

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

"In Defense Of The Human": The Survival
Of Moral Optimism In Post-War American Fiction.

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

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by

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It is widely accepted that early American literature reflects the boundless social and moral optimism of "The Great Experiment", expresses certitude in the ultimate perfectibility of man in the New World. Equally widely held is the belief that American experience in the twentieth century has prompted something of a retreat from this optimistic position, has blunted the belief in -- crudely put -- the American Dream and that this retreat has been particularly marked in American fiction since World War Two.

This thesis seeks to confront such assumptions about the "American Nightmare", as described in contemporary American fiction, by examining the work of six post-war American fiction writers: three Jews -- Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Chaim Potok and three non-Jews -- John Cheever, John Updike and William Burroughs. This arrangement allows for a discussion of the obvious literary differences between Jew and non-Jew in the period. Moreover, it allows for speculation about the cultural processes underlying such differences, processes which have enabled some writers to produce fictions reinforcing the values and principles of individual significance and moral virtue in a social context while the work of others powerfully argues the irrelevance or impossibility of such values in contemporary society.

My object in this is not to make an equation whereby optimism equals good literature and pessimism equals bad literature. Rather it is to demonstrate the way in which the optimistic strain of American literature abides -- albeit in a somewhat muted form -- and to point up the paradoxical way in which it is the very Jewishness of their writing that has made the work of Bellow, Malamud and Potok seem so thoroughly American. In so doing I hope to underline the singular

contribution of Jewish American writing since 1945 to the American literary canon.

I want to offer my particular thanks to the following people:

Dr. Edward Abramson for his generous help
and guidance;

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of nonsense.

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INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to An Almost Chosen People, Walter Nicgorski and Ronald Weber suggest that "Throughout our history, from Massachusetts Bay through Vietnam and Watergate, the feeling has persisted -- intense at times, perhaps faint now -- that the hope America holds out is grounded not so much in material prosperity as in moral attainment."¹ This remark raises a number of very interesting and telling points about the American experience. First and most obvious is the social and moral righteousness that the authors rightly identify as being implicit in the American enterprise. Second is the didactic, exemplary nature of the enterprise itself: America, through the success of its own efforts, will offer (indeed urge) itself as a model to the rest of the world. Arguably such didacticism goes to the heart of American culture: as Charlie Citrine observes of another character in Humboldt's Gift, "Thaxter was a real American, in that like Walt Whitman, he offered himself as an archetype -- 'What I assume you will assume.'"² Third, Nicgorski and Weber observe the contemporary decline in the momentum and depth of conviction which fuels the belief in such specialness, they intimate a subversive suspicion that somehow the peoples of the USA have failed to build a new Jerusalem in the New World.³

Concentrating, for a moment, on the last of these points it is noteworthy that (almost) everyone agrees that we live in traumatic times, that our age is characterized by profound disappointment, disillusion and disbelief. As Raymond Olderman has observed:

The facts of contemporary experience are constantly beyond belief: calling those facts absurd does not seem to subdue them. There is always some small comfort in the neatness of categories, but only a glance at the day's headlines, a moment of listening to an advertisement or dealing with the clerk of some organization that holds you under the

power of incredible inconvenience, and a jolting feeling that you have come unplugged or disconnected will destroy the safety that categories supply. The unbelievability of events is no longer reserved for large world affairs. We have moved beyond the enormities of Buchenwald and Auschwitz and Hiroshima to the experience of the fantastic within what should be the firm shape of everyday reality. 4

Such a feeling has been particularly marked in the literary response to the age, especially in the USA where even the least apocalyptically inclined of observers, like Saul Bellow, have agreed that the times demand a fundamental reappraisal of our understanding of what it is to be a human being. Perhaps the emphatic nature of this anxiety is only to be expected in the case of the artist since, as seer and antenna of the race, the necessary problem of understanding is particularly acute. How can the artist hope to comprehend or depict a society that constantly defies and outstrips attempts at definition? This point was made by Philip Roth more than twenty years ago and is, perhaps, even more relevant today than it was then.⁵ Under these circumstances is it desirable, even possible, to continue examining society in artistic terms which use assumptions about narrative, character and the significance of the individual that the pressures of experience seem to render obsolete. In the words of Jerome Klinkowitz: "if what passes for reality is distressingly unreal why spend time representing it?"⁶

The difficulties such circumstances have created can be gauged by the multiplicity of literary responses to the period, responses describing the fragmentation of the literary scene in post-war America. Nonetheless, even at the most conservative level, there has been, as Stan Smith has pointed out, a change in tack, a decision by the novelist to opt for a smaller canvas of concerns on which to depict diminishing expectations; a decision to refrain

from treating with heroism and tragedy in favour of something less conclusive or impressive. (Literary) man seems to have been busy redefining his relationship to the cosmos in terms which are much less assured, more jokey and tangential. A sort of siege mentality has emerged, whereby the pressures of survival necessitate less powerful answers dependent on images of flight and victimization, submission, fragmentation of meaning and a weary playfulness. Subject to these pressures, the modern hero has become, in Stan Smith's words "a sadly contracted hero."⁷

However, while this modern hero is undoubtedly contracted (in terms of scope and aspiration) why must the adverb 'sadly' necessarily be attached to Dr. Smith's title? Is it sad if the contraction is simply realistic, a recognition of humanity's inherent limitations, allied to a more objective assertion of human possibility? To what extent have American writers lost that moral vision and belief in humanity traditional to the US enterprize and to what extent have they merely redirected and refashioned it: in what forms does it survive? Perhaps the old certitudes have gone and perhaps even the old forms with them: nonetheless it is evident that some writers, at least, have made a laudable effort to keep that idealism and moral optimism alive, have tried to preserve essential human virtues at the heart of their fiction. They have, in short, tried to present "good men in action,"⁸ characters determined to place the moral perfectibility of humanity at the heart of their human vision and in this way something of the desire for "moral attainment" identified by Nicgorski and Weber has survived.

I will be considering these matters primarily through the work of six contemporary writers: three Jews, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Chaim Potok and three non-Jews, William Burroughs, John Cheever and John Updike. For this reason the thesis has been organized into two, perhaps contrasting, halves. The first half

concerns the non-Jews, three very different writers,⁹ all of whom have persuasive claims to 'major' status. In this I seek to establish the nature and essence of the dystopian vision which has become the hallmark of much post-war American fiction and to gauge the extent to which this vision manifests itself in the work of the three writers under consideration.

The second half attempts something slightly different in that, dealing with Jewish writers, it is concerned not only to document the vein of moral optimism which runs through their fiction but also to establish the communality of that optimism; the way that each writer draws upon a shared sense of 'Jewishness'. Thus, the 'statistically significant' overrepresentation of Jewish novelists is justifiable, indeed essential, not only because of the relatively large number of Jewish-American novelists who have produced quality fiction in the post war era but also for a far more profound (although not entirely unconnected) reason. They have, throughout their fiction, made a special contribution to the maintenance of American moral optimism, a contribution which hinges on a residual and cultural Jewish perspective. This fact has been touched upon by several critics attempting to explain the importance, indeed pre-eminence, of Jewish-American novelists in post war American fiction¹⁰ and is abundantly apparent in the work of the three who are considered here. It is fair to say that their books are characterized if not by overt preachiness then at least by a tone of stern moral concern¹¹ and this is something I have attempted to reflect in the titles I have given the chapters discussing their work. Each is a quotation drawn from the pen of the particular author and each, I think, reflects their common desire to affirm the essential goodness and perfectibility of humanity, their concern and desire to contribute to the ultimate achievement of that perfection. The coincidence of such concern

seems to me to be far more than random fortuity, is something necessarily rooted in their common cultural heritage. As Saul Bellow says in To Jerusalem and Back, Jews "have a multitude of faults, but they have not given up on the old virtues."¹² It is these virtues, essentially matters of the individual's value, significance and dignity, that he and writers like him have insisted upon as being central, indeed essential, to our continued understanding of what it means to be a 'human' being.

Reading Myself and Others (London: Corgi, 1977), p. 110.

University Press, 1977, p. 1.

1. Self-Portrait

What the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make something out of American reality. It is difficult, it is intricate, it is informative, and finally it is even a kind of management to one's own imagination. The country is continually evolving and talented, and the culture throws up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.

Reading Myself and Others (London: Corgi, 1977), p. 110.

2. Jerome Klinkowitz, Literary Discussions (Chicago: University

of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 27.

3. Star Smith, A Self-Portrait of a Man (Durham: British

Association for American Studies, 1961).

4. The phrase is used by Steven D. Levine, writing a Bellowian

description of the novelist's fictive intent. (S.D. Levine,

"In Defense of Bellow: Saul Bellow's To Jerusalem and Back,"

Studies in American Jewish Literature 4, 11, p. 53.

5. My own feeling is that the similarities between Cheever and

Spillane have been somewhat overplayed. Certainly both share

an admirable verbal facility and a New Yorker background not

beyond that they differ a great deal. Spillane, for instance,

is far more of a celebrant of modern life than was Cheever,

who spent little time in the urban environment which

Spillane describes, frequently with unalloyed delight and

NOTES

1. Walter Nicgorski and Ronald Weber, eds., An Almost Chosen People (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), p.ix.
2. Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 279.
3. To this list could most usefully be added that tacit recognition (implicit in the volume's title) of the community of interests and ideals which exists between Jews and Americans.
4. Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond The Waste Land (London: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 1.
5. Roth complained

that the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stupifies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.

Reading Myself and Others (London: Corgi, 1977), p.110.
6. Jerome Klinkowitz, Literary Disruptions (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 32.
7. Stan Smith, A Sadly Contracted Hero (Durham: British Association for American Studies, 1981).
8. The phrase is used by Steven D. Lavine, echoing a Bellovian description of the novelist's fictive intent. (S.D. Lavine, "In Defiance Of Reason: Saul Bellow's To Jerusalem and Back," Studies In American Jewish Literature 4, ii, p. 83.
9. My own feeling is that the similarities between Cheever and Updike have been somewhat overplayed. Certainly both share an admirable verbal facility and a New Yorker background but beyond that they differ a great deal. Updike, for instance, is far more of a celebrant of modern life than was Cheever, who found little to admire in the urban environment which Updike describes, frequently with undisguised relish and

enthusiasm. Moreover Updike's work, for all its impressionistic, adjectival abundance is stylistically quite different from Cheever's, less formal and convoluted in tone and sentence structure. Finally, Updike is manifestly a realist writer (in a nineteenth century sense) whereas Cheever was more romantic, almost a magic realist, whose interest in realism was merely (as he once said) in probability.

10. Two of the most notable of these critics have been Leslie Fiedler and Alfred Kazin. Fiedler suggests, in Waiting For The End, that "the Jews must already have become capable of projecting psychological meanings with which the non-Jewish community is vitally concerned." [Waiting For The End (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 77.] Similarly, Kazin has argued, with reference to Saul Bellow's novels, that "each of these narratives was a kind of survival kit for a period in which survival became all too real a question for many Americans. The Jewish experience on that subject -- and what else had the experience been? -- seemed exemplary to Americans...." [Alfred Kazin, Bright Book Of Life (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), p.130.]

11. "Preachiness," in fact, is precisely what John Updike identified in the moral tone of Bellow's later novels, as he explained on "Saul Bellow and the latter-day lean-to," (First broadcast on BBC Radio Three, 3 February, 1982).
12. Saul Bellow, To Jerusalem and Back (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 57.

THE AMERICAN WEST

From the time of its discovery America was always considered a continent of new lands and new opportunities. It was believed that it contained the secrets of the future, and that it was the destiny of the American people to develop it. The American West was the land of the future, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it. The American West was the land of the future, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it. The American West was the land of the future, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it.

In a sense, America simply had the good fortune to be discovered at the right time and in the right place. It was a continent of new lands and new opportunities, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it.

It was a great land of opportunity, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it. It was a great land of opportunity, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it. It was a great land of opportunity, and it was the duty of the American people to develop it.

PART ONE

for perfection. Later, toward the end of the eighteenth century, the American people began to feel that they had reached the end of the world. They had reached the end of the world, and they had reached the end of the world. They had reached the end of the world, and they had reached the end of the world. They had reached the end of the world, and they had reached the end of the world.

Accordingly, the American people began to feel that they had reached the end of the world. They had reached the end of the world, and they had reached the end of the world. They had reached the end of the world, and they had reached the end of the world.

CHAPTER TWOAN END TO EXCEPTIONALISM

From the time of its discovery America was always something more than just a new land or new continent. It embodied certain mythic possibilities which stirred the European heart in a way that subsequent 'new worlds', the unknown lands of Africa or the new continent of Australasia, failed to do. America was, for a variety of reasons -- mytho-poetic, religious, commercial and national - political -- exciting and significant to an extent that utterly transcended its contemporary importance or utility.

