... The snow was spoiled and rotten with manure and litter, dead rats, dogs...
>
> The morning light could not free itself from gloom and frost. Up and down the street, the brick-recessed windows were dark, filled with darkness... And wagons, sledges, drays, the horses shuddering, the air drowned in leaden green, the dung stained ice, trails of ashes. Moses and his brothers put on their caps and prayed together.
>
> "Ma tovu chaleha Yaakov..."
>
> "How goodly are thy tents, O Israel."[2]

Herzog could hardly be accused of musing over a bucolic setting. The place is an early twentieth-century American slum, a veritable stone and steel sewer. Nevertheless, it is at the same time a place to which "Moses' heart was attached with great power."[3] This despite streets like Napoleon, "rotten, toylike, crazy and filthy, riddled, flogged with harsh weather."[4] The description recalls the world that Hanneh Breineh look down upon

from her ghetto flat on the lower East Side half a century earlier. But, Moses, like Hanneh before him, is not turned off by the suffering indigenous to a big city ghetto. "What was wrong with Napoleon Street?"[5] he asks himself. Jews have been faced with suffering throughout most of their history, he concludes, and in spite of it or perhaps in part because of it "the children of the race, by a never-failing miracle, opened their eyes on one strange world after another, age after age, and uttered the same prayer in each, eagerly loving what they found."[6]

Despite the enormous physical hardships experienced by his family and neighbors in the ghetto "here was a wider range of human feelings than he had every again been able to find. ...All he ever wanted was there."[7] As Hanneh Breineh remains rooted to her flat in the ghetto walking the bare floors recalling days from the past, so also Herzog remains a prisoner of his "ancient memories," a shadowy figure unable to uncover anything in the present even remotely resembling the love of life and plethora of human emotions which characterized the "suffering Jews" of the ghetto.

Both authors are suggesting that material success in the New World too frequently causes the successful to dispose of a number of Old World qualities that made their success in the New World possible in the first place. In "The Fat of the Land," Miss Yezierska argues

that it is the repressed talent and feeling passed down from one generation of Old World ghetto Jews to the next, products of an underground world in which the inhabitants were forced for centuries to internalize their emotions and skills, that makes it possible for Jews born or raised in America to rise quickly on the ladder of success. Bitterly, Hanneh Breineh at the close of the story declares: "It is I and my mother and my mother's mother and my father and father's father who had such a black life in Poland; it is our choked thoughts and feelings that are flaming up in my children and making them great in America. And yet they shame themselves from me."[8]

Again and again in the short stories collected under the title Hungry Hearts appears the theme that the miracle of the New World is deeply rooted in the miracle of suffering and solidarity that characterized the life of the Jews in the old. For Miss Yezierska the real Jew, the Jew worth caring and writing about, is the Jew who willingly paid allegiance to this debt from his past. In the tale "My Own People," which is a thinly disguised story of Miss Yezierska's struggles as an author to find the right and natural words to express the sorrow and beauty of "her people" living in the ghetto, Sophie the narrator declares, "Hanneh Breineh is the real. Hanneh Breineh is life."[9] Hanneh is romanticized to the extent that even her broken and prosaic English is described as "words that dance with a thousand colors. Like a

rainbow it flows from her lips. Ach, if only I could write like Hanneh Breineh talks," thought Sophie.[10]

"The Miracle" in the same collection of short stories develops even further the view that the Jews' success in the New World grows out of "our choked-thoughts and feelings that are flaming up in my children."[11] The reader is introduced to a Polish Jewess living a life of poverty and hardship. She dreams of migrating to America. Letters from America lead her to believe that it is a land of poetry and lovers. Eventually her dream comes true and she journeys to the New World.

A short time passes and she falls madly in love with her teacher at night school. In time he returns her love. To the immigrant girl he represents the "born American" and all the wonderful things that that birthright implies. Deeply impressed with his urbanity and sophistication she attempts to change her ways and become like "born American" girls. But he strenuously objects:

> I don't want you to get down on earth like the Americans. That is just the beauty and wonder of you. We Americans are too much on earth; we need more of your power to fly. You are the promise of the centuries to come. You are the heart, the creative pulse of America to be.[12]

With these lines Miss Yezierska prophesied the unprecedented personal achievements and public contributions that would come to characterize the Jewish community in twentieth-century America.

Again and again in Jewish communities across the nation personal success stories like those of Hanneh

Breineh's children would be repeated. Eventually, the overwhelming affluence of the Jewish American community would prompt Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer to write:

> Of course, one of the reasons we can speak of the Jewish group is that in a number of ways it is sharply defined, special, and individual. As any casual observer knows, its economic characteristics are particularly striking.
>
> Around the world, wherever they went, the Jews of Eastern Europe became in large proportions businessmen. Too, wherever they went, they showed a fierce passion to have their children educated and become professionals. ...Arriving with no money and few skills, beginning as workers or tiny tradesmen, they have achieved remarkable economic success. Indeed, one of the probable reasons that the American Jewish Committee, the oldest of three major organizations interested in the civil rights of Jews, opposed further analysis of the information gathered by the census in 1957 was that it feared anti-Semites could make use of the figures on Jewish income.[13]

Furthermore, Glazer and Moynihan point out that the Jews' need to succeed materially was matched by an equal enthusiasm for education.

> Eastern European Jews showed almost from the beginning of their arrival in this country a passion for education that was unique in American history.[14] (More than 80% of eligible Jewish youth are attending college, and they form more than 6% of the total student population.)[15]

However, in Glazer's and Moynihan's opinion, "the real achievement of the Jews in America has been the generations of energetic and gifted young people they have supplied to the arts, to radical politics, to the labor movement."[16] To be sure, Jewish achievements in these areas of human endeavor are noteworthy. Furthermore, in a substantial number of cases the energy for

these achievements, at least in part, developed out of a growing disillusionment that Jewish youth felt toward the New World. The role of the early Jewish American artist as political critic has already been discussed at some length. In his view, America's specific promise of liberty, justice, and implied assurances of prosperity for all men had not materialized--nor was there any meaningful sign on the horizon that indicated a change for the better as long as the capitalistic system of government remained. Down through the decades numbers of young Jews have expressed their desire for social change in a variety of ways. Even in the decade of the sixties, a time of affluence unequaled in American history for Jew and non-Jew alike, this trend has not reversed itself.

> Many of the nation's most vocal young protesters are of Jewish origin. A survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee in San Francisco last year found that 30% of Haight-Ashbury's hippies were Jewish. The Hillel Foundations, campus arm of B'nai B'rith, concluded that Jewish students made up one-third of last spring's Columbia protesters.[17]

"How I Found America," the final story in the collection, dramatizes the kinds of rebellion and enthusiasm for life that were characteristic of certain ghetto youth during the early decades of this century. At the same time the story serves as a reminder to all who will listen that "dead generations whose faith though beaten back still presses on--a resistless, deathless force" makes it possible for the young people to feel and fight as they do.[18]

Unlike the heroines of some of the earlier tales, the heroine of this story is not a totally naive, dewy-eyed lass searching for romantic love and enduring idyllic happiness. Instead, the story focuses on a discussion that Sophie Sapinsky, a Russian-born union organizer for sweatshop workers, holds with a kind-hearted American born school teacher.

> My faith is dead, but in my blood their faith (a thousand voices of her Jewish ancestors who believed in a free land) still clamors and aches for fulfillment.
>
> ...In this America that crushes and kills me, their spirit drives me on--to struggle--to suffer--but never to submit.[19]

Sophie goes on to speak of the mud hut she lived in in Sukovoly, of the Czar's pogroms, and her great dream of coming to a humanistic America where all men enjoyed equal opportunities, were free from the shackles of poverty, and concerned themselves with one another's welfare. It is during a conversation with the patient and sympathetic teacher that Sophie is struck by what after all is the meaning of America: "Ach, friend! Your words are life to me. You make it [America] light for my eyes!"[20]

Sophie has found a devoted friend. As a result Sophie feels whole again, her spirit renewed. There are people in America who do care about one another, Sophie thinks, and they care more about one another than about possessing objects or piling dollars on top of dollars.

> So all those lonely years of seeking and praying were not in vain! How glad I was that I had not stopped at the husk--a good job--a good living--but pressed on, through the barriers of materialism.
>
> Through my inarticulate groping and reaching out I had found the soul--the spirit--of America.[21]

"How I Found America" re-emphasizes the central theme that dominates practically all of the short stories in the collection. The materially successful in the New World stand to lose more than they gain, Miss Yezierska maintains, if in the final analysis the glitter of their possessions blinds them to the far greater treasures of spiritual beauty and human kindness.

Milton Hindus has written of Anzie Yezierska: "She was a writer of fiction with all of the fiction writer's license to romanticize or exaggerate the grimy realism of her material."[22] Generally speaking this sums up rather well the novels that Miss Yezierska published between 1923 and 1929. The spirit of hyperbole and romanticism is everywhere in these works. Unlike a number of earlier Jewish American authors she tends to pay less attention to the novel as a vehicle for realism and social crusades and experiments more with the novel as a place for imagination and idealism. But, in her attempt to free herself of the restraints of realistic situations and issues, she invariably hurls her reader forward into melodramatic plots, unreal characters, and stylistic quagmires from whose effects he never fully regains his balance. Of her writing, Miss Yezierska admitted:

> What shall I keep, and what shall I throw away? Which is madness and which is inspiration? I never know. I pick and choose things like a person feeling his way in the dark--I am never sure of myself.[23]

Along certain lines Miss Yezierska's novels follow a highly consistent pattern. Her heroes are female (hardly disguised autobiographical figments of herself), exceedingly poor, have a terrifying and incredible amount of egotism and faith in their ability to achieve their ends, and they exude this same outrageous self-confidence and self-sufficiency as they go about selecting the means, no matter how rash or unscrupulous, to achieve those frequently incredible ends.

> Critics have said that I have but one story to tell and that I tell that one story in different ways each time I write. That is true. My one story is hunger. Hunger driven by loneliness. --Man's bread hunger and man's love hunger.[24]

Sonya Vrunsky in Salome of the Tenements is just such a heroine. She is the passionate, aggressive Jewish immigrant, Yiddish dialect and all, dedicated to achieving the goals of love and recognition and willing to trade on her considerable natural attractiveness and enormous conceit to gain them. On more than one occasion she reassures herself:

> You have a head. You have brains. You got a will that will burn through everything and everybody to get the thing you will.
>
> Life is to them that have life. Love is to them that have love. Life and love shall be mine even if all the New York millionaires got to pay for it.[25]

To read through the entire story of Sonya Vrunsky is to be momentarily struck by shades of Abraham Cahan's

hero David Levinsky. Both David and Sonya are hungry for success; and initially both appear hungry for strikingly similar reasons. Each is pathetically poor, and of similar background. In addition, both in their own way share that loneliness which was frequently the inheritance of New World immigrants. Furthermore, David Levinsky and Sonya Vrunsky were born in the same country, migrated to America more or less at the same time, and even lived out most of their lives probably only a few streets apart in New York City.

However, upon closer examination this comparison proves somewhat illusory. There is after all little in common between the two heroes. For it is not so much how a man begins his life or even the physical surroundings that he spends it in that proves the measure of the life he lived. And though both David Levinsky and Sonya Vrunsky seek love and recognition in the New World the moods and messages that appear to come out of their respective lives are strikingly different. Sonya is deliberately blind to reality. She conjures up a world to please her mental eye while ignoring the sweep and voice of the actual world about her. Sonya worships ideal love and beauty and she does so because sordidness and despair is the stuff of her real world. And in pursuit of her worship she chooses to know nothing of people except as objects to adorn her fantasies. Miss Yezierska describes her as "a Salome of the tenement striving to be a Mona Lisa."[26]

Throughout the novel she is quick to remind herself: "I have no one. No father, no mother, no money, no friends. For every little thing I got to fight, fight till I'm nearly dead."[27]

Eventually Sonya falls in love with John Manning, an American-born, philanthropic millionaire who seeks the vitality and strength that seems to pulsate through the blood streams of the lower East Side immigrants whose settlement houses he endows. However, Miss Yezierska points out that Sonya is primarily attracted to Manning because he symbolizes the highly rational and exceedingly civilized Yankee stock which she has come to admire. Sonya hungers after her millionaire obsessed by the fact that "the beauty, the culture of all ages is in him. To have him is to possess all--the deepest, the finest of all America. He is my bridge to civilization."[28] Above all else, unlike "the rapacious greed of [her] race for money, power" John Manning represents for Sonya the qualities of refinement and culture.[29] And she connives to have him despite the fact that he is a millionaire and she is penniless, that he is highly educated and she is not.

What Sonya lacks in fortune and learning she more than compensates for with ambition and inherent cunning. At no time when Sonya and John are together are his romantic gestures described as vigorous. Rather, Miss Yezierska depicts him as a practically passionless man, almost

ethereal in his romantic posturing. He is spoken of as a man with apparent ice in his veins and as one who suffers agonizingly "when his dead ancestors, his rigid training, prevented him from being warm and spontaneous as he wanted to be."[30] But, "Salome of the Tenements" is not deterred. At one point in the story she tells Manning:

> I only feel that we are for each other as the sun is for the earth. Races and classes and creeds, the religion of your people and my people melt like mist in our own togetherness. --We are the sphinx, the eternal riddle of life--man and woman in love."[31]

Unlike David Levinsky, Sonya is not hampered on occasion by feelings of uncertainty or disillusionment resulting from critical self-appraisal. Once her mind is made up that John Manning the well-bred Yankee millionaire represents what it is she thinks she wants out of life all else is put out of sight as she focuses on achieving her end.

> In her intensity of emotion, she was the Russian Jewess rapacious in her famine to absorb the austere perfections of the Anglo Saxon race.
>
> Yes, I can't help it using all that is in me--every thought of my brain--every feeling in my heart--every beauty of my body to win him.[32]

Her passionate devotion to herself and the satisfaction of her needs makes her appear at times an almost totally scandalous protagonist. An incorrigible romantic, Sonya seems to know nothing of failure--until she encounters it head on. Only then is she shocked out of her romantic world and brought to the realization that

there exists a tragic universe in which despair and fate are the natural commodities of human traffic.