In a sense, America simply had the good fortune to be discovered (or re-discovered) at the right cultural and historical moment. It was a vast tract of unspoilt wilderness suitable for investment with the old world's hopes, dreams and economic surpluses; a new world whose newness (and hence its uncorruptedness) was the keynote as it assumed immense symbolic significance in humanity's search for perfection. Later, toward the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, that portion of the American continent which had become the USA took on board the bulk of the myths and expectations that Europe and, indeed, the new nationals themselves had previously expended on the whole continent. The myth of El Dorado with its attendant dreams of vast personal wealth might, for a while, have continued to motivate the exploration and exploitation of the areas we now call Latin America but in the USA such undisguised greed and rapacious acquisitiveness was denied, suppressed, sublimated, cloaked or displaced by the notions of universal plenty and the ideological equation of individual wealth with personal freedom. As Nicgorski and Weber have emphasized, the story of America (that is to say the story of the United States) is more a matter of moral attainment than material acquisition.¹

Accordingly men of vision, when considering America, brought

forth visions so much greater and more ambitious than was the case for other nations. The whole concept of the "American Dream" underlines this. There is no similar "Italian Dream" or "British Dream" but because America was so much larger, so fertile, so empty of failure, more could be hoped for, more envisioned. Grand claims were made and extravagant hopes entertained on her behalf. For instance, in 1785 Dr. Richard Price, a close friend of Benjamin Franklin, remarked, "Perhaps I do not go too far when I say that, next to the introduction of Christianity among mankind, the American Revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive course of human improvement."² Equally extravagant was the philosopher Hegel's claim that

America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself.... It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber-room of Europe.... It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself. ³

However false such claims may ring today, however wildly hopeful such ideas might seem to our jaundiced eyes in the latter half of the twentieth century, there is no doubt that the hopes and beliefs articulated in the words of Price and Hegel precisely mirrored the largely unarticulated hopes and beliefs which were central to the burgeoning myth of America. In this matter the American artist was a crucial figure: by formulating and uttering the ideals on which the USA was founded, by creating a cultural vocabulary to describe them, he (and overwhelmingly it was he) was able simultaneously to identify and promote an intense and unique national spirit. Under these circumstances perhaps it was of no great importance that the writers and painters of the republic's early years were hardly creative artists of the first order. They nonetheless succeeded in their cultural brief: they communicated the uniqueness of their homeland and its magnificence of purpose.

Only to look at the paintings of Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand is to appreciate the almost breathless enthusiasm expressed by prosodists like Crèvecoeur. Reinforcing the sense of wonder evident in the poetry of Bryant and Freneau is the conviction that in America the world has found something else, something fresh and God-given. The germ of this idea, an intangible sense of "more", was captured by William Cullen Bryant in his "To Cole, The Painter, Departing For Europe":

Thine eyes shall see the light of distant skies;
 Yet, Cole! thy heart shall bear to Europe's strand
 A living image of our own bright land,
 Such as upon thy glorious canvas lies;
 Lone lakes - savannas where the bison roves -
 Rocks rich with summer garlands - solemn streams -
 Skies, where the desert eagle wheels and screams -
 Spring bloom and autumn blaze of boundless groves.
 Fair scenes shall greet thee where thou goest - fair,
 But different - everywhere the trace of men,
 Paths, homes, graves, ruins, from the lowest glen
 To where life shrinks from the fierce Alpine air.
 Gaze on them, till the tears shall dim they sight,
 But keep that earlier, wilder image bright. 4

As a later, much greater American poet, Walt Whitman, was to observe:

The United States themselves are essentially
 the greatest poem. In the history of the
 earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring
 appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness
 and stir. Here at last is something in the doings
 of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings
 of day and night. Here is action untied from strings,
 necessarily blind to particulars and details,
 magnificently moving in masses. 5

It became the duty of the American artist in the nineteenth century to communicate this greatness, to be the conduit of its expression. Urged on by the disparate exhortations of Noah Webster, Ezra Stiles and Ralph Waldo Emerson (to name but three), the American writer's sense of a moral purpose underpinning his artistic effort was doubly felt and doubly important.⁶

Irving Howe once observed that American Literature "begins upon a note of wonder, glistening with expectation, marvelling at the freshness of native earth. Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Twain -- all, during their earlier years seem overawed by the sheer

good fortune, the chosenness, of American mankind...."⁷ He went on to argue that

all the major American writers of the 19th century strike this chord of ecstasy -- even the wily Hawthorne, once he has transported Hester Prynne to the woods. It is an ecstasy of essential man, free of social bonds, in deep relation with the tangible world. In this vision, every man declares himself a pioneer of spirit. Every man makes and remakes himself, defining his character as an endless series of second chances. It's as if Eve never bit nor Adam fell. 8

As Howe suggests, this sense of wonder and chosenness was common in the nineteenth century, even to those writers normally considered bleak and lacking a sense of optimism. Even Hawthorne, "who knew disagreeable things in his inner soul,"⁹ and Melville, "a man at odds with the heavy idealism of his age ... unable to reconcile such ideals with the reality he experienced,"¹⁰ shared it to some extent.

Thus, in The Marble Faun, Hawthorne's -- essentially literary -- complaint against his homeland was tinged by pride for its social, human achievement:

No author... can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no misery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight as is happily the case with my dear, native land. 11

Similarly, Melville contrived an uncharacteristically rhapsodic note of affirmation in his assertion that

We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At a period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America but we give alms to the world. 12

Inarguably, such idealism was doomed to disappointment. Hardly a century after the publication of White Jacket any romantic beliefs in the nation's possibilities had been crushed underfoot by the experience of the intervening years. Arguably the inevitable tension between the twin ideals of individual freedom and social justice became too much for the "American Dream" to bear as the ideals themselves proved irreconcilable. Perhaps the pre-lapsarian mythology informing Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, Hester Prynne's wilderness and Huck Finn's decision "to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest,"¹³ was only valid in an untamed world and withered under threat from the remorseless tread of civilization. Perhaps as individualism itself became a discredited and outmoded notion,¹⁴ inappropriate to an age geared to mass production and increasingly characterized by Baudelairian alienation, the dream of individual achievement became debased, became an ethic of pure greed. Certainly strong tremors of disillusion, powerfully dystopian intimations, began to emerge in the writings of Crane, Dreiser and Upton Sinclair and these blossomed into the expression of an authentically tragic vision in the books of Hemingway, Faulkner and Fitzgerald. By the 1920's and 30's it was possible to think of American writing as being predominantly coloured by a sense of irretrievable loss, even of despair. And yet the literary mood was still, in its way, romantic ("incorrigibly romantic,"¹⁵ suggests Irving Howe) and a certain epic grandeur attaches to the tragic recognition which, for example, attends Carraway's closing thoughts in The Great Gatsby:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving flow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes - a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must

have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. 16

Even his subsequent thoughts on Gatsby himself, "of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock," serve to heighten the awareness of a dimension of hope tragically denied modern man. The sheer vulgarity of Gatsby's efforts, the meretricious nature of the object of his wonder, intensifies our understanding of the universality, inevitability, of human disillusionment and prompts a recognition of that element of romantic yearning intrinsic to human aspiration. As Stan Smith has said:

Until the Second World War American literature remained essentially high-toned, unselfconsciously affirming certain norms of behaviour, of courage, persistence, stoicism, which were felt to be integral to the American experience. The requirement for writing the "Great American novel" was precisely this seriousness, this firmness of moral or political purpose. The enormous power and size of the United States required a style equally epic and intense. 17

To a certain extent the very epic intensity of pre-war American fiction gave it a somewhat parochial look in comparison with its European counterpart. Insulated by size, independence and physical isolation, unsavaged by modern warfare, with great areas as yet unsullied by industrial despoliation, the USA and its native writers were slow to take up the Prufrock motif of modern man ("I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,")¹⁸ were slow to digest the full implications of Eliot's description of "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."¹⁹ Such, however, can hardly be said to have been the case in the post-war years during which time there has been an accelerated acceptance of this line of argument, bringing with it a radical and downward reassessment of human significance.

Thus the capacity for tragic utterance, as demonstrated in The Great Gatsby, the sense of shock displayed at the apparent disparity between aspiration and actuality is almost totally absent from American fiction post-war. If it has not disappeared altogether, then it has at least diminished appreciably and to the extent that it now seems faintly ridiculous, utterly inappropriate, to find in a post-war novel the almost sentimental, lyrical opulence which attends Nelson Algren's The Man With The Golden Arm (written in 1946). Changing literary perceptions and altered expectations decree that, far from achieving a tragic elevation of his characters through the poetic resonances of the prose, Algren's deliberate rhythmic repetitions and the forcedly rhetorical qualities of the novel undermine those characters' credibility, remove them from the parameters of present-day reality.

To a very great extent, post-war American fiction has offered not a heroic or tragic but a pathetic vision of humanity. A vision denying dignity and aspiration by emphasizing the humiliating futility at the heart of contemporary experience. Increasingly, the tone of post-war American fiction confirms the opinion of the English novelist B.S. Johnson who argued that modern literature, like modern life, should be nasty, brutish and short. A number of elements have contributed to this markedly deflated vision of human significance and aspiration. At the risk of appearing axiomatic, The Holocaust, Hiroshima, the threat from nuclear war and the Neutron Bomb, growing economic disparity between the northern and southern hemispheres, even the failure of the visionary radicalism of the 1960s, have all, in their different ways, contributed to an undermining of belief in the innate beneficence of humanity.

In no small part the widespread abandonment of traditional religion and religious values has contributed to this sea change

in opinion. A poll, conducted in 1946 amongst college graduates, showed that whilst an enormous number expressed a need for some form of religious belief to give them a focus in life only a small minority of those questioned felt that their religion provided them with such support.²⁰ The conviction that death is absolute annihilation has forced a re-evaluation of aims and values in the formerly Christian West and the manifest failure of either political doctrine or the social sciences to fill the gap previously occupied by religion has had a profound effect on the individual's attitude to his social existence.

Increasingly, it seems man is ceasing to operate as a social animal, incapable of making connections between himself and others. With no sense of religious continuity modern man has also experienced a decline in his sense of his antecedents and descendents. He does not act in a manner influenced by his ancestors or with reference to the needs of the succeeding generations. After all, with only one life to live, priority must be given to the present -- to its demands and pleasures -- leaving the past and the future effectively to their own devices. Furthermore the debasement of the original Puritan work ethic has served to intensify a selfish point of view in the individual with regard to his social dealings. In The Culture of Narcissism Christopher Lasch identifies a decline in the role of the work ethic from Puritan times, when industriousness was clearly intended to serve both social and moral needs, up to the present day when success is seen as an end in itself.²¹ This view has tended to promote competition to an intolerable, unhealthily aggressive, level in which it is clearly intended to defeat and debase, rather than benefit, the rest of the community.

At the same time as he has sought to become aggressively free of society, American and, to an extent, western European man has

been plagued by a growing sense of his social and political impotence. The continued growth of corporations has stifled the opportunities for individual achievement in the business and commercial sphere -- laying the rags to riches myths to rest -- whilst the increasingly technical nature of industry has caused fragmentation and specialization in work patterns so that jobs have tended to become meaningless in relation to the overall scheme of production. Thus, the theme of modern life is of the worker as cog or component part, infinitely replaceable and totally lacking in individual qualities. This sense of non-identity has been equally promoted by the growth of bureaucratic systems of government, the growth of computerization and the general decline in personal contact even on the level of the replacement of the local shop by supermarkets. Writing about this very real decline in the individual's self-regard and significance Christopher Lasch observes that there has been a "reduction of work to routines imperfectly understood by the worker and controlled by the capitalist. Similarly the expansion of welfare services presupposed the reduction of the citizen to a consumer of expertise."²² It is one of Lasch's main arguments that 'welfare liberalism' has succeeded in emasculating its subjects by freeing them from any sense of responsibility by pronouncing them unfit to run their own lives. This 'consumption of expertise' exists not only at the level of the state welfare and judiciary where "Therapy legitimates deviance as sickness..."²³ and tends "to promote dependence as a way of life,"²⁴ but also in every department of American life. Accordingly, a man is not healthy unless his doctor has so pronounced him or sane until his analyst has helped him 'make adjustments' to the pressures of living. In this way, at a time of increasing social aggression and isolation, the individual is being made increasingly dependent on society.

Finally there has been a collapse of the individual's belief in the utility of the democratic process. A sense of frustration over the limited influence of a single vote, of the impossibility of having a voice in public debate, together with a sense of helplessness in plotting the nation's course as it lurches through crises such as the Cuban missile confrontation in 1962, The Vietnam War or The Iranian Hostages has encouraged many to withdraw from any consideration of politics and political matters either in bemusement or despair. As the pressure to surrender the sense or pretense of individual autonomy has increased so has the citizen been faced with evidence of man's utter unworthiness, the seeming facility and enthusiasm the race displays for destruction. An era which began by demonstrating how thin a veneer of civilized conduct overlay an apparently endless capacity for inflicting suffering and death on fellow beings (in the form of the Nazi death camps and Hiroshima) has continued with periodic reminders like napalm and the neutron bomb of the variety and savagery of weaponry under scientific guidance. Clearly, in the modern era, progress, so long the hallmark of American success, is not what it used to be.

During such a period of social flux and upheaval art and literature could hardly stay aloof or remain unaffected. They have had to respond to the challenge of the age and post-war American fiction, in particular, has forcefully expressed the difficulties felt at a more general level by society at large. Arguably, a society which seems to lack the human dimension or any sense of moral purpose is going to produce art which seems to rejoice in its own impenetrability, which secretes or refuses to yield meaning.