Marriage to John Manning proves a failure. Propinquity between Jew and gentile proves most disquieting. Sonya finds herself ill at ease in Manning's affluent society. His "refined" friends see Sonya as an uninhibited monkey. She in turn loses faith in "the austere perfections of the Anglo-Saxon race." Anglo-Saxons have transformed themselves into cruel and artificial people, Sonya decides. Even worse, she concludes, the worlds of the Jewish lower East Side and gentile society are permanently incompatible. Marriage has destroyed Sonya's romantic vision.

An irreparable breech arises between Sonya and her husband. She leaves their sumptuous Fifth Avenue home. Her quest for the love prince has proved false; her time and effort to achieve a perfect love union has proved a sheer waste. "The Anglo-Saxon coldness, it is centuries of solid ice that all of the suns of the sky can't melt," she declares.[33] In addition, Sonya no longer feels at liberty to return to the lower East Side. "You have killed yourself with the people after your Christian marriage," a friend tells her.[34]

Sonya is guilty of hubris; overreaching ambition has left her loveless and practically friendless. All that she had hoped to achieve as a result of her union to John Manning has eluded her. By the end of the story

she is painfully convinced that to try and triumph over Christian society's traditional hostility toward the Jews--even in the name of love and culture--promises only the ultimate in personal unhappiness.

> Where in this whole world can I turn to? Even the gods are against me, because I couldn't stand the mean luck to which I was born. Because I wanted to grab by force love, power, the place higher up, the gods got jealous of me.[35]

Tersely put, what has occurred is that a self-deceiving, stubborn female has been brought down from out of the top layer of her vivid and active fantasy life. Sonya Vrunsky carried most of her world around inside her head believing that practically whatever she willed would eventually come true if only she persisted long and hard enough. Her failure to cement her relationship with John Manning and the Anglo-Saxon world forces her into a reappraisal of this conviction. Her innocence spiritually raped, she becomes something of a new person; she no longer permits her ego mania to create killing standards which can only result in failure.

The final scene of the book reveals Sonya struggling to become a high-style fashion designer and thereby replacing her impossible vision of love with a more realistic vision of beauty. Though she is still inspired by her imagination, all appearances suggest that she is now more accountable to direct experience. Only in her memory does she still permit herself to harbor thoughts of "the madness, the daring, the deathless adventures of youth" (i.e., the unattainable beauty in love.)[36]

Perhaps Salome of the Tenements was Anzia Yezierska's earnest attempt at writing serious tragedy. Probably, however, it would be truer to say that this novel, like all her other works of fiction, was little more than a hardly disguished accounting of her own personal dreams and experiences. In her book called Children of Loneliness, she declares: "Writing is to me a confession--not a profession."[37] And on a later page she admits that despite "all the confused unsureness of myself, I was absolutely sure I had great things in me. I felt that all I needed was the chance to reach the educated higher-ups, and all the big things in me would leap out quicker than lightning."[38]

How far she was driven by this illusion is a matter for her biographer to accurately determine. More pertinent, however, is the unquestionable fact that neither Salome of the Tenements, nor her other novels comes close to greatness. In fact, most of what can be said about her writing is bad--and the best that can be said is that Miss Yezierska was undeniably at home in the environment and with the people she wrote about and that her stormy style and fullness of expression bring some light to an otherwise gloomy and humorless world. Miss Yezierska's whole act of writing was to put her own foaming self into her pieces, trying somehow at the same time to make peace between her imagination and the rules of style.

In nearly every case, however, it is her imagination

that prevails. This is particularly true in the places in her writing where she seems determined to discover for her readers the "real" America. In her opinion:

> there [was] no going back to the Old World for any one who has breathed the invigorating air of America. ...In no other country would a nobody from nowhere--one of the millions of lonely immigrants that pour through Ellis Island--a dumb thing with nothing but hunger and desire--get the chance to become articulate that America has given me.[39]

But she was not articulate, at least not in the conventional meaning of the word; and furthermore, it was a deliberate choice on her part. Once again Miss Yezierska is in striking contrast to Abraham Cahan, who possessed a remarkable feeling for his "American experience" and a remarkable skill in his use of the English language. The Rise of David Levinsky, is a model of well-wrought prose. Confessionally minded Anzia Yezierska, however, "wasn't interested in grammar...and [frowned on the] still drier and deadlier literature about Chaucer and Marlowe."[40] She refused to discipline herself in the fundamentals of composition for fear that like a literary friend, "a dealer in words [whose] fatal fluency enables him to turn out thousands of words a day in the busy factory of his brain, without putting anything of himself into it," she too might become guilty of "cheap manipulation" of her reader's emotions.[41]

Milton Hindus has described Miss Yezierska's prose style as "a homemade improvised version of the Yiddish language in which she naturally thinks."[42]

He points out:

> that (though) her characters all speak in a way which can best be appreciated when we translate the words back into their native Yiddish, Abraham Cahan's characters often do the same thing, but Cahan's own narrative style is pure enough to have inspired a stylist as refined as William Dean Howells with admiration for him--in her case the narrative itself is carried on in an "English" which is indistinguishable from that of her characters: for example, "It breathed from her the feeling of plenty, as if she had Rockefeller's millions to give away."[43]

Concerning the critics' reaction to her prose style he has this to say:

> Her earliest reviewers were divided on the subject of her style. Some found its foreign intonations romantically exciting and poetic. It was local color, which the Romantic movement in literature had taught them to admire, even if it was laid on with a trowel. But other critics reproached her with what seemed an offensively nervy form of artificiality.

And though he points out:

> that Miss Yezierska's method enables her on occasion to wax poetic in the true sense of the word--more often she sounds simply careless. At her worst, the dialogue reminds us of a soap opera like The Rise of the Goldbergs: "What for did I come to America?" asks one of her characters.

"Language is a stumbling block to her rather than a help," Hindus concludes.[44]

In other words, Miss Yezierska's passion for honest "confession" frequently turned into romantic license; and the romantic license found expression in such special tricks of craft as "artificial" dialogue, melodramatic settings, and stock characters--ironically, some of the very devices that she was most critical of in the writings of others.

In many ways, Miss Yezierska's final two novels, Bread Givers (1925) and Arrogant Beggar (1927), are extensions of her earlier fiction. Bread Givers tells the story of "a struggle between a father of the old world and his daughters of the New."[45] It is set in the lower East Side and is drawn from the author's own experiences in the New World and particularly her struggle with her father.

Actually the ground work for the story was laid in 1923 in the volume Children of Loneliness, where Miss Yezierska describes the chasm between an educated immigrant child and her parents.

> The girl's thoughts surged hotly as she glanced from her father to her mother. A chasm of four centuries could not have separated her more completely from them than her four years at Cornell. "I feel I have a right to my own life and yet I feel just as strongly that I owe my father and mother something."[46]

Likewise in Bread Givers, painful struggle and mixed emotions result when an inflexible and insensitive father attempts to impose his old world values on his New World daughters. The novel asks and attempts to answer the question: At what point in life does one's filial loyalties cease to be as important as loyalty to one's self?

In the case of Bessie, the eldest of three girls, the answer is never forthcoming. Bessie is a child of poverty; on all sides she is surrounded by suffering. But, neither her suffering nor his childs' dreams of better life affects her father. In the opening scene

while his three daughters sit huddled together for warmth, hungry and unable to find work, he sits straight and unmoved, eyes fixed on the Talmud while his lips move in a ritual prayer. To prevent starvation and eviction, the youngest daughter, a child of ten goes out into the street to peddle herring.

Throughout the book the father lives only for his Talmud. When Bessie (who has long since become the bread-winner for the family) receives a marriage bid from an ambitious and practical man, her father refuses to grant permission. Out of loyalty to her father Bessie refuses to run off with the man. Soon after he marries another ghetto girl and the reader is informed that Bessie has condemned herself to a life without love or meaning.

Furthermore, the pattern is repeated in the life of the second daughter. Mashah is a lovely creature who dreams of love. Mashah meets Jacob, a promising concert pianist. They fall in love. Jacob's wealthy father visits Mashah's home and is appalled by the poverty and her fanantically religious father. He warns his son to break off the relationship. Jacob resists. The father threatens to withhold funds and thus destroy his son's dream of a career. Jacob obeys. Heartbroken, Mashah clings to her dream of love. She connives with Jacob to meet in secret. Her father learns of their stratagems and forbids her to see the boy on the grounds that he is an apostate and therefore worthless. Mashah

cannot bring herself to disobey her father and thus like her sister condemns herself to a life without love or meaning.

At this point in the story the narrator Sara, the youngest daughter, declares:

> More and more I began to see that Father, in his innocent craziness to hold up the Light of the Law to his children, was a tyrant more terrible than the Tsar from Russia.
>
> I hate my father! And I hate God most of all for bringing me into such a terrible house.[47]

Filled with a fearsome hate Sara threatens to leave her home. She denounces her father's faith, promising to have no more to do with the world from which she has come.

> No! No one from Essex or Hester Street for me. I don't want a man like Berel Bernstein whose head was all day on making money from the sweatshop. No, I wouldn't even want one like Jacob Novak, even if he was a piano-player, if he ate the bread of his father who bossed him. I'd want an American-born man who was his own boss. And would let me be my boss. And no fathers, and no mothers, and no sweatshops, and no herring![48]

In Bread Givers, the dual issues of filial loyalty and self-realization receive a much more complete and convincing analysis than in any of Miss Yezierska's earlier works. Sara's rebellion against the harsh and unjust restrictions laid down by her father is her first giant step forward in quest of self.

> Thank God, I'm living in America. You [father] made the lives of the other children. I'm going to make my own life. Nobody can stop me. I'm not from the old country. I'm American.[49]

Like Sonya Vrunsky before her, Sara is willing to work hard to get what she wants. She goes to night

school where she is devoted to her courses while working as a mangler in a laundry during the day. Sara's successes and failures, her struggles for love and personal and national identity closely parallel Miss Yezierska's own experiences. Bread Givers, along with its fully developed treatment of such issues as filial loyalty and the self-realization of the immigrant heroine also provides a convincing psychological explanation of the heroine's actions. Whatever importance these issues held for Miss Yezierska personally, she succeeded in Bread Givers in detaching herself from her main character's personality to the extent that Sara's struggles on occasion become the reader's struggles and not unconvincing circumstances piled on circumstances, incidents narrated rather than acted out. Sara's struggle for self-realization in the New World is a sometimes exciting combination of audacity and defiance complicated by a loyalty to a past (i.e., her father and his love of Talmudic wisdom) from which she seeks to escape and to preserve in the same breath.

The thoughtful reader of Bread Givers is able to see, for example, that secular education in the New World represents for Sara something remarkably similar to what the Torah and the Talmud represent for her father. Their mutual love of the written word sets them apart from their fellow human beings, the father from his children and Sara from her classmates in night school who go to class in hopes of improving only their material standing

and not in quest of wisdom. Sara's obsession with finding out about herself and using learning as the building blocks for "making her own life" proves an obstacle during an early love affair. Max Goldstein, a talented businessman who tells Sara "only dumbheads fool themselves that education and college and all that sort of nonsense will push them on in the world," excites her with his brash self-confidence and obvious know-how. His view that "money makes the wheels go ground" gives her pause. She listens attentively when he tells her that "with my money I can have college graduates working for me, for my agents, my bookkeepers, my lawyers. I can hire them and fire them. And they, with all their education, are under my feet, just because I got the money."[50]

For a moment Sara is tempted to set aside her exile born of rebellious independence and love of learning and exchange it for the wealth and power that Max so richly describes. But only for a moment is she tempted. Her interest in becoming permanently allied with Max Goldstein and his world ceases the instant she:

> looked at my books on my table that had stared at me like enemies a little while before. They were again the life of my life. Ach! Nothing was so beautiful as to learn, to know, to master by the sheer force of my will even the dead squares and triangles of geometry. I seized my books and hugged them to my breasts as though they were living things.[51]

Sara's father comes to her rented room and demands that she return home. Sara refuses and attempts instead to share with him her love of learning--confident that

"a man of the Book" will feel as she feels. The elder Smolinsky is unresponsive. "To him [Sara] was nothing but his ... unmarried daughter to be bought and sold."[52] Quoting the Torah he instructs her to "breed and multiply. A woman's highest happiness is to be a man's wife, the mother of a man's children."[53] But the appeal of the Law has no effect on Sara. She is more convinced than ever that her father is no more than "a tyrant from the Old World where only men were people."[54] In a symbolic gesture she turns her back on her father and grows mute. "I saw there was no use talking. He could never understand. He was the Old World. I was the New."[55]

However, Sara's newly found freedom as a woman and as a daughter is not without its problems. The sustained act of revolt which has made her free to express her own personality has at the same time set her further apart from society. Sara is alone, virtually unable to communicate with parent, sibling, or peers. In the process of discovering how to deal with the world on her own terms she has failed to discover rhetoric which will permit her to effectively communicate to others how it is she lives and why. For the most part even while enrolled in college she finds herself a social outcast. Brains and books seem to count less than "youth and beauty and clothes--things I never had and never could have. Joy and lover were not for such as me."[56]

Sara persists, refusing to be anything but what she believes in. She earns a degree. And with it the

recognition of the dean. "I'd perish with the unfit. But you, child--your place is with the pioneers. And you're going to survive."[57] Sara is not only to survive, she is to prevail. With super-woman determination she resolves to communicate to others her love of learning. She becomes a teacher. Passing through the streets of the lower East Side leading to the school where she is to meet her first class, Sara renounces physical love as something outside the scope of her feelings. Her teaching becomes her love, "the honeymoon of her career." Standing on Hester Street where her struggles for independence first began, Sara proclaims:

> Life was all before me because my work was before me. I, Sara Smolinsky, had done what I had set out to do. I was now a teacher in the public schools. And this was but the first step in the ladder of my new life. I was only at the beginning of things. The world outside was so big and vast. Now I'll have the leisure and the quiet to go on and on, higher and higher.[58]

Sara Smolinsky is as good as her word. Discovering herself as a capable teacher permits her in turn to discover herself as a person. She falls in love with a public school principal. Both are natives of Poland, "of one blood," who feel pretty much the same way about life. Before Sara's marriage to Hugo her attitude toward life is expressed in narrow and unyielding terms and, furthermore, such an attitude causes her to reject out of hand any and all points of view about life which fail to duplicate hers. But the energy growing out of her love

for another person broadens her perspective on a number of matters. Not least of all, due in part to Hugo's prompting ("As for your father--it's from him that you got the iron for the fight you had to make to be what you are now"), Sara decides to invite her father to become a part of her new home.[59] "It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me."[60] Sara has come full circle. Love has provided her with access to wisdom where knowledge did not. No longer is she emotionally crippled by her former tendency to judge herself subjectively while seeing others entirely objectively. By the end of the story her youthful antagonisms born of frustrations and uncertainty have yielded to a spirit of understanding and compassion. If this novel may be described, generally speaking, as a study in tensions resulting from the confrontation of Old and New World values, it must not at the same time be overlooked that Miss Yezierska closes her effort on the note that the past, i.e., Sara's spiritual inheritance, endows Sara with "the fibre of a strong, live spruce tree that grows in strength the more it's knocked about by the wind."[61]

At the heart of such a statement is the reminder that while a rejection of Judaism as an inflexible religious pattern of behavior for Jewish youth in the New World is justified, still, at the same time, a reaffirmation of the value of its ethical/moral influences which

permit these same Jews to operate so effectively in the New World is called for. This ambivalence toward Judaism, earnestly portrayed in Miss Yezierska's earliest short stories and developed more elaborately in slightly different words and settings down through her final piece of extended fiction (Arrogant Beggar, 1927), is the scheme which unites her writing with that of a number of earlier Jewish American authors. The self-actualized woman, e.g., Sonya Vrunsky and Sara Smolinsky, and the partial rejection of Old World values for those of the New are equally significant portions of that same scheme. Sonya and Sara represent for Miss Yezierska symbols of any number of noble, if somewhat naive and at times misguided, Jewish American females of her day who were busily at work discovering truth in a society which they refused to have forced on them by either parents, teachers or tradition, but who insisted on the right to encounter it at their own pace and on their own terms.

To be sure, Miss Yezierska's uninhibited and emancipated heroines during their quests for what is "noble and true" seem to act more often out of instinct than out of any carefully reasoned plan. Still, from an historical point of view, even if their values seem arrived at effortlessly--too easily--their spirit of independence and vibrant quest for the "true and noble" in the New World clearly identifies them with other Jewish American figures in fiction.

In Arrogant Beggar, Miss Yezierska's all-consuming concern for the poor Lower East Side immigrant girl who desires to better herself is rehashed. The same problems of how to go from the poor and unappreciated to a higher station in life that faced Sony Vrunsky in Salome of the Tenements faces Adele. On the one hand, Adele, like Sonya, is "anxious crazy" to gain entrance into the world of the grand and beautiful and wealthy. However, in at least one respect, Adele's character and sense of integrity runs deeper and purer than her predecessors. At first, when she sees Arthur Hellman, the wealthy and sophisticated scion of a philanthropic family, Adele, like Sonya before her, seems willing to do practically anything to meet him and get him interested in her. He was "the first man of the other world. The first man I must know. But how can I open that shut door? How make him see me the next time we meet?"[62]

In fact, however, Adele is after all only willing to go so far to accomplish her end. Whereas Sony Vrunsky was unhampered by pride or any ethical compunction when it came to plotting and maneuvering to achieve her ends, Adele's deceptively romantic and ambitious exterior ("What wonder that man could do for me! By one little bit of love, he could make me the equal of his sister, his mother. If I struggled for a thousand years, could I ever get into his world? Only the magic of his love could get me there!") fails to exhaust what may be described as the hard core of her ethical make-up.[63]

Fired from her job as a clerk Adele is forced to take refuge in one of Mrs. Hellman's institutions. The clothes and cash she receives from Mrs. Hellman gall her. "God! What's happening to me? I hate myself. I hate her for helping me. And I hate myself for taking her help!"[64] Adele looks for a way out of her plight. She recalls Shlomoh Hershbein, a former admirer whom she threw over when she saw Arthur Hellman for the first time. "He loves me...and I like him well enough. He has a teacher's job now. He's the way out from all my troubles."[65] But he is not. Adele is betwixt and between. Taking handouts from Mrs. Hellman goes against her grain, while the thought of giving up her dream of winning Arthur Hellman and settling for Shlomoh and security is equally unpalatable to her romantic sensibility.

For a time the main thrust of the novel focuses on the adventures resulting from Adele's romantic dilemma. Shlomoh loves Adele; Adele loves Arthur Hellman; Arthur loves Arthur (temporarily). Unrequited love proves a painful blow to Adele's highly romantic sensibilities. She grows hateful, hateful especially toward charity and charity givers, which, of course, includes Arthur Hellman's mother whom she secretly blames for her dilemma. During a moment of intense reverie she concludes that the differences between "grand people" and the likes of herself are only superficial. "Life was not what you put in your stomach, or wore on your back, or the house you lived in.

It was what you felt in your heart and thought in your mind."[66] But facts growing out of her harsh reality do not permit this kind of romantic distortion of the situation for long. Moments later Adele is forced to remember: "I was the servant again. And the rich were the rich and the poor were the poor. And I was in the pantry, hired to wait on those lucky ones."[67]

Asked to speak before a banquet held in honor of the benefactors of the "Home" in which she is a guest, Adele tells them:

> (You are) feeding your vanity on my helplessness--my misfortune. You had to advertise to all--"Remember, beggar, where you would have been if it hadn't been for us."
>
> Shylock only wanted the man's flesh. You want his soul. You robbed me of my soul, my spirit, my self.[68]

Seated in the audience, Arthur Hellman is entranced by this brazen but fearlessly honest pantry maid. However, Adele disappears before he can push his way down to the podium.