It is, then, as a response to a rapidly changing society that the "sea change" in American literature must be seen. It is a change identified by, among others, Stan Smith who asserted that

just as the United States assumed a role consonant with [its] heroic vision, its new writers ... opted... for a comic mode that ranged from zany exuberance to the dark and subversive mood that soon became classified as "black humour". Everywhere, the tragic and heroic were out of fashion. The very concept of the self forged by the American experience was taken to pieces and reassembled.... The heroic ego which pushed the Frontier across the Pacific, which went on to make the world "safe for democracy", undergoes a prolonged adolescent identity-crisis in the post-war novel. No longer able to take its own pretensions seriously, it lapses into a self-loathing and complementary narcissism by turns maudlin, farcical and obscene. 25

Clearly such a crisis is, in no small measure, a response to a waning sense of purpose (the moral purpose which previously informed the American enterprise). However, it is more than just this -- just such a waning sense of purpose can be detected in pre-war fiction -- the crisis is also a response to (and an expression of) the waning sense of outrage about this absence of purpose. Post-war American fiction, then, is a fiction characterized by uncertainty, uncertain because it has become involved in attempts to make new assumptions about the nature and character of humanity and human experience. As Saul Bellow observed in 1963, "Undeniably the human being is not what he commonly thought a century ago. The question remains. He is something. What is he?"²⁶

This is no small question: in the face of a question of such magnitude uncertainty is to be expected and symptoms of it abound in the form and content of contemporary fiction. To differing extents mimesis, narrative continuity, narratorial reliability and consistency of point of view have been abandoned as inadequate to the requirements of many of the more challenging contemporary authors who have studiously rejected or subverted pre-war literary norms. Thus, in 1967 John Barth was able to give expression to a widely held belief about the conventional novel's obsolescence when

describing "the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities" leading to what he saw in terms of "a literature of exhaustion."²⁷ What remained was an essentially playful, parodic and reflexive mode of literary awareness and something of this self-conscious artificiality has percolated throughout American fiction in the years since 1945. Even a writer as apparently conservative as John Cheever has, in one very significant sense, eschewed the narrow demands of realism in his stories, preferring not to locate them in historical time while repeatedly stressing his work's essential fictionality.²⁸

At the same time, the literature of the period can be seen in terms of an effort (or series of efforts) to retrench and redefine less adventurously our concept of humanity and human aspiration. Thus Absurdist literature, Black Comedy and the experimental ideas behind the anti-novel may be regarded as responses to certain anti-human elements abroad in society. Such a retrenchment does not of itself bespeak despair or pessimism, as John Barth observed with regard to the literature of exhaustion,²⁹ and indeed a novelist like Kurt Vonnegut is very much involved in the celebration of essential human qualities such as kindness and brotherhood and his writing can be viewed as an attempt to locate a system within which they can still function. As Josephine Hendin has suggested

Postwar experimental fiction may be seen as a search for ways to deal with the violence, brevity, and rigidity of life. It carries to great extremes the themes of combativeness, fragmentariness, coolness, and meaninglessness that are the marks of modern fiction. It may originate in the modernist sense of life as problematic, but unlike the great experimental fiction of the 1920s, it does not lament the brokenness of experience as a sign of the decline of Western civilization. Instead it offers an acceptance of dislocation as a major part of life and perhaps a hope that the displacement of traditional ideals might permit new ways of dealing with the human situation.

Certainly part of the post-war literary mode has been a rejection or evasion of anything as intense as despair in favour of an uneasy jokiness. However it is arguable that this, in its attempts at concealment, has only succeeded in displaying a great sense of disappointment, a disappointment no less profound for being orchestrated in a minor key.

The tenor of this movement from despair to disappointment is captured by Irving Howe's description of the difference between writers of the generation of Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann and that of their literary successors. Howe argues that "the angel with whom Kafka wrestles heroically and without letup is the angel of nothingness," and that Thomas Mann was dogged by "a demon of nihilism trailing both himself and his surrogate figures from novel to novel." However:

As for those who follow these masters, they seem to have relaxed in the death-struggle with the shapeless demon and some, among the more fashionable of the moment, even strike a pleasant truce with him. But the power of example remains a great one and if a writer like Norman Mailer does not choose to wrestle with the angel Kafka encountered, there are moments when he is prepared to challenge it to a bit of amiable hand-wrestling. 31

Inarguably these figures, in the literary landscape shaped by modernism, share the same fears and concerns. The same terrors, conjured up by a perceived absence of purpose to life, motivate the generation of Mailer just as they did that of Kafka:

Nihilism lies at the center of all that we mean by modernist literature, both as subject and symptom, a demon overcome and a demon victorious. For the terror which haunts the modern mind is that of a meaningless and eternal death. The death of the gods would not trouble us if we, in discovering that they have died, did not have to die alongside them.

The source of the motivation is the same: what has altered is the response to that source and the way of expressing that response.

It is clear, then, that American fiction since World War Two shares (inherits) something of the concerns of pre-war literature, even as it struggles to come to terms with a world rapidly moving beyond those concerns. Such a bifurcation has produced a peculiarly agitated and restive literature which Tony Tanner, in his incisive study City Of Words, depicts in two words: flight and entropy. In this situation of "binary opposition," Tanner argues, can be discovered the paradox of contemporary fiction: "We may say that a central concern for the hero of many recent American novels is this: can he find a freedom which is not a jelly, and can he establish an identity which is not a prison?"³³ With this idea as his touchstone, Tanner ranges with impressive unity of argument from the frantic efforts to outrun or outwit a malign fate recorded in the fiction of Kurt Vonnegut to the entropic lexical playfulness which characterizes Barth's 'literature of exhaustion.'

Moreover, Tanner makes apparent the fact that the contemporary preponderance of novels of flight is a response to the increasing difficulty of asserting the self, a way of rescuing it from a society almost invariably depicted

as a metamorphosing range of generalized hostilities. The tendency is to posit society as a vast hostile mass, with specific threatening things and people looming up into brief focus without contributing to an emerging model of the constitution of American society. Society is regarded almost without exception as unequivocally malevolent to the self. All control is regarded as bad control; any authority is immediately interpreted as a part of a malign authoritarianism stalking through the land seeking what further individual freedoms it may devour.

34

In this situation, given the pressures of mass society, the only solution is revolt, the only way to define the self is by the celebration of it through rebellion and a refusal to conform: a

state of affairs as true for Kesey's MacMurphy and Mailer's Rojack as it is for Ishmael Reed's Loop Garoo Kid or Robert Stone's Rheinhardt, Hicks or Tabor. Indeed what binds together these, and a multitude of other, characters is an infatuation with the irrational act, the conviction that only in the perverse or anti-social gesture lies true self-definition.

What emerges from the plethora of literary fiction produced in the USA over the last forty years is the almost universal recognition that the American novelist is confronted by new difficulties, a terrain he must traverse which is both difficult and unexplored. In the course of this he must also answer a host of new questions about the human condition and about the relevance of the American Dream to the improvement of that condition.³⁵ Indeed, the very diversity of the fiction in this period makes it difficult fully to represent the responses and strategies employed by fabulists, fictionalists, novelists and story writers in their efforts to tell the artistic truth about the way we live now. Inevitably, authors with pressing claims for inclusion have had to be excluded, among them John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut and, in particular, Robert Stone. Furthermore, it could be said that the trio I have chosen to examine (Burroughs, Cheever and Updike) errs somewhat on the side of tradition, ignoring many of the exciting developments and experiments in modern (and post-modern) writing.³⁶

Against such charges I would argue that to have included, say, Kurt Vonnegut at the expense of John Updike would have slewed the focus of the thesis too far toward experiment: would have suggested a qualitative pre-eminence of the experimentalists which clearly does not exist. Despite claims to the contrary by critics like Jerome Klinkowitz,³⁷ David Lodge's assertion that "many of the most talented post-war novelists -- John Updike, Saul Bellow,

Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth, for example -- have worked, for the most part, within the conventions of realistic fiction,"³⁸ continues to hold true and this fact ensures that realistic fiction continues to be relevant.

The three writers who follow, therefore, seem to offer the best possible representation of American literary trends in the post-war era. William Burroughs has been, if nothing else, controversial, pushing back the barriers of acceptability with regard to both form and content. Indeed, he takes the principle of self-definition through rebellion and the image of the individual in flight from an implacably hostile society as far as either can reasonably go and his ideas, however bizarre, have always contained sufficient conviction to remain challenging.

John Cheever's work, on the other hand, seems almost archetypally conservative with its evident desire to affirm and celebrate an innate American goodness. Of all the post-war writers it was Cheever who most convincingly reached back to older American values without submitting to sentimentalization or Norman Rockwell-style oversimplification. Nonetheless, at the same time Cheever clearly recognized the distressingly powerful undertow of contemporary experience and subtly depicted the way in which it had come to shape the lives of middle America. More than anyone else Cheever achieved an artistic expression of the society of "affluence and anxiety,"³⁹ and more than any other writer discussed here his reputation deserves an upward revaluation.

John Updike operates somewhere in between Cheever and Burroughs (though he is clearly closer in spirit and style to Cheever, whom he strongly echoes in, for example, The Witches Of Eastwick). Updike, more than Cheever, depicts the self besieged by hostile social forces and yet he is by no means a potential revolutionary in the Burroughs mode. More than either he is a celebrant of

the modern world and its artefacts, capable of rhapsodizing about the consumer trappings of American society (cars, Burger bars and kitchen implements) and yet, more explicitly than any other post-war novelist, he has explored the field of moral possibilities in an age of declining religiosity. Thus, though he celebrates life's sensual possibilities, he is simultaneously aware that there are other facets of life which undercut the capacity for celebration and that the tininess of the human individual enfeebls the scope and strength of human joy.

Nonetheless, in Updike's work (as in Cheever's) there is an undoubted concern to establish what remains of the human spirit, a will to seek out what, in American man, can still be affirmed. In this respect, their work stands in marked contrast to that of William Burroughs whose most approving pronouncement on the USA has been a--presumably-- ironic endorsement of the nation's propensity for mayhem and violence.⁴⁰ The extent to which either of these viewpoints is tenable is at the heart of the discussion which follows.

[John Hippie Thornton, ed., *The Palpit Of The American Revolution* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1930, p. 49)]

A little later Noah Webster, writing of the need for a distinctly American literary voice, argued that

As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard; for the state of our letters is already corrupted, and her language on the decline.

[Noah Webster, *Dissertations On The English Language* (London: 1789, p. 41)]

It is an argument most forcefully put by Ralph Waldo Emerson, proclaiming that 'we have listened too long to the country

NOTES

1. Walter Nicgorski and Ronald Weber, eds., An Almost Chosen People (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1976), p. ix.
2. Spiller, Thorp et al., eds., Literary History of The United States, 3rd. edn. (New York; MacMillan, 1963), p.197.
3. G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures On The Philosophy of History, translated by Sibree (London: George Bell, 1878), p. 90.
4. William Cullen Bryant, Poetical Works, 2 Volumes, ed. Parke Godwin (New York: Appleton and Co., 1883), Vol.1.p.219.
5. Walt Whitman, Complete Verse and Selected Prose, (London: Nonesuch Press, 1938), p. 572.
6. In 1783 Ezra Styles, a president of Yale College, foresaw the day when the manifest magnificence of the infant American nation would produce art commensurate to its importance. He spoke of a time when

all the arts may be transplanted from Europe and Asia, and flourish in America with an augmented lustre.... The rough sonorous diction of the English language may here take its Athenian polish, and receive its attic urbanity, as it will probably become the vernacular tongue of more numerous millions than ever yet spoke one language on earth....

[John Wingate Thornton, ed., The Pulpit Of The American Revolution (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), p. 461.]

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[Noah Webster, Dissertations On The English Language(Gainesville, Fla.:Scholars' Facsimiles; 1951), p. 20.]

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muses of Europe."

Selected Writings, eds., Atkinson and MacDowell (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 61.

7. Irving Howe, "The American Voice -- It Begins On A Note of Wonder," New York Times Book Review, July 4, 1976, p. 1..
8. Ibid., p. 1.
9. D. H. Lawrence, Studies In Classic American Literature (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 89.
10. D.E.S. Maxwell, Encyclopaedia Britannica (Macropaedia), 11: 873.
11. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Complete Novels and Selected Tales, ed., Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 590.
12. Herman Melville, White Jacket (New York) Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 150.
13. Mark Twain, The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 400.
14. Wylie Sypher, for instance, has argued that individualism was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century which "created the self and destroyed the self.... It destroyed the self because it held a notion of that self which was not tenable for very long." The problem, Sypher suggests, is that rugged individualism was incompatible with the equally cherished notion of utility.

Loss Of The Self In Modern Literature and Art (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 19.
15. Howe, "It Begins On A Note Of Wonder," p. 2.
16. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 187 - 188.
17. Stan Smith, A Sadly Contracted Hero (Durham: BAAS, 1981), p. 5.
18. T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 16.
19. T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," The Dial LXXV, November, 1923, p. 483.
20. Chester Eisinger, ed., The 1940s: Profile Of A Nation In Crisis (New York: Anchor, 1969), pp. 152 - 163.

21. Christopher Lasch, The Culture Of Narcissism (London:Abacus, 1980).
22. Ibid., p. 378.
23. Ibid., p. 389.
24. Ibid., p. 388.
25. Stan Smith, p. 5.
26. Saul Bellow, "Recent American Fiction," Encounter 21, Nov. 63 p. 29.
27. John Barth, "The Literature Of Exhaustion," Atlantic Monthly August 1967, p. 27.
28. To this end he scrupulously avoided anchoring his works in time or place (as Updike did with Couples and the Kennedy era or Rabbit Redux and the moon landing), frequently pointing this up with the phrase "at the time of which I'm writing," e.g. Bullet Park (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 21. Equally pointedly, Cheever would stress the artifice of the stories themselves by reminding the reader of the contrivance involved. Bullet Park, for instance, begins with the injunction: Paint me a small railroad station then, ten minutes before dark," (p.9), and Oh What A Paradise It Seems is parenthasized by the observation that the book is a story "to be read in bed in an old house on a rainy night" [London : Cape, 1982, pp. 3, 100].
29. The exhaustion of the old forms, with the implication of the death of the conventional novel was, in Barth's words, "by no means necessarily a cause for despair." "The Literature Of Exhaustion," p. 29.
30. Daniel Hoffman, ed., Harvard Guide To Contemporary American Writing (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1979), p. 240.
31. Irving Howe, Decline Of The New (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), pp. 32 - 33.

32. Ibid., p. 33.
33. Tony Tanner, City Of Words (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p. 19.
34. Ibid., pp. 416.
35. This question of relevance is particularly acute in American literature which, as the critic Bernard Bergonzi has observed, "is peculiarly concerned with the Human Condition."
The Situation Of The Novel (London: MacMillan 1970), p. 81.
36. I am acutely aware that the entire selection neglects Black writers, women writers, Southern writers and a number of ethnic groups of growing significance in the US literary canon.
37. See for example Jerome Klinkowitz, Literary Disruptions (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1975), passim.
38. David Lodge, "The Novelist At The Crossroads," Critical Quarterly 11,2 (Summer 1969), p. 132.
39. The origin of this phrase, I believe, lies with the noted historian Carl N. Degler who used it as the title for a history of the USA from 1945 to 1970.
40. During his interview with Daniel Odier in 1969 Burroughs remarked, somewhat ambiguously, that
"I have just returned from America and found that it has changed almost beyond recognition America may well be the hope of the world. It is also the source of such emotional plagues as drug hysteria, racism, Bible -belt morality, Protestant-capitalist ethic, muscular Christianity...."

Daniel Odier, The Job (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969),
p. 71.

CHAPTER THREE"Oh, What A Paradise It Seems":The Reluctant Tragedies of John Cheever

The critical response to John Cheever has been at best a matter of muted acceptance and at worst slightly dismissive. It has been characterized by an air of damnation with faint praise and of minor key. Frequently lumped together with (but after) Marquand, O'Hara and Updike, Cheever has also been used as an example of the virtues and (more often) vices of a typical writer of the New Yorker school. This is to say that, stylistically, he over-wrote, showed too great a concern for (and sympathy with) the middle classes and had nothing to say. He was merely an entertainer.

Most of these beliefs seem to stem from some grim critical determination to force John Cheever into a mould he did not fit: that of the realistic writer and novelist of manners. Only from this standpoint can any sense be made of Richard Rupp's complaint that "Cheever refuses to take modern life seriously,"¹ or Samuel Irving Bellman's claim that "there is a wacky streak in Cheever traceable throughout his work, expressed in surrealistic scenes and simplistic myth-making, and this generally lessens his credibility."² Only if we measure him by the conventions and standards which govern realist fiction, the fiction of objective reportage and social detail, produced by the likes of John O'Hara can we accept that the conclusion to "The Housebreaker Of Shady Hill" is "pat and over-contrived"³ or that in his stories Cheever demonstrated a "rather easy glide to a too simple and unearned affirmation."⁴

It is not, however, against such standards that Cheever should be examined and it is partly my purpose in what follows to describe a more appropriate context in which his work may be considered; a context in which his considerable talents are more readily

demonstrable and one which helps to reveal him as an intensely serious and frequently trenchant critic of his times. It is in this respect that the view of Cheever as a flawed realist, a social critic of the middle-class undermined by a passion for magic and unwonted lyricism is most damaging and least helpful. It has also been the most pervasive criticism since, as early as the nineteen thirties, Cheever's work was being attacked for its failure to get to grips with the social realities of the time.

In a sense, though, Cheever never was a realistic novelist and story writer. He possessed a sure instinct for and understanding of the suburban middle class and was capable of providing what Julian Barnes has called "the nap of middle class life... precisely rendered,"⁵ but, beyond that, his intentions and interests diverted from those of his contemporaries like O'Hara or Updike. Even when handling overtly 'social' material such as the intense drudgery of the suburban woman in "The Season Of Divorce" Cheever declined to focus directly upon the facts of domestic enslavement as part of a critique of the enforcing society, choosing rather to render the spirit of the housewife's despair as a metaphor for a larger, perhaps global, human disappointment and sense of futility. Indeed it is fair to say that Cheever had very little use or affection for the kind of specificity which marks much of the writing of those with whom he is most closely identified and compared. In a letter to Frederick Bracher Cheever wrote of how

I have carefully avoided dates in order to give my characters freedom to pursue their emotional lives without the interruptions of history.... A sense of time that revolves around the sinking of ships and declarations of war seems to me a sense of time debased. We live at deeper levels than these and fiction should make this clear. 6

In fact Cheever's purpose in providing such artefacts and items as

constitute social reality in his work was contrary to, at least different from, the purpose such dense social specification usually serves. "What I've always wanted of verisimilitude is probability," he told Annette Grant, "this table seems real, the fruit basket belonged to my grandmother, but a madwoman could come in the door any moment."⁷ The purpose was not so much to establish a sense of familiarity, through mimetic intimacy, as to confound the sense of unruffled calm engendered by that very familiarity. Thus "if [the reader] truly believes he is standing on a rug you can pull it from under him."⁸

Beyond such intimations of Cheever's limited enthusiasm for the overtly realistic mode there is a clear case to be made for revising the accepted opinion of his place within the canon of American fiction in favour of a sense of Cheever as an experimenter, searching for stylistic devices to take his writing beyond what he apparently regarded as the limiting confines of traditional narrative fiction with its strict adherence to point of view, temporal linearity of narrative and a largely unintrusive narrator. This experimental aspect of Cheever's work has been considerably underplayed despite Walter Clemons' perceptive observation that "long before Donald Barthelme, John Barth and Thomas Pynchon began tinkering with narrative conventions, Cheever had unobtrusively disrupted the expected shapes of fiction."⁹ In fact Cheever has been almost totally ignored (presumably as too conservative) by those who profess an interest in work which reaches beyond the confines of the traditional 'realist' novel and yet one of the most striking aspects of reading the Collected Stories is witnessing Cheever's increasing willingness to experiment with form and narrative structure.

There was about Cheever's writing a certain self-conscious literariness which extended beyond the referential use of Keats or

the Old Testament into a more general willingness to admit and emphasize the 'createdness' of his fictions. Thus he was never afraid to utilize contrivance (of plot or narrative) to underline his point -- however incongruous or unlikely it might appear. Typically this emphasis came in the form of an impassioned and lyric outburst from the narrator such as closes the early story "Goodbye My Brother" or opens "Lowboy":

Oh I hate small men and I will write about them no more but in passing I would like to say that's what my brother Richard is: small. He has small hands, small feet, a small waist, small children, a small wife, and when he comes to our cocktail parties he sits in a small chair. If you pick up a book of his, you will find his name, "Richard Norton," on the flyleaf in his very small handwriting. He emanates, in my opinion, a disgusting aura of smallness. He is also spoiled, and when you go to his house you eat his food from his china with his silver, and if you observe his capricious and vulgar house rules you may be lucky enough to get some of his brandy....10

In this case the portentous "Oh", the strength of the word "hate" and the excessive literary formality of the words "I will write about them no more" gives way to a more colloquial and conversational approach with its potentially comic use of repetition as the general statement gives way to the particular complaint and a certain diminution of theme occurs. What begins as a portentous statement on human potential subsides into an irritable litany of an individual's shortcomings. For instance the word 'small' with its connotations of poverty of aspiration, scope and moral stature gives way to precise denotation of physical size. And yet the sense of those opening words as a complaint against some unspoken human paucity is never abandoned in the story and connects the apparent pettiness of the spoken complaint to a greater and more significant observation about human nature. In a similar way Cheever closed one of "Three Stories", a vignette in which two apparent strangers sit together on a plane, she rejecting his conversational blandishments

with varying degrees of open hostility, with the following paragraph:

But look, look. Why does he point out her bag to the porter and why, when they both have their bags, does he follow her out to the cab stand, where he bargains with a driver for the trip into Rome? Why does he join her in the cab? Is he the undiscourageable masher that she dreaded? No, no. He is her husband, she is his wife, the mother of his children, and a woman he has worshipped passionately for nearly thirty years. 11

The narrator's impassioned intrusion confounds the cold, matter-of-fact restraint of what has gone before. Only at this point is there any hint of despair or disaster in their lives. The metaphorical rug of which Cheever spoke in the Grant interview has been pulled from under the reader and a point has been made about the powerful and irrational element (we do not discover why they are acting in this manner) underlying the apparently calm surface of the lives of ordinary people.

Such outbursts and observations are symptomatic of the way in which Cheever was attempting to describe an area of human concern and experience which he felt moved beyond and could not be defined within the narrowly real world of objective reportage. Increasingly, Cheever's fiction demonstrated a desire to escape the confines of depicting the physically actual and the demands of traditionally rendered fiction. In the introduction to one of his last, uncollected stories Cheever explained the necessity for such violations:

One of the beauties of the craft of fiction is the element of risk. One escalates a falsehood of great magnitude, hoping that the reader will not feel gulled. In discourse, there is no such risk. But the obsolescence of linear narrative, in a world distinguished by its curvatures, sometimes forces one into discourse. We can all write a storm at sea and that chase through a mountain pass (at dusk), but there is, it seems to me some inner form that transcends suspense and the furniture of narrative. 12

In order to achieve this move he used a number of literary

strategies which took him into the realm of fictive experiment. Notably, as has already been seen he used the narrator in a way which confounded the conventions of prose fiction in the twentieth century. Cheever's narrators move in and out of his stories, making observations and supplying information in a selfconscious manner (as in the example above from "Three Stories"), alternately drawing in and distancing the reader and making judgements on the characters:

One reason you always saw the Beers at cocktail parties and railroad stations was that they were always looking for somebody. They weren't looking for somebody like you or me -- they were looking for the Marchioness of Bath -- but any port in a storm. The way they used to come in to a party and stare around them is understandable -- we all do it -- but the way they used to peer at their fellow travellers on a station platform was something else. 13

Here the intention is to enjoin the reader in a community of spirit and experience, to prepare him to share the narrator's opinion of the Beers. In a similar way, in "Artemis, the Honest Well Digger," the narrational aside contained the remark that "he had been 'down on' (his vocabulary) Maria many times"¹⁴ serves to impress upon the reader the nature of the story (it is not 'true' in that it is organized and related by one who holds opinions and biases) and reveals something of the nature both of Artemis and the narrator.

Increasingly Cheever used such an intrusive narrator -- a man not in any way related to the action or development of the story -- to point up the way in which fiction is organized. Thus, in "The Children," in order to learn more about a character's circumstances, when "he goes out onto the terrace . . . we follow him and speak to him there,"¹⁵ calling him by name. Again, in attempting to further persuade the reader about the Beers, another example of their behaviour is arranged for us: "So the

summer and the sea will be the setting for their last appearance -- their last appearance for our purposes here, at any rate,"¹⁶ (my italics). Hand in hand with this deliberate emphasis on the role of the narrator in controlling and governing the reader's experience of the story went an (at least partial) abandonment of cohesive narrative and temporal linearity. By switching back and forth through time and having different characters take up the story "The Day The Pig Fell Into The Well" becomes a multi-layered vision of a family in which the events referred to in the title are a more or less incidental point around which the material can be organized. Cheever used such an arrangement, of unrelated vignettes or unconnected events, on a number of occasions, sometimes in an attempt to suggest a community of purpose, on other occasions in order to suggest the unanimity or human despair or experience, as in "Three Stories" or "The Leaves, The Lion - Fish and The Bear," but also, as with "The President of the Argentine," in a way which argues the impenetrability of human experience. However used, this tendency in Cheever's fiction, to depict and define the world in terms of discontinuous images, serves further to confute the accepted vision of Cheever as a conventionally realist literary practitioner.