Hungry and without friends or funds she remains determined to make it on her own. She finds a job washing dishes is a sleezy lunchroom. There she meets Muhmenkeh, an old Jewish lady with "gray skin, gray stringy hair, gray rags," a woman who despite her misfortune "could smile like that. Smile and receive me with that warm, rich friendliness of a person who feels she has much to give."[69]

Adele goes home with the woman, a decision that proves to be the turning point of the story. "There flowed over me a sense of peace, of homecoming. Here was the real world [Jews suffering together.] I just stared at her. Seventy-six years old and standing on her own feet. And I beggared my soul stretching out my hands for help."[70]

Meanwhile, Arthur Hellman searches until he discovers his Yiddish Cinderella stretched out on Muhmenkeh's cot covered in rags and burning with fever. "In his English clothes, sleeves rolled up--wearing Muhmenkeh's old patched apron, Sir Galahad armed in calico" attempts to nurse her back to health.[71]

Muhmenkeh enters and he offers her money for food and coal. "No, Mister. Your heart is good. But Gott sei dank, I got yet my hands and feet to earn me my every cent."[72] Adele in turn takes her cue from the old woman when she replies to Arthur who has urged her to become his wife: "I've got to do it my own way. I know now that I can never fly with borrowed feathers."[73] She scorns her former romantic fondness for him, "the idea of being in love with a man of your kind."[74] Unlike Sonya Vrunsky, Adele is not tempted to try her hand on the social ladder.

> I'd never feel one of you--never one of the Hellmans. I'd never feel your equal even though I was.
>
> And you don't feel I'm your equal, because, even now, you're planning what you can do for me,

> what you can make of me. And not what I can do--what we can do together.[75]

Most significant in this declaration is what amounts to Adele's repudiation of "the austere perfections of the Anglo-Saxon Race."[76] For the first time in the novel, Adele seems to have at least a partial awareness of the handicap of the Jewish-Gentile complex that she has been operating under. No longer does her life remain one of escape, apology, impossible dreams; in effect, by virtue of her rejection of Arthur Hellman's proposal, she places the self-abnegating process that so often characterized her earlier experiences squarely behind her. From this point on in the story the plot centers on the importance of the relationship between Jew and Jew rather than on any hopes that Adele formerly held regarding her approval by and acceptance into Gentile American society. It is frail and twisted Muhmenkeh, a spirit of the Old World, a symbol of the centuries of Jews who survived despite horrible adversity, who comforts Adele during her darkest hours in a way that Arthur Hellman with "his tall, straight body, aristocratic face," and enormous wealth never could.[77] As a result of her devoted and unselfish concern she kindles in Adele, a Jewess of the New World, enthusiasm for the Old Testament teaching that a Jew is his brother's keeper. "Only the heart knows," Muhmenkeh tells Adele. "And why? Because the heart feels. And that's all we know from each other--what we feel." To Adele this cadaverous-looking

woman staring down at her was someone for who "giving was really living--the only living. If you didn't give, you didn't live."[78]

In time Adele heals, but Muhmenkeh dies. However, her spirit lives on in the body and heart of the girl. In particular does Adele's attitude toward Jewish people change. She becomes concerned over the effects of the sterile environment of stone and asphalt on her neighbors. "All at once, I knew what I was going to do. Right here--in the heart of the tenements, where everything is so ugly and alike, this was the place to start something with Muhmenkeh's spirit in it."[79] Adele opens a coffee house decorated with the art work of ghetto painters. Her dream is to create a center of artistic and intellectual stimulation for her people. Here she meets a pianist with whom she falls in love. Her concern for "our own people" is contagious. "You brought me back to life," the musician tells her.

Miss Yezierska concludes her story by telling the reader that Muhmenkeh's grandchild is brought from Poland to live with Adele and her husband. In this way Adele hopes to pass on the love and therefore the key to life that Muhmenkeh instilled in her earlier. As in Bread Givers, when Sara and her husband invite her father to join them, so in Arrogant Beggar the spirit of the Old World is united with the personality of the New.

Whether or not Miss Yezierska's final novel represents much of an artistic improvement over her earlier fiction is not our primary concern here. After all, the author herself has on more than one occasion admitted that her reason for writing was primarily confessional. Furthermore, what critical writing that has appeared on the matter suggests little that refutes Miss Yezierska's self-evaluation. However, it should be noted before moving on that Adele's refusal to surrender her integrity as an individual in order to gain admission into Arthur Hellman's world gives her something of a grandness uncharacteristic of practically all of Miss Yezierska's earlier heroines.

In any case, Miss Yezierska's emotional response to the ferment and frustration of her time is historically valuable as well as entertaining. For out of her bitterness and resentment comes a feeling of enormous optimism about the promise of the New World and what exactly it could hold in store for the Jewish American immigrant who was willing to push hard on past his original conceptions and instead see the American world for what it was. There is something fresh and exciting about her people as they plod about stumbling over the tails of the impossible romantic dreams that they erect for themselves. For whatever else they are they are not quitters--and once the reader makes this fundamental discovery about the Yezierska heroines he is in a position to share with

them something of the thrill they feel as they quest for recognition or truth and beauty in the mountains of mortar and asphalt that is their American ghetto.

Admittedly, any critic used to evaluating literature as good or bad based on some esthetic standard would argue that Arrogant Beggar, or for that matter the entire corpus of Miss Yezierska's fiction, deserves the wastebasket. But at the same time that she closes the door on any critical attention of an esthetic kind it must be remembered that another measure of value is the insight she offers the twentieth-century reader into the mind of the immigrant Jew as he thought about such varied concerns as gentiles, parents, education, and the New World in general. It is here in this less rarefied atmosphere of personal love, tears, ambition, and failure that Miss Yezierska's fiction has a place.

The year 1927 has been selected as my cut off point because in those years immediately following Miss Yezierska's final novel Jewish American fiction assumes a progressively Marxist character. Quantitatively, this portion of Jewish American fiction is sizeable and has, of course, an intimate and complex philosophical relationship to the dynamic international social movement of the thirties. It is my opinion that these works, growing as they did out of an exceptional set of human circumstances and esthetic considerations

are entitled to a thoughtful and extended discussion all their own.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Saul Bellow, Herzog, The Viking Press Inc., New York, 1961, p. 139.

[2]Bellow, p. 140.

[3]Bellow, p. 140.

[4]Bellow, p. 140.

[5]Bellow, p. 140.

[6]Bellow, p. 140.

[7]Bellow, p. 140.

[8]Anzia Yezierska, Hungry Hearts, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1920, p. 219.

[9]Yezierska, p. 242.

[10]Yezierska, p. 242.

[11]Yezierska, p. 219.

[12]Yezierska, p. 137.

[13]Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963, p. 143.

[14]Glazer and Moynihan, p. 155.

[15]Time, September 20, 1968, p. 66.

[16]Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963, p. 179.

[17]Time, September 20, 1968, p. 66.

[18]Anzia Yezierska, Hungry Hearts, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1920, p. 274.

[19]Yezierska, p. 274.

[20]Yezierska, p. 296.

[21]Yezierska, p. 297.

[22]Milton Hindus, "The Art of Anzia Yezierska," The Chicago Forum, Winter, 1966-67, pp. 136-141.

[23]Anzia Yezierska, Children of Loneliness, Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1923, p. 11.

[24]Yezierska, p. 15.

[25]Anzia Yezierska, Salome of the Tenements, Boni and Liverright, 1923, pp. 80-81.

[26]Yezierska, p. 138.

[27]Yezierska, p. 80.

[28]Yezierska, p. 160.

[29]Yezierska, p. 37.

[30]Yezierska, p. 61.

[31]Yezierska, p. 173.

[32]Yezierska, pp. 109, 116.