One interesting aspect of Cheever's fiction is the manner in which this 'disruptive' approach to narrative structure echoed an increasingly chaotic and pessimistic outlook on the world, as if the "determination to trace some moral chain of being,"¹⁷ which he claimed as a constant factor in his artistic efforts had begun to fail. Of course the tendency to depict humanity in terms of discouragement, moral weakness and failure was present in the earlier work as was the use of magic or madness to reveal hidden truths about the human condition: for example both are powerfully present in "The Enormous Radio." However, as Joan Didion has

observed, a "note of exile and estrangement has always been present in Cheever's fiction, from the early stories on. But in the beginning Cheever's characters appeared to be exiled merely by their own errors or passions or foolishness...."¹⁸ The later fiction, by contrast, seemed to suggest a more fundamental source for the feeling of estrangement. So, just as St. Botolphs, with its "shine of decorum that was not hypocrisy but a guise or mode of hope,"¹⁹ gave way to the valueless and anonymous communities of Shady Hill, Gory Brook and Bullet Park; just as Cheever apparently relinquished his belief in "the inestimable greatness of the race" in favour of increasingly negative depictions of human activity, so his writing, by its growing use of disruptive forms, enacted the incoherence and futility which marked the lives of his characters.

Characteristic of this enactment is the story "The President Of The Argentine" which, somewhat pointedly, declares itself in the opening paragraph:

Coldness falls from the air, she thought, as she carried the white roses up the stairs to the paneled library. That, or: How like sandpipers were the children on the beach, she thought, as she stood by the rusty screen door of their rented house on Nantucket. Zap. Blam. Pow. Here endeth my stab at yesterday's fiction. No one's been reading it for forty years. It went out with easel painting, and by easel painting one means the sort of painting that used to be displayed on easels. Two curates playing checkers by a cockatoo's roost. Painting has cast off its frames, and yet one deeply misses these massive and golden celebrations -- fruit and angels -- for their element of ultimate risk. By framing a painting the artist, of course, declared it to be a distillate of his deepest feelings about love and death. By junking the frame he destroyed the risk of a declaration. He may, as he will claim, have opened doors, porticos, gates, and mountain passes onto an unframed infinity of comprehension; or he may merely have displayed his abysmal lack of vitality. The woman climbing the stairs with her white roses is in a sense a frame, a declaration, and my account of putting a hat on a statue is frameless and may indeed not deserve a frame at all. 20

Thus the story opens on a note of frustration, rejection and loss, chronicling not only the brutalizing and trivializing of experience in the present day but also its incoherence and, crucially, a sense of divorce from the past. This divorce plays a large part in Cheever's writing and in this case is highlighted both by the violent 'junking' of the forms of 'yesterday's fiction' and by the very irrelevance of the reminiscences which make up much of the narrator's tale. Unlike Leander Wapshot's journal (with its tone of joyful morality) or "the impression of unusual permanence"²¹ conveyed by St. Botolph's, these fragments hold no value and proffer no sense of order: they in no way throw light on the events on Commonwealth Avenue which (the narrator is suggesting) are themselves so trivial and futile as to be undeserving of the 'frame' of storytelling. Further, "The President Of The Argentine," closes on a note of weariness and defeat. Having rejected the forms of "yesterday's fiction" because of their constraining artificiality (the painting and its frame), the narrator chooses to render the closing paragraph in terms of another artificial narrative form -- the film:

And so we will end as the movies do when, having exhausted the kiss, the walk-off, the reconciliation, and the boundlessness of faith, hope, and charity, they resort to a downward or falling crawl title giving the facts in the case - usually to the fading music of police sirens. The girl's real name is Alice-Mae Plumber and she has flunked out of embalming school and is afraid to tell her parents. The man in the middy blouse is named Lemuel Howe and he will be arrested three days later for possession of dangerous drugs and sentenced to five years in the Suffolk County Jail. The man who wanted to put his hat on the statue of the President is I. 22

The narrator seems to be articulating a sense of hopelessness and cultural impotence, the "downward or falling crawl title" expressing a failure of imagination as well as of hope, and the

story becomes an expression, both in form and content, of exhaustion and surrender.

In this way "The President of the Argentine" conforms wholly to, indeed encapsulates, an emerging pattern in Cheever's fiction. This pattern takes the form of an expression of regret and of a reluctant recognition of the tragic nature of human experience linked to a perception of the failure, in the modern world, of what might best be described as human values. Indeed the "moral chain of being" to which Cheever referred in his introduction to the collected Stories may well be seen in these same terms and there is no doubt that John Cheever, throughout his fiction, argued against man's abandonment of such values. Thus, in The Wapshot Scandal, an old man rails against the amoral values of the technological age as represented by Dr. Cameron by intimating that they lack the human dimension: "...I find in your thinking some narrowness, some unwillingness, I should say, to acknowledge those simple ties that bind us to one another and to the gardens of the earth.... We possess Promethean powers but don't we lack the awe, the humanity, that primitive man brought to the sacred fire?"²³ Similarly Mallory, in "The Geometry Of Love," is driven to try and work out his emotional problems by arithmetic formulae because he lacks the sustaining knowledge of human value systems: "He might not, had he possessed any philosophy or religion, have needed geometry, but the religious observations in his neighborhood seemed to him boring and threadbare and he had no disposition for philosophy."²⁴

In fact, as the fiction attests, Cheever brought a strong moral vision to his writing, a point that is underlined by the fable-like qualities of his work. For example, the transformation of Johnny Hake at the conclusion of "The Housebreaker Of Shady Hill" (a conclusion elsewhere described as "pat and over - contrived") works

precisely because of the fabulous terms of moral instruction in which it is rendered. However, even in those works like "The Jewels of The Cabots" in which there is no clear moral tone a powerful use of understated irony conveys the need, on the reader's part, for the exercising of moral judgement. Thus, even though the narrator could be to some extent unreliable (and Cheever demanded that the reader be alive to the subtlest of hints and promptings on that score) and the society he depicted frequently seemed beyond the reach of conventional moral values, the fictions themselves never suffered from the amorality which all too frequently afflicted the characters. Indeed John Cheever, in his understatedly ironic way, brought a rigorously humanistic code to his writing and became one of the most perceptive chroniclers of the vanishing moral dimension in post-war American life.

In no small measure this loss of a moral dimension and the attendant enfeeblement of the social fabric was, in Cheever's writing, accompanied by the collapse of the old patrician order of New England. It was a world with which Cheever clearly felt a certain unease; a number of his stories reflect a sense of distress at the excesses of so class-bound a society with its easy assumptions of privilege and superiority. Nonetheless he apparently remained convinced of the health, vigour and moral order which this same class had been able to pass on to the wider society and saw the passing of moral certitude as being mirrored in and perhaps connected to the decline of certain social rigidities. Certainly, his work repeatedly displayed these ideas, as in the Wapshot Scandal where Melissa, in marked contrast to old Honora Wapshot, is unable to bear her part in the scandals precisely because she has none of the social certitudes and traditions of St. Botolphs on which to draw. This difference, essentially one of social class

and tradition, is most clearly stated by Dr. Bronson in Bullet Park. Attempting to diagnose Tony Nailles' loss of appetite for life, the psychiatrist tells the boy's mother:

"There is a tendency, in your income group to substitute possessions for moral and spiritual norms. A strict sense of good and evil, even if it is mistaken, is better than none."²⁵

The inference can clearly be drawn: there has been a breakdown in the social fabric attendant on the move from community to commutertown, a breakdown with serious implications for the moral dimensions of society. This belief stayed with John Cheever to the end of his literary career. As late as his last published work, Oh What A Paradise It Seems, the narrator, Lemuel Sears, was able most precisely to verbalize his dissatisfaction with modern life by itemizing what had been lost from the world of his youth:

The traditional forces of selection -- the clubs, the social register and the professional lists -- were all obsolete, he knew, but some traces or hints of caste seemed necessary to him for the comprehension and enjoyment of the world. These people seemed not only to belong to no organized society, they seemed to confound any such possibility. 26

The tone is familiar -- rational, reasonable and understanding, the narrator is clearly a man of liberal virtues -- but equally familiar is the sense of regret at what has been lost to the world and that, overwhelmingly, is a sense of purpose and an order amenable to human understanding. For this reason it would be ungenerous and unjust to depict Cheever in terms of a social reactionary obsessed with the decline of a social hierarchy. He was capable, as I have suggested, of attacking the excesses of such a hierarchy and of parodying (albeit very gently) its concerns, as in "Marito in Citta" where Estabrook, forced to choose between wife and mistress, eventually chooses his wife because his mistress "wouldn't know how to sail. She would get tangled upon the

mainsheet, vomit to windward and pass out in the cabin once they were past the point. She wouldn't know how to play tennis. Why, she wouldn't even know how to ski!"²⁷ It is perhaps more useful to regard Cheever's concern with lost social certainties as symptomatic of a wider, more significant loss, as part of a deeper regret at the contemporary divorce from and disregard for the past.

This disregard was evident everywhere in Cheever's writing; characterized as much by the relationships between parents and children as by the near total disregard for national heritage and history. The lack of connection between parents and children, a lack of commitment almost, repeatedly surfaced in Cheever's short stories (for instance in "The Sorrows Of Gin" and "The Ocean") but the tone of poignant loss and dislocation was perhaps best evoked by the fate of the Brewsters in The Wapshot Chronicle:

Mr. Brewster was an invalid and Mrs. Brewster supported her husband and had sent her two sons through college with the money she made as a baker. Her sons had done well but now one of them lived in San Francisco and the other in Detroit and they never came home. They wrote her saying that they planned to come home for Christmas or Easter -- that the first trip they made would be the trip to St. Botolphs -- but they went to Yosemite National Park, they went to Mexico City, they even went to Paris, but they never, never came home. 28

Above all, it is a loss of values that is represented in such family breakdown. The centrality and vitality of the past to Cheever's sense of civilization may be gauged by Lorenzo Wapshot's hope that "By a retrospective view of the past may I find wisdom to govern and improve the future more profitably."²⁹ This sense is reinforced by Cheever's scathing summary of Francis Weed in "The Country Husband": "...his memory was something like his appendix -- a vestigial repository. It was not his limitation at all to be unable to escape the past; it was perhaps his limitation that he had escaped it so successfully."³⁰ St. Botolphs possessed

such a security of values, built on its respect for the past and its traditions, to the extent that "in a world of much change the green at St. Botolphs conveyed an impression of unusual permanence."³¹

In this context the abandonment of St. Botolphs, the admission that "I will never come back, and if I do there will be nothing left... there will really be nothing at all,"³² was crucial to Cheever's social vision and his understanding of the (declining) significance of the past for the present. The replacement of St. Botolphs with Talifer, Bullet Park and Shady Hill as fictional locales was in Cheever's eyes at one with the growth of bland, ugly and vulgar artefacts in modern society. Frequently his narrators voiced anger at their impotence in the face of what can only be described as society's slide into nightmare. There seems, in the words of the narrator of "The Angel Of The Bridge", to be "an emergence of brutality and chaos."³³ In this case the narrator develops a sudden and totally irrational fear of crossing bridges, a fear which, he comes to suspect, is "an expression of my clumsily concealed horror of what is becoming of the world." He amplifies this remark in the following way:

"...I hate freeways and Buffalo Burgers. Expatriated palm trees and monotonous housing developments depress me. The continuous music on special-fare trains exacerbates my feelings. I detest the destruction of familiar landmarks, I am deeply troubled by the misery and drunkenness I find among my friends, I abhor the dishonest practices I see. And it was at the highest point in the arc of a bridge that I became aware suddenly of the depth and bitterness of my feelings about modern life, and of the profoundness of my yearning for a more vivid, simple, and peaceable world." ³⁴

In Oh What A Paradise It Seems the same connection is made between an apparent contemporary delight in ugly vulgarity and a failure to appreciate the past in a more pointed way:

...the ruined villages were for Sears a melancholy spectacle, as if a truly adventurous people had made a wrong turning and stumbled into a gypsy culture. Here were the most fleeting commitments and the most massive household gods. Beside a porn drive-in movie were two furniture stores whose items needed the strength of two or three men to be moved. He thought it a landscape, a people -- and he counted himself among them -- who had lost the sense of a harvest. 35

This mixture of anger and disappointment is apparent throughout Cheever's work: it forms a sustained theme in The Wapshot Chronicle and even by this relatively early stage, the strength and vigour of society is in palpable decline; already there are "more ships in bottles than on the water..."³⁶ and this change is linked to a certain domestication of society, a certain tameness which reveals itself to Moses Wapshot in the realization of "how securely conquered that country [New England] was by his good mother and her kind -- the iron women in their summer dresses."³⁷ These signs of the passing of a more heroic, essentially masculine, age are underlined by Sarah's action in taking the "Topaze" out of service, thereby depriving Leander of his usefulness. Indeed, it had only remained in service at Honora's whim and served merely to bolster Leander's illusion of having a role to play, of his usefulness.

From sailing ship to gift "shoppe": the trivialization and debasement of life as an endeavour was frequently female-inspired in Cheever's fiction. Leander's eventual suicide is prompted by the encroachment of women on perceived male territory:

He undressed behind a dune and was disappointed to find Mrs. Sturgis and Mrs. Gates preparing to have a picnic on the stretch of beach where he wanted to swim and sun himself. He was also disappointed that he should have such black looks for the old ladies who were discussing canned goods and the ingratitude of daughters-in-law while the surf spoke in loud voices of wrecks and voyages and the likeness of things.... 38

Suicide is Leander's response to a world changing faster and further than his capacity or desire to adjust and while it hardly emerged as a theme in Cheever's writing throughout, his work depicted men variously undone by the incomprehensible and (often unintentionally) malign power of women. Thus Moses Wapshot is reduced to alcoholic degeneracy by the strange and disorderly whims of Melissa; Ezekiel Farragut is exposed to the inexplicable hostility of his wife; Charlie Mallory (in "The Geometry Of Love") is pushed into insanity by the demands of his wife; Lemuel Sears takes refuge in a homosexual relationship and the psychiatrist after the break up of his affair with Renee who insists that "you don't... understand the first thing about women...."³⁹ The changing basis of the male/female relationship was used by Cheever as a metaphor for the changing face of society and the growing power of women acted as an analogy for the increasing inability of man to control his own destiny.

As with the matter of social class, it would be wrong to infer misogynist tendencies from Cheever's treatment of women. It is, I think, better understood as an expression of his general and wider dissatisfaction with the taming and trivializing process at the heart of modern civilization. Just as ships become "shoppes" so human excellence is driven out by the pressures of conformity and standardization (as in "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin") and, in "The Sorrows Of Gin" the good, rich land gives nourishment only to the spiritually thin and morally barren suburbanites. Thus Mrs. Henlein, descended from Patroons, expresses these notions of corruption and degeneration in her verbal attack on Mr. Lawton, a representative of the new corporate-rich breed of middle class Americans. "I lived in this neighborhood my whole life. I can remember when it was full of good farming people and there was fish in the rivers. My father had four acres of sweet meadowland

and a name that was known far and wide..."⁴⁰ she says, indicating, in her family's decline, the destruction of the traditions that made sense of their lives and in the change in the land, no longer supporting cattle or fish but, instead, providing a home for the insensitive and conscienceless Lawtons, a pollution both actual and spiritual. The despairing communities of Bullet Park and Shady Hill, composed of people who have lost or never possessed 'a strict sense of good and evil', are mere shadows of older communities like St. Botolphs and, increasingly, the soulless townships like Talifer (in The Wapshot Scandal) are the marks modern society is leaving on America.

This sense of contemporary debasement was mirrored in Cheever's use of language as a vehicle for depicting his disquiet with modern versions of the human condition, echoing the loss of epic intensity and an adventurous dimension to human life in a brutal, crude language stressing abruptness, aggression, and general disrespect for all things human. Through his deployment of this language Cheever sought to demonstrate the way in which the brutal and vulgar and intruded into everyday life, offering language as an indicator of the devaluation of the culture itself. Just as Lemuel Sears detects, in a ruined village, signs of how "a truly adventurous people had made a wrong turning and stumbled into a gypsy culture,"⁴¹ so, in corrupted and desensitized language, the reader can detect signs of our dehumanization and the way in which contemporary insistence on stark brutality as the 'bottom line' of reality has coarsened modern sensibilities.⁴²

Thus, in place of Leander Wapshot's briskly lyrical journal of life in nineteenth century New England, the modern age can only offer advertizing blather about "Buffalo Burgers" or the "Zap Blam. Pow," which accompanies the "junking" of poetic values in "The President Of The Argentine." Instead of the emotive and descriptive language

which attends Sears' outrage at the despoliation of Beasley's Pond all he has left at the end is a semi-literate jargon of non-communication⁴³ whereby he describes a soulless, perhaps even pyrrhic, victory.

The most obvious and sustained example of this linguistic descent comes in Falconer, a book hailed by some as Cheever's entry into the latter half of the twentieth century, presumably because of its frankness of language and a naturalistic concern for bodily functions. Certainly it is far removed from most of Cheever's previous work and at times it almost seems as if the novelist was attempting to render the kind of speech patterns so successfully captured in the plays of David Mamet. However, Cheever's intentions clearly go beyond the faithful representation of American speech and to a great extent the novel depicts the linguistic/spiritual prison as well as the physical prison in which Farragut is held. His physical confinement is explicitly echoed in the imaginative and communicational limitations of his spoken language. The extent to which spoken communication inhibits Farragut is demonstrated by the lexical dexterity and precision of the letters he writes describing the humiliations and injustices forced upon him. Interestingly, Farragut has no spoken formulation for describing such injustices. In a very real sense the prison he must escape from is not only physical but spiritual: he must, in a sense, escape into himself, into those larger possibilities which the dull, mean and brutal language of the prison gives him no opportunity to express.

The despair attendant on this debasement, both moral and linguistic, is underlined by the perceived uniformity of the onslaught: "I been all over this country, its the same everywhere..."⁴⁴ moans Betsey Wapshot who is unable to escape the clutches of Talifer and, by extension, the emptiness that is to be found at the centre of modern life. Even the unspoilt (backward) areas of

Europe are subject to "the advance of barbarism, vulgarity and censoriousness,"⁴⁵ which emanates from the United States. In an ironically titled story, "The Golden Age," Seton, a television script writer, tries to escape what he sees as the mediocrity and deceitfulness of his career by retreating to an old fishing village in Tuscany. He tries to pass himself off as a poet -- indicative of his desires to scale great heights of human understanding -- only to find that his comedy series, dubbed into Italian, has followed him and his misery is completed by the joy with which the locals greet the discovery that he is not, after all, "merely a poet." Clearly, nowhere is free from the debasement of human feelings and aspirations that lies behind the mental junk-food we are constantly fed by the television: "The blue green beam of the television set in the cafe has begun to transform them from sailors into cowboys, from fishermen into gangsters,"⁴⁶ says the narrator, describing the villagers' surrender of identity and, at the same time, locating the source of the 'disease' in the pervasive, all-too-popular culture of modern America.

A very particular example of this sense of modern debasement of values and the loss of the standards of the past occurs in "The Sutton Place Story." A small girl has gone missing and the frightened parents can only wait, worry and indulge in a certain amount of self reproach:

"I had a little brother who died. His name was Charles -- Charles, junior. He was named after my father and he died of some kind of sickness when he was two and a half years old, about Deborah's age. Of course it was very hard on Mother and Dad, but it wasn't anything as bad as this. You see, I think children mean much more to us than they did to our parents. That's what I've been thinking. I suppose it's because we're not as religious and because the way we live makes us much more vulnerable. I feel filthy with guilt. I feel as though I'd been a rotten mother and

a rotten wife and as though this were punishment. I've broken every vow and every promise that I've ever made. I've broken all the good promises. When I was a little girl, I used to make promises on the new moon and the first snow. I've broken everything good." 47

The mother's outburst encapsulates the feelings of contemporary worthlessness that overwhelm many of Cheever's protagonists. What it also does is to suggest a change in the attitude to death in the modern age, a change rooted in a growing fear of death. It is, moreover, a change readily identifiable in society as a whole: death, it has been suggested, has replaced sex in the post-war world as the great subject of social taboo and a whole euphemistic vocabulary now attends the business of death and the disposal of the corpse. Several novelists, notably Evelyn Waugh in The Loved One and J. P. Donleavy in A Fairy Tale Of New York, have viciously satirized these attempts to deflect the harsh force and truth of death and clearly Cheever, without making the business of death central to any of his fictions, shared their concern at such efforts to banish or beautify death. Indeed, he once claimed that his writing sought "to make some link between the light in the sky and the taste of death,"⁴⁸ an expression which, given Cheever's frequent use of light as a symbol for joy and goodness, seems to suggest a desire to unite death with life as a culmination (rather than a cessation) of experience. Certainly, he abhorred the tendency to disguise death through euphemism, ridiculing it through an embalming student's unconscious irony in saying "that her task, her study and vocation, was to beautify death, to make death comprehensible to the cruelly bereaved."⁴⁹

Despite this abhorrence the fear of death is very real for many of Cheever's characters. It lurks in the back of his characters' minds hinting that life, however lived, can be rendered absurd, meaningless, by its ending. Thus, Coverly Wapshot detects amongst

the ghosts of his ancestors an atmosphere of "trouble and failure," despite their patently successful and good lives, just as acute as the sense of foreboding, that "horror of death,"⁵⁰ which distresses Melissa, who has fled her responsibilities and lived, in Cheever's eyes, a rootless, worthless life. "Was it because they had been Mortal, was it because for every last one of them the pain of death had been bitter?",⁵¹ Coverly wonders. Cheever's characters rarely indulge in speculation beyond this point: an afterlife is not a proposition which is ever seriously entertained and the church and its clergy exist only to point to the distance man has strayed from grace (as attested to by the drunken vicar in The Wapshot Scandal or the bishop interested only in finding a sanctuary in case of nuclear attack in "The Brigadier and The Golf Widow"). Only Chicken Number Two, in Falconer, welcomes death as a new adventure: "...I'd go down a very happy man because I'm interested in what's going to happen next,"⁵² this remark however reveals more about the appalling greyness of prison life, as Cheever depicts it in Falconer, than it does about the character's religious convictions. On more than one occasion the prisoners' situation is compared, not at all favourably, to that of the dead. Farragut feels himself to be "among the living dead,"⁵³ and Tiny, the prison warder, tells them, "You is worse than dead. You shit, the dead don't shit."⁵⁴ In any event death, as life, holds little dignity for Chicken; his corpse being left as a decoy in Farragut's bed while Farragut smuggles himself out of jail in the canvas sack meant to serve as Chicken's coffin.

Clearly, it is the loss of a sense of purpose, and the anguish which replaces that sense, that troubles nearly all of Cheever's characters, even if death is not invoked by name. Coverly tells Honora that she should not want to die because "life is a gift, a mysterious gift,"⁵⁵ but he says this

"feebly" and it is hard for the reader to believe he means what he says, particularly in a world of hurtful and arbitrary pain and suffering. It is just such a world that Eliot Nailles begins to experience in Bullet Park, a world which allows the kind of mental and physical misery which affects Nailles' mother and son and which challenges his sense of the "fitness" of things. It is a despair from which Nailles can find no escape: "There was some obvious purpose in his loving Nellie and the light of morning but what was the purpose, the message, the lesson to be learned from his stricken son?"⁵⁶ Why, ultimately, should we have to submit to suffering if, after all, each life is just a brief spell between two apparently limitless voids?

The Americans of Cheever's fiction try very hard to avoid confronting this question: the maid in "Clementina" pointedly remarks of her American employers that "they did not believe in the dead,"⁵⁷ and Leander, in The Wapshot Chronicle, goes some way to defining this unwilling relationship of life to death in his summary of Honora's approach to life:

...he wondered if it wasn't the fear of death that had determined her crabwise progress through life. It could have been that by side-stepping those things that, through their force -- love, incontinence and peace of mind -- throw into our faces the facts of our mortality she might have uncovered the mystery of a spirited old age. 58

It is as if, through a shallow, uninvolved approach to life, an approach which seeks to exclude consideration of darker and more troublesome matters, death can be ignored or excluded from the precincts and concerns of the characters who people Cheever's America. An examination of this attitude is evident in all his work but gains its most clear expression in the story 'The Death Of Justina'. In a sense the reader is prepared for the pessimistic line of the story as the narrator, in an opining aside, confesses

his growing perplexity in the face of life and admits that "perhaps the exhibitionist at the corner of Chestnut and Elm Streets is more significant than the lovely woman with a bar of sunlight in her hair...."⁵⁹

The story itself opens with Moses, the narrator, looking out of the window: "I thought suddenly of the neglected graves of my three brothers on the mountain side and that death is a loneliness much crueler than any loneliness hinted at in life."⁶⁰ He explains this rawness, this sensitivity, to such 'unusual' subject matter by the fact that he has recently stopped both drinking and smoking, a state of affairs which inevitably recalls the accusation, in Bullet Park, that America is 'drugging' itself to avoid facing up to realities.

The sudden death of his wife's cousin Justina, whilst visiting them, serves to emphasize the narrator's new found sense of disquiet. Despite renewed attempts to anaesthetize himself with cigarettes and whisky, he is forced into recognizing the true nature of his fellow suburbanites' fear of death when he discovers that through administrative over-zealousness no one can be buried in Zone B where he lives. The mayor excuses the oversight by arguing that precautions had to be taken to safeguard "the neighborhood, and all the human and commercial values we've worked so hard to protect."⁶¹ The irony of this concern for human values is illuminated by the mayor's unwitting admission that a fear of death lies at the centre of this attitude:

...it's just that it happened in the wrong zone and if I make an exception for you I'll have to make an exception for everyone and this kind of morbidity, when it gets out of hand, can be very depressing. People don't like to live in a neighborhood where this sort of thing goes on all the time. 62

Eventually cousin Justina is buried but even the funeral serves to remind Moses of the way in which his neighbors have attempted to exclude the dead:

The dead are not, God knows, a minority, but in Proxmire Manor their unexalted kingdom is on the outskirts, rather like a dump, where they are transported furtively as Knaves and scoundrels and where they lie in an atmosphere of perfect neglect. Justina's life had been exemplary, but by ending it she seemed to have disgraced us all. 63

Some explanation, if not mitigation, of the behaviour of the Mayor and all of Cheever's other, similar characters is provided by what subsequently happens to Moses. The absurdity of his life is revealed to him in a dream in which shoppers pick unlabelled packages off the shelf of a brightly lit supermarket only to be thrown out of the store into dark water where there is "a terrible noise of moaning and crying in the air."⁶⁴ Cheever's fondness for bright light as a sign of life and its juxtaposition with brutality and darkness encourages an interpretation of the dream as a revelation of the futility of the matters with which people concern themselves and this certainly is the attitude that Moses, at the end of the story, brings to his job. He writes out the twenty third psalm as an advertisement for a tonic called Elixircol and yet does so without any sense of joy or expression of faith: "I felt very tired,"⁶⁵ is his only comment on his choice.

"The Death of Justina" is characteristic of Cheever -- not only its approach to contemporary American values, its description of breakdown and its resolutely middle class setting -- in its use of an apparently normal situation as the basis for a metaphor for the irrationality and horror at the heart of experience. He is able to record the good heartedness and vulgar innocence of middle America⁶⁶ even as he observes the worm at the heart of the apple, the worm that will eventually destroy the apple. The story is also an example of how Cheever used verisimilitude to achieve probability, leading the reader into a nightmare of life with distinctly surreal overtones via a very ordinary, commonplace scene. The dream

sequence, in particular, is a fine example of the way in which Cheever worked, as on a miniature painting, with great attention to detail, displaying how guilt, absurdity and terror underlay the human condition. He develops the light/dark paradox (an obvious, potentially trite, image) in an interesting way, not being content simply to oppose the light of the supermarket (life and innocence) with the obviously symbolic darkness beyond. The narrator observes how "The ceiling was paved with fluorescent light -- brilliant, cheerful but, considering our prehistoric memories, a harsh link in the chain of light that binds us to the past."⁶⁷ In doing so, he provides an illuminating aside to Cheever's career-long attraction to images of sunlight as symbolic of natural goodness and beauty. The neon is pointedly differentiated, by its harshness, from that real (i.e. natural) light. Clearly these innocents, in choosing the harsh and unnatural environment signified by the neon light, have relinquished their birthright, are somehow complicit in this scene of human degradation and futility. They have forgone what is good, natural and simple in life in pursuit of something which, in a very real sense, is not worth the candle.

Thus far I have, perhaps, seemed to emphasize the tragic element in John Cheever's writing: the sense of man divorced and alienated from a deteriorating, almost anti-human, environment and of the despairing spectre of death. This, however, was by no means the whole story. On the contrary, his work contained substantial elements of celebration and joy and was imbued with a determination to reject easy pessimism and a view of humanity based on its lowest common denominator. This attitude is perhaps most pointedly apparent in the story "A Miscellany of Characters that Will Not Appear," in which a variety of "tragic" stereotypes are described and discarded because "they throw so little true light

on the way we live."⁶⁸ Further, "scornful descriptions of American landscapes....," drunks, homosexuals and "explicit descriptions of sexual commerce," are rejected and it is, once again, worth pointing out that such rejections are not borne out of some arch reactionary tendency in Cheever's own personality but out of a sense of the failure of such symbols to do justice to the human situation.⁶⁹ Indeed, Cheever's attitude to such pessimistic visions of humanity were encapsulated in his description of the bitter, cynical novelist Royden Blake whose fictions could never "hope to celebrate a world that lies spread out around us like a bewildering and stupendous dream,"⁷⁰ and not least because his work contained all the faults the narrator is vowing to banish from his own writing:

In his pages one found alcoholics, scarifying descriptions of the American landscape, and fat parts for Marlon Brando. You might say that he had lost the gift of evoking the perfumes of life: sea water, the smoke of burning hemlock, and the breasts of women. He had damaged, you might say, the ear's innermost chamber, where we hear the heavy noise of the dragon's tail moving over the dead leaves. ⁷¹

However, as the somewhat haphazard method of "A Miscellany Of Characters That Will Not Appear," might suggest, Cheever's rejection of such a reductive and cynical vision of humanity was not built upon a rigorous moral and philosophical code. It was, rather, an expression of joy and pleasure in those areas amenable to man, a "most powerful sense of how singular, in the vastness of creation, is the richness of our opportunity."⁷² This sense is communicated in "A Vision Of The World" in terms of an irrational comfort in simply being, a comfort expressed in the narrator's cure-all phrase, "Porpozec ciebe nie prosze dorzanin albo zyolpoca ciwego,"⁷³ from which he draws inexplicable contentment. This irrationality extends to the words themselves, an ungrammatical Slavic mish-mash meaning

"there are many good things in life; you should not search for the things that do not exist in life."⁷⁴

It was from such an (arguably) limited standpoint that John Cheever proceeded in his quest for sources of goodness and joy in the world. Typically, as in "The World Of Apples," he found it in the celebration of the natural world, an appreciation of which enables Asa Bascomb to overcome the feeling that "gross obscenity seemed to be the only factor in life that possessed color and cheer."⁷⁵ Indeed, the wealth that the natural world held for man was central to a sense of well-being and moral purpose. In "The Housebreaker Of Shady Hill," it is the sweetness of rainfall which dissuades Johnny Hake from a life of crime and in Falconer Ezekiel Farragut recalls

a trustees meeting in the city over a matter of several million dollars. The meeting was on the lower floor of a new office building. Some ginkgo trees had been planted in the street. The meeting was in October when the ginkgos turn a strikingly pure and uniform yellow, and during the meeting he had, while watching these leaves fall across the air, found his vitality and his intelligence suddenly stimulated and had been able to make a substantial contribution to the meeting founded foursquare on the brightness of leaves. 76

Frequently this human response to nature (a response allied, in works like Oh What A Paradise It Seems, to a capacity for a more general human goodness) had a suburban or commuter town setting. It is remarkable, given the antipathy he voiced elsewhere, the extent to which Cheever was prepared to hymn the lyric possibilities of this wealthy middle-class milieu.⁷⁷ Certainly, most of his fiction was set in the outer reaches of the Hudson River or Connecticut commuter belts and much of it sought, even as it excoriated the behaviour of certain inhabitants, to impress upon the reader the beauty, potential and richness of the surroundings. Thus, despite the mean-mindedness and prejudice at work in the community in "The Trouble Of Marcie

Flint," Cheever was still able to identify the healing element of a suburban evening and "the view of the golden light on the grass and the trees...."⁷⁸ Indeed, his writing tended to leave the reader with an undiminished regard for the suburban environment: a regard reinforced by Cheever's own observation that "there's been too much criticism of the middle-class way of life. Life can be as good and rich there as any place else."⁷⁹ Bullet Park is perhaps the work that most readily demonstrates this regard. Beginning with a somewhat ironic and backhanded account of a suburban community, it nevertheless rejects the commonplace objections to such communities, essentially for being glib and stereotypical (the adolescent complainant, doubtless recalling Ginsberg, makes something of a chant of his charges and finishes, significantly, "Howl, howl, howl,"⁸⁰). All of this is underlined by Cheever's treatment of Eliot Nailles who, despite his futility (a chemist working on the elimination of bad breath) and his moral limitations (he is what Hammer's mother describes as "a good example of a life lived without any genuine emotion or value"⁸¹), is given sympathetic treatment and a quasi-heroic aspect. The "ashes" and despair which confront the Wickwires, as suburban representatives, in chapter one are particularized in the fate of Eliot Nailles and there is a sense of almost tragic nobility in Nailles' situation at the close of the novel: "Tony went back to school on Monday and Nailles -- drugged -- went off to work and everything was as wonderful, wonderful, wonderful as it had been."⁸² Clearly, the repetition of wonderful is heavily ironic, as is the counterpointing of Nailles' drugged present with an idealized vision of his past, but the recognition of this irony coexists with and is almost submerged by Nailles' self sacrifice and success in saving his son.

Eliot Nailles is perhaps an extreme example but nonetheless he does serve as an example of Cheever's typical suburban man. Mistaken

or weak, taking refuge in drink or insubstantial dreams, occasionally even driven to criminal activity (like Johnny Hake or the peeping Tom, Marston, in "The Cure") he is still a man possessed of human dignity and warmth, capable of rising above the apparent banality of his daily life in pursuit of some higher purpose. Reasonable, recognizable and above all sympathetic figures, such characters are often, despite their failings, able to give voice to some hopeful assertion of human feelings which transcends the supposed narrowness and shallowness of the suburban world.⁸³

In addition to this almost Bellovian refusal to accept what Charlie Citrine might have called "the bottom line" on human futility and mendacity there was something in the style which worked against a summation of John Cheever as simply a bard of middle class tragedy. The reluctance to accept tragedy and futility as the human lot is reflected in which Wilfred Sheed has called the "exceptionally high polish and... certain wild gleam,"⁸⁴ of Cheever's writing style. This has, perhaps, been no more than a device to deflect the harshness of the message by the beauty of the wrapping or, as Samuel Coale argues, it may be that Cheever was quite simply better at evoking joy than describing despair.⁸⁵ In either case, comparison readily reveals Cheever as more direct in his approach to positive, optimistic material, reacting with an overt lyricism to the triumph over Lawrence's cynical view of life at the close of "Goodbye, My Brother":

"Oh, what can you do with a man like that?
What can you do? How can you dissuade
his eye in a crowd from seeking out the
cheek with acne, the infirm hand; how
can you teach him to respond to the
inestimable greatness of the race, the
harsh surface beauty of life; how can you
put his finger for him on the obdurate truths
before which fear and horror are powerless?
The sea that morning was iridescent and
dark. My wife and my sister were
swimming - Diana and Helen - and I saw
their uncovered heads, black and gold in

the dark water. I saw them come out and
 I saw that they were naked, unshy, beautiful,
 and full of grace, and I watched the naked
 women walk out of the sea." 86

On the other hand, he had something of a crab-wise, indirect approach to the subjects of despair and misery, arriving at them as if by surprise through the use of irony and understatement. It was as if he was unable to get to grips with such material. The close of Oh What A Paradise It Seems, for example, allows the reader to infer Lemuel Sears' surrender of his spirit through his new vocabulary for Beasley's Pond, and character condemnations came most frequently through unconscious narratorial exposés. Thus Cheever sought the reader's disapprobation of Elizabeth Chidchester Madison's behaviour in "An Educated American Woman" while seeming to condemn her husband and in "The Jewel Of The Cabots" conveyed a sense of universal moral collapse by "allowing" the narrator to concentrate on social trivia rather than on the murder of Amos Cabot and the conspiracy of silence surrounding it.

Concerning this ironic approach to a more pessimistic vision of humanity, Ihab Hassan has written that "Cheever's affirmative statement is a whimsical statement. But does not whimsy imply an ironic stance, a denial of, or at least detachment from, the disagreeable aspects of reality in order to create a metaphor of the excellence and continuity of things."⁸⁷ An excellent example of this aspect of Cheever's style is the story "The Wrysons" which is, at base, a tale of the horrendous and wilful artificiality of concerns of a typical (arguably stereotypical) suburban couple. However, by using the familiar narrator-figure, a man at once affable, witty, reasonable and, above all, sympathetic, Cheever was able to deflect the full force of criticism from the blinkered Wrysons, dissolving the reader's exasperation in lightly ironic humour. Thus he begins by recording the extreme shallowness of the Wrysons' petty prejudices

and trivial philistinism, without overt censure: "They seemed to sense that there was a stranger at the gates -- unwashed, tirelessly scheming, foreign, the father of disorderly children, who would ruin their rose garden and depreciate their real estate investment, a man with a beard, a garlic breath and a book."⁸⁸

By avoiding the harsh critical tone of which the Wrysons are deserving Cheever lightened the whole tone of the story, enabling himself to reject its projected tragic ending in favour of a semi-comic tale of missed opportunities. One night Irene Wryson, awakened by her recurrent nightmare of a nuclear disaster, goes downstairs to find her husband, who secretly bakes cakes in an effort to recall the security of childhood, asleep in the kitchen and his cake burning:

"I burned it," he said when he saw the smoke pouring from the oven. "I burned the damned thing."

"I thought it was the hydrogen bomb," she said.

"It's a cake," he said "I burned it. What made you think it was the hydrogen bomb?"

"If you wanted something to eat, you should have waked me," she said.

She turned off the oven, and opened the window to let out the smell of smoke and let in the smell of nicotiana and other night flowers. 89

With the precision of Harold Lloyd or Buster Keaton teetering on the edge of a cliff, the Wrysons, observed by the audience but apparently unknowing, turn back from their precipice of knowledge.

Some comprehension -- perhaps momentary -- of the complexity of life must have come to them, but it was only momentary. There were no further explanations. He threw the cake, which was burned to a cinder, into the garbage, and they turned out the lights and climbed the stairs, more mystified by life than ever, and more interested than ever in a good appearance. 90

The narrator makes it clear that this unknowingness is wilful and yet is partly complicit in such deception, maintaining that the

spectre at the gates is no more than a comic-book anarchist.