[33]Yezierska, p. 248.

[34]Yezierska, p. 255.

[35]Yezierska, p. 256.

[36]Yezierska, p. 290.

[37]Anzia Yezierska, Children of Loneliness, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1923, p. 265.

[38]Yezierska, p. 269

[39]Yezierska, p. 270.

[40]Yezierska, circa, p. 10.

[41]Yezierska, circa, p. 12.

[42]Milton Hindus, "The Art of Anzia Yezierska," The Chicago Forum, Winter, 1966-67, pp. 136-141.

[43]Hindus, pp. 136-141.

[44]Hindus, pp. 136-141.

[45]Anzia Yezierska, Bread Givers, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925, Introduction.

[46]Anzia Yezierska, Children of Loneliness, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1923, p. 105.

[47]Anzia Yezierska, Bread Givers, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925, pp. 65-66.

[48]Yezierska, p. 66.

[49]Yezierska, p. 138.

[50]Yezierska, p. 199.

[51]Yezierska, p. 201.

[52]Yezierska, p. 205.

[53]Yezierska, p. 206.

[54]Yezierska, p. 205.

[55]Yezierska, p. 207.

[56]Yezierska, p. 220.

[57]Yezierska, p. 232.

[58]Yezierska, p. 241.

[59]Yezierska, p. 279.

[60]Yezierska, p. 279.

[61]Yezierska, p. 279.

[62]Anzia Yezierska, Arrogant Beggar, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1927, p. 53.

[63]Yezierska, p. 140.

[64]Yezierska, p. 87.

[65]Yezierska, p. 93.

[66]Yezierska, p. 128.

[67]Yezierska, p. 128.

[68]Yezierska, p. 154.

[69]Yezierska, p. 170.

[70]Yezierska, pp. 170-173.

[71]Yezierska, p. 194.

[72]Yezierska, p. 199.

[73]Yezierska, p. 201.

[74]Yezierska, p. 211.

[75]Yezierska, p. 212.

[76]Anzia Yezierska, Salome of the Tenements, Boni and Liverright, 1923, p. 109.

[77]Anzia Yezierska, Arrogant Beggar, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1927, p. 74.

[78]Yezierska, p. 217.

[79]Yezierska, p. 226.

POSTSCRIPT

Love is the heart of the Old Testament. Inherent in confrontations between Jew and his makers is the belief that each will do right by each other. The Jew's belief is based on faith. The Jew knows that God is, that God's will is his will for God is the final explanation of everything. Reason does not enter into this awareness. And once knowing that God is at the center of everything the Jew acts upon this conception as if it were forever a foregone conclusion. Though he may be called upon to suffer, e.g., Abraham, or caused to suffer, e.g., Job, his love for God does not waver. Such total commitment is the supreme act of faith. If anything less were demanded of the Jew, if he was provided, for example, with some kind of irrefutable proof, either visible or logical, that God no matter what he does is always deserving of man's love, then the Jew's love and concomitant right action would be less than a total expression of faith. It is in fact this total and unwavering love of God and his creations which transcends time and place and binds a Jew from one time and place to a Jew from another.

Such a faith can make a man whole. Knowing that one is inexorably united with something at the center

of everything is exhilarating and reassuring beyond words. Under such circumstances the vague is transformed into the certain, the shapeless takes on form, and the seemingly abstract becomes for the believer the immediate embodiment of revelation.

More than anything else the contemporary Jewish-American novel is a search for ways and means to regain that feeling of being whole. It is an attempt to dramatize in modern terms what effects a belief in a loving force concerned with the welfare of his creation has on those descendants still loyal to Hebrew tradition. It is an ironic commentary on the New World citizen, Jew or gentile, that despite his wherewithal to conquer the external world of space he remains a pathetic and apparently helpless victim of the remote and dirty corners of his psyche. To conquer space while failing to win man's struggle against the terrors of his dreadful frustrations and excesses is a bankrupt victory. A substantial portion of the popularity now enjoyed by such Jewish-American authors as Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud grows out of the statements and feelings found on the pages of their fiction that despite the dreadful plight of contemporary human existence, there remains, after all, a hope that the time that once was, a time when man did not act exclusively out of his self-interest, when he did not consider himself the measure of all things and therefore an ultimate absurdity, might somehow be recreated in the present.

Love is the key to that re-creation. Morris Bober, the hero of Malamud's The Assistant, loves his fellow man. And by loving his fellow man unselfishly and devotedly, the novel seems to suggest, he gains for himself a feeling of belonging to an ordered universe in which giving of one's self is rewarded with spiritual completeness. Morris is a materially poor man. He is not in the least competitive. He daughter on one occasion practically tells him in so many words that he deliberately goes out of his way to be stepped on. Morris has been condemned by some critics as a spineless anti-hero who seeks to be maimed by a world only too willing to gratify his need to suffer. The basis for such an argument evolves from the theory that since the Jew historically has suffered so consistently there is a predisposition in the contemporary Jew to feel unJewish and therefore spiritually unclean unless he too can bear a burden and experience suffering.

To apply such a complex interpretation to the personality of Morris Bober seems inappropriate. Morris does not love to suffer; rather, Morris loves because as a Jew he knows that man was created in the image of God and that to love man on earth is to experience God. Morris does not talk about God. And most certainly he at no time attempts to intellectualize his Jewishness. He is a Jew; it is a fact of his existence that he is aware of. He acts out his Jewishness. To act in a

Jewish way is to love. He knows this is so because his heart tells him so. His love is indiscriminate. As Abraham loved no matter what God asked of him, so Morris loves people, rich and poor, kind and cruel, Jew or gentile. He is a humble man who goes about in his daily life fulfilling the responsibility of being Jewish.

The effect is contagious. Morris' assistant in the grocery store, a non-Jew, an initially cruel and unloving man, is transformed by the close of the novel into a loyal, devoted human being. What is most significant in the character change of the assistant is the implication that love holds for all humankind in the modern world. For Malamud the responsibility of being a Jew in the twentieth century is to witness for God to all men and by so doing seek to preserve the fruits of His labors. The consequences that such activity could have on future human society is self-evident.

It has been said that in the sixties the Jewish-American novel has replaced the Southern-American novel as the most meaningful branch of American fiction. A comparison of the two sub-genres is an interesting one. In both cases the authors operate from highly unique and deeply personal pasts. Furthermore, they bring these pasts into the present and, frequently, in the better works manage to dramatically translate the significance of a cultural tradition into the why and wherefores of a man's everyday actions.

What the modern reader had found most appealing first in the Southern novel and presently in the Jewish-American novel is the suggestion of a secure and stable world where men could relate to one another and feel they experienced portions of their lives in common. If the immigrant American Jew of the Diaspora died with a prayer on his lips to be united with "eratz Isroael," so frequently, the contemporary Southerner has nostalgic visions of an aristocratic ante-bellum society where God and the plantation master were white and ubiquitious blacks served at the pleasure of the white folk. What is remarkable to the modern eye about both cultures is the striking sense of order that prevailed, a time and place where man had a clear conception of what role he was expected to play and the rewards and punishments he could expect depending on his course of action. Such a time is a far cry from present day when more often than not the typical man suffers from a constant fear that the sum total of energy that he has exerted in life goes to naught. Verbally and emotionally isolated from his fellow men, existing without values and dreams in common, he has come to believe that God is dead and that the worth of a man's life is characterized by absurdity.