It can be argued that these various stylistic elements, the use of irony, the lyric tendencies, even the obvious joy in words which Cheever exhibited are nothing less than his rejection of the apparently tragic implications of his tales and an expression of his joy in the triumph of language as that most unique human achievement. Less charitably, it is possible to agree with Alfred Kazin's suggestion that "My deepest feeling about Cheever is that his marvelous brightness is an effort to cheer himself up."⁹¹ Neither position, however, does Cheever full justice since it is this contradictory mixture between style and content, the tension between a desire for joyous affirmation and a recognition of humanity's tragic dimension that is the essence of Cheever's reluctant tragedies. Despite the very real causes for joy and celebration that Cheever identified through his writing, there was an insistence, an awareness, that defeated his characters' best efforts to live an (arguably anaesthetized) existence, free from the stresses and harsher concerns of life and, as in "The Death Of Justina," death. Into their placidly content lives came a remorseless and forbidding knowledge of a dark and unwelcome reality. For the Westcotts for instance, in "The Enormous Radio," it was the radio itself stripping away the veils of normality from the lives of their neighbours and themselves. But the messenger took many forms. Thus, in "The Scarlet Moving Van," it was the character Gee-Gee come to disrupt the "unprecedentedly comfortable and tranquil,"⁹² friends and neighbours of Charlie Folkestone. Gee Gee, who "was All-America twice, but... was never a money-player -- he always played straight out of his heart,"⁹³ had descended from this youthful peak of athletic perfection into an obsessive, overbearing drunkenness, repeatedly but mysteriously asserting that "I have to teach them."⁹⁴

Precisely what Gee Gee had to teach them, by his hostile and anti-social behaviour, was of the existence of a yawning chasm of fearful misery underlying the apparently sturdy surface of all their lives, a chasm created by the futility and irrationality of existence. After a series of these drunken exhibitions

Folkestone felt he understood the drunken man's message; he had always sensed it. It was at the bottom of their friendship. Gee-Gee was an advocate for the lame, the diseased, the poor, for those who through no fault of their own live out their lives in misery and pain. To the happy and the wellborn and the rich he had this to say -- that for all their affection, their comforts, and their privileges they would not be spared the pangs of anger and lust and the agonies of death. He only meant for them to be prepared for the blow when the blow fell. But was it not possible to accept this truth without having him dance a jig in your living room? He spoke from some vision of the suffering in life, but was it necessary to suffer oneself in order to accept his message? It seemed so. 95

Throughout his fiction, such revelations left Cheever's many similar protagonists similarly disabled. Overwhelmed by a sense of futility and confusion, they became unable to return to the cosy shallows inhabited by such people as the Wrysons.

Ultimately, despite the props of the natural world, the reserves of human goodness and a willingness to identify "that most powerful sense of our being alive on the planet... that most powerful sense of how singular, in the vastness of creation, is the richness of our opportunity,"⁹⁶ the dominant emotion in Cheever's fiction was one of pessimism and the dominant theme the failure of humanity to bring lasting meaning to the world. The feeling of negativity that overwhelmed Lemuel Sears, a feeling which he described as a "Balkans of the spirit..."⁹⁷ was a common one for Cheever, stressing the profound solitude of individuals despite their best efforts to deny it. So it was that

Betsy Wapshot recognized "the cutting thread, the wire of loneliness..."⁹⁸ that ran through her life and, like Julia Weed in "The Country Husband" or the Wickwires in Bullet Park, attempted to overcome the recognition with a vigorous social life, hoping perhaps to replace meaning with action, quality with quantity. Thus, far from being merely an entertainer or just one more recorder of mid-century, middle-class American mores, Cheever was the formulator of a mode for describing the unease of our century, for recording the anxiety amid the affluence, for providing his readership with something as irrational, moving and complex as our experience of life itself.

CHEEVER NOTES

1. Richard Rupp, Celebration In Post-War American Fiction (Coral Gables, Fla: University Of Miami Press, 1970), p. 31.
2. Samuel Irving Bellman, "Review of John Cheever by Lynn Waldeland," Studies In Short Fiction, 19, 2, (1982), p. 183.
3. William Peden, The American Short Story (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 52.
4. Peter Cushing, "Reviews," Journal Of American Studies, 15, 2 (1981), p. 267.
5. Julian Barnes, "Serpents In Suburbia," The Observer 25 July 1982, p. 30.
6. Quoted in Frederick Bracher, "John Cheever and Comedy," Critique 6, i, p. 72.
7. Annette Grant, "John Cheever: The Art Of Fiction LX11," Paris Review 67, p. 42.
8. Ibid., p. 41.
9. Quoted in Lynne Waldeland, John Cheever (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 28.
10. John Cheever, The Stories Of John Cheever (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 404.
11. Ibid., p. 680.
12. "The Leaves, The Lion-Fish and The Bear," Esquire November, 1974, p. 110.
13. Ibid., p. 249.
14. Ibid., p. 655.
15. Ibid., p. 185.
16. Ibid., p. 251.
17. Ibid., vii.
18. Joan Didion "Falconer," New York Times Book Review, 6 March 1977, p. 1.

19. John Cheever, The Wapshot Scandal (London: Abacus, 1982), p.4.
20. John Cheever, "The President Of The Argentine," Atlantic Monthly March, 1974, p. 43.
21. John Cheever, The Wapshot Chronicle (London: Abacus, 1981),
p. 5.
22. "The President Of The Argentine," p. 45.
23. The Wapshot Scandal, p. 176.
24. Stories, p. 597.
25. John Cheever, Bullet Park (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.37.
26. John Cheever, Oh What A Paradise It Seems (London: Jonathan
Cape, 1982), p. 32.
27. Stories, p. 593.
28. The Wapshot Chronicle, p. 21.
29. Ibid., p. 14.
30. Stories, p. 330.
31. The Wapshot Chronicle, p. 5.
32. The Wapshot Scandal, p. 251.
33. Stories, p. 494.
34. Ibid., p. 495.
35. Oh What A Paradise It Seems, p. 65.
36. Wapshot Chronicle, p. 18.
37. Ibid., p. 56.
38. Ibid., pp. 291 - 292.
39. Oh What A Paradise It Seems, p. 20.
40. Stories, p. 207.
41. Oh What A Paradise It Seems, p. 65.
42. In this respect Cheever's work carried distinctly Bellovian
overtones and, in fact, Cheever greatly admired Bellow's work.
43. Sears' closing speech, in which he describes the process
whereby Beasley's Pond was purified, is characterized by
jargon and the sort of emotional and tonal flatness associated
with a bored tourist guide.

44. The Wapshot Scandal, p. 60.
45. Stories, p. 403.
46. Ibid., p. 397.
47. Ibid., p. 76.
48. Bracher, p. 68.
49. "The President Of The Argentine," p. 45.
50. The Wapshot Scandal, p. 76.
51. Ibid., p. 29.
52. John Cheever, Falconer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 146.
53. Ibid., p. 26.
54. Ibid., p. 118.
55. Wapshot Scandal, p. 235.
56. Bullet Park, p. 48.
57. Stories, p. 440.
58. Wapshot Chronicle, p. 191.
59. Stories, p. 429.
60. Ibid., p. 429.
61. Ibid., p. 435.
62. Ibid., p. 435.
63. Ibid., p. 437.
64. Ibid., p. 436.
65. Ibid., p. 437.
66. The narrator describes the USA as his "beloved country" and remarks how his fellow countrymen

were dressed with that sumptuary abandon that European caricaturists record with such bitter disgust. Yes, there were grandmothers in shorts, big-butt women in knitted pants, and men wearing such an assortment of clothing that it looked as if they had dressed hurriedly in a burning building. But this, as I say, is my own country and in my opinion the caricaturist who vilifies the old lady in shorts vilifies himself.

Stories, p. 436.

This willingness to defend the innocently vulgar, the unsophisticated yet honest against the sophisticated

but morally corrupt was a frequent element in Cheever's fiction, effectively laying to rest the charges that he was a culturally snobbish social patrician. For instance, in Oh What A Paradise It Seems Cheever describes the Brandenburg Concerto being used as muzak in a Buy Brite supermarket:

This music had been chosen by a nephew of one of the majority stockholders, who seemed to think that there would be some enjoyable irony between eighteenth-century music and the tumult of a contemporary shopping center. He was, spiritually speaking, a frail young man who would amount to nothing, and the irony he so enjoyed would be discontinued in a month or so. There is no irony of course. The capital of Brandenburg was a market village and on a summer's day when the doors of the cathedral stood open the great concertos must have been heard by the grocers and merchants. (pp.48 - 49).

What these incidents emphasize is the sort of uncritical love that Cheever brought to his innocent characters, who were frequently involved in tragedies not of their own making.

67. Stories, p. 435.

68. Ibid., p. 469.

69. With regard to homosexuals, Cheever argued that it was "time that we embraced the indiscretion and inconstancy of the flesh and moved on" (Stories p. 469.) Moreover, his own view of "sexual commerce," however oriented, was somewhat lyrical as can be seen from the relationship between Ezekiel Farragut and Jody in Falconer or in the following passage drawn from

The Wapshot Chronicle:

A young nurse came to the door, looking out at the carnival and the summer evening, and a doctor joined her.

"B2 thinks he is dying," the nurse said. "He wants a priest,"

"I called Father Bevier," the doctor said. "He's out." He put a hand on the nurse's slender back and let it fall along her buttocks.

"Oh, I could use a little of that," the nurse said cheerfully.

"So could I," the doctor said.

He continued to stroke her buttocks and

desire seemed to make the nurse plaintive and in a human way much finer and the doctor, who had looked very tired, seemed refreshed. Then, from the dark interior of the place, there was a wordless roar, a spitting grunt, extorted either by extreme physical misery or the collapse of reasonable hope. The doctor and the nurse separated and disappeared in the dark at the end of the hall. (pp. 182- 183).

Far from censuring their behaviour, Cheever was celebrating its positive powers and capacity for spiritual nourishment.

70. Stories, p. 472.
71. Ibid., p. 471.
72. Oh What A Paradise It Seems, p. 100.
73. Stories, p. 516.
74. Clinton S. Burhans, "The Grave Of Social Coherence,"
Twentieth Century Literature 14, p. 195.
75. Stories, p. 617.
76. Falconer, p. 65.
77. Remarkable in the context not only of his depiction of such townships as Talifer, in The Wapshot Scandal, or Bullet Park but in the hostile treatment of their habitues in stories like "The Swimmer," "The Country Husband," or "The Trouble Of Marcie Flint," all of which serve to suggest or depict the shallow lives and concerns of the suburban communities at large.
78. Stories, p. 495.
79. Rollene Waterman, "Interview with John Cheever," Saturday Review
13.9.58, p. 33.
80. Bullet Park, p. 10.
81. Ibid., p. 122.
82. Ibid., p. 176.
83. One such man is Charles Flint, the runaway husband in "The Trouble of Marcie Flint." From seeming a weak, discouraged and perhaps mildly alcoholic character, he makes something of a heroic (albeit futile) gesture of reversal at the end

of the story, vowing to return and "see my children grow and take up their lives, and I will gentle Marcie -- sweet Marcie, dear Marcie, Marcie my love. I will shelter her with the curve of my body from all the harms of the dark."

Stories, p. 301.

84. Wilfred Sheed, "The Novelist Of Suburbia," Life 18.4.69, p.40.

85. Coale seems inclined to the view that Cheever was somehow not equal to the task of tragedy: "The Style... does not seem suited to the descriptions of more disturbing themes - loneliness, death, decay - because of its essentially lyric and comic nature,"

Samuel Coale, John Cheever (New York; Frederick Ungar, 1977), p. 78.

86. Stories, p. 21.

87. Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 194.

88. Stories, p. 319.

89. Ibid., pp. 323 - 324.

90. Ibid., p. 324.

91. Alfred Kazin, The Bright Book Of Life (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1974), p. 113.

92. Stories, p. 359.

93. Ibid., p. 361.

94. Ibid., p. 360.

95. Ibid., p. 363.

96. Oh What A Paradise It Seems, p. 100.

97. Ibid., p. 43.

98. The Wapshot Chronicle, p. 235.

CHAPTER FOUR

John Updike:

"The Christian Church and Naked Women"

Aside from being, at least by contemporary literary standards, almost frighteningly prolific (he has produced, on average, one new volume of creative literature every year since 1959) John Updike also keeps up a breathtakingly hectic sideline in book reviewing usually, although not exclusively, for the New Yorker magazine. However, the most impressive aspect of his work is not its sheer volume so much as the universally high level of lexical and intellectual care which informs it. Manifestly, Updike gives a great deal of consideration to all his writing and even the least significant review demonstrates a degree of thoughtfulness which combines powerfully with an incisive critical intellect. This of itself is impressive, good literary reviewers (as the uniformly uninformative and unhelpful reviews of The Witches Of Eastwick attest) being sufficiently rare as to be positively unusual. Equally unusual is the generosity of Updike's criticism: his evident desire to identify and praise achievement and an equally palpable reluctance to belittle the efforts of a fellow writer whatever his personal misgiving. While this is, in one sense, commendable it is not always felicitous as, for instance, his review of Bernard Malamud's God's Grace indicates. It is a book about which Updike clearly has reservations, as indeed did a number of other reviewers. What emerges from the review, however, is a rather muddled account of these reservations as, on the one hand, he convincingly grasps Malamud's central impulse and confounds general critical opinion as to the novel's pessimism while on the other the review is so honeyed in its objections to a perceived incoherence of religious philosophy as to deprive the review of much of its critical force.¹

As Martin Amis has observed: "With Updike's judgements one is usually busy (as Americans say) revising downward. He is not just a gentleman. He is a Christian gentleman. His indulgent gallantry reliably extends to whatever is disadvantaged, homely, stoical, foreign or feminine."²

Martin Amis, of course, is