In light of this, nevertheless, certain critics, Harry T. Moore, among them, have blatantly misread what significance Jewish-American fiction, deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions as it is, holds for

a reading public whose outlook is existential. In the introduction to Jews and Americans, Moore declares that "Herzog's problems [the hero of Saul Bellow's novel] are not specifically Jewish... Herzog's alienation is ultimately not very different from that of most intellectualized Americans."[1]

Mr. Moore could not be more wrong. Herzog's alienation is highly specific. He yearns to go back in time to a turn of the century ghetto where the inhabitants operated out of the same cultural bag; where Jews, because they were Jews, possessed values and dreams in common. Despite the poverty it was for Moses Herzog a very good time. A good time, for instance, because religious and cultural roots common to Jews from different parts of Europe and even the world permitted them to greet one another as "landsmen." Down through the second and even third generations of Jewish-Americans the term, like soul brother for the Black Americans in the sixties, connoted an entire outlook on life shaped by specific kinds of traditions and values. Thus a Sephardic (Spanish Jew) and a Litvak (Lithuanian Jew) felt they spoke the same language though they lacked a vocabulary in common.

At one point Mr. Moore claims that "of course, no such thing as Jewish blood exists , any more than there's Presbyterian or Baptist blood."[2] Technically speaking he is correct. But in making his point he

reveals his inability to understand Herzog's obsession with the past. The difference between Herzog's yearning to go back in time and countless other highly sensitized non-Jewish Americans who find the twentieth century intolerable is the difference between yearning for a specific period and place where a common culture rooted in a specific religious outlook bound even strangers together, and a mere hopeful yearning for a better world where one's daily life is not marked by chaos and absurdity. Herzog seeks to go back in time, while most intellectualized non-Jewish Americans look toward the future with visions of a more ordered and meaningful world.

It is Mr. Moore's opinion that "one of the triumphs of Mr. Bellow's book is that he can make his hero the product of a specialized environment and at the same time broadly representative."[3] Nonsense. It is not Bellow's doing at all; rather, Moore himself reads into Moses Herzog characteristics that might in the twentieth century be described as "broadly representative." There is nothing of the "goy" in Herzog. To be sure Herzog feels cut off; but what he feels himself cut off from has virtually nothing to do with the alienation frequently labelled as the standard psychosis of twentieth-century urban America. Too often the formerly exclusively Jewish neighborhoods of New York's Lower East Side and Chicago's Halstead section are portrayed in history books as

utterly unsavory, ramshackle portions of the cities where filth and poverty caused endless suffering and where the residents lived joyless lives. Such portraits are far from the whole truth. It is to be remembered that unlike European Jews, American Jews were not forced by government decree to live in segregated areas. Often they chose to dwell in New World ghettos because, despite the poverty and filth, they felt at home among their own people. "As a portal, the Lower East Side prepared millions for adaptation to American life," A. Schoener wrote..."Because its population was transient, the Lower East Side was like a school."[4] Moses Herzog is a passionately sentimental alumnus of Chicago's Jewish ghetto. So much so, in fact, that alongside his nostalgic recall the real world of his mature years seems almost completely lacking in the critical elements of happiness and meaning.

From the point of view of Mr. Moore, all alienation, including that of Herzog from his fellow Jews and the environment which gave him his sense of Jewishness, is "broadly representative." Moore is correct when he alludes to alienation as characteristic of both Jew and non-Jew in twentieth century America. But at that point the parallel between Herzog and non-Jewish Americans ends, as all comparisons tend to break down between human beings of widely different backgrounds. Undoubtedly, what Mr. Moore, and what most non-Jewish Americans

find compelling in the character of Moses Herzog, and what they can identify with, is the shattered man that, by the close of the novel, he has come to represent. But to say that Herzog's breakdown and estrangement from society is "broadly representative" is to ignore entirely the fact that the roots of his destruction can be located in his Jewish attitudes toward life and human kind.

It cannot be stressed too much that the indispensable prerequisite to any thoughtful and accurate analysis of contemporary Jewish-American fiction requires that the critic bear in mind how much the Jew's awareness of his historic past influences his every forward look. The Jew's pride in his past, his belief that there is merit in the common history, ideals, and aspirations of Judasim, despite the fact that for each generation it undergoes change, is, in the final analysis, a sense of continuity that becomes a shaping orientation toward reality. That the Jewish way of life, including both the social structure of the culture and the Jewish religion, can succeed in remaining distinguishable and viable despite the revisions that it passes through with each succeeding generation is testimony both to its inherent worth and promise for an uninterrupted future.

Contemporary Jewish-American fiction is evidence of just this conclusion. In the sixties Jews continue to write about Jews and the Jewish way of life. Yet,

there is no indication of the literature becoming a static, parochial sub-genre divorced from the issues and developments affecting American society as a whole. Moses Herzog and Morris Bober are clearly Jewish characters. The interest in these characters is not confined, however, to exclusively Jewish readers. Furthermore, Jewish authors who have written about Jewish characters and themes at least part of the time include many of America's most prominent contemporary authors. Foremost among these include Philip Roth, Herbert Gold, Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw, Arthur Miller, and J. D. Salinger.

As the saying goes, "The Jewish-American author has never had it so good." Perhaps the explanation for why this is so can be found in the words of Albert Einstein who wrote:

> Judaism appears to me to be almost exclusively concerned with the moral attitude in and toward life...The essence of the Jewish concept of life seems to me to be the affirmation of life for all creatures. For the life of the individual has meaning only in the service of enhancing and ennobling the life of every living thing. Life is holy; i.e., it is the highest worth on which all other values depend. ...Moreover it is clear that "to serve God" is equivalent to serving "every living thing."
>
> To how great an extent the consciousness of the sanctity of life is alive in the Jewish people is beautifully illustrated by a remark once made to me by Walter Rathenau: "When a Jew says he takes pleasure in the hunt, he lies." It is impossible to express more simply the consciousness of the sanctity and the unity of all life as it exists in the Jewish people.[5]

In a time when literature, both fiction and non-fiction, tends to depict man as ignoble and absurd, the

"life approach of the Jewish people" is unique. "Life is holy," declares Judaism. Man is good and worth troubling over, declares the Jewish-American author. To see these statements clearly is to fix one's eyes on the light in the midst of darkness, to see a whole world of nothing replaced forever by a fixed nature of something.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Irving Malin, Jews and Americans, Southern Illinois University Press, 1965, p. vii.

[2]Malin, p. vii.

[3]Malin, p. vii.

[4]Quoted as it appears in "American Judaism," Alfred Werner, Vol. XVI, No. 2, p. 17, Winter, 1966-67.

[5]Albert Einstein, The Detroit Jewish News, Friday, December 13, 1968.

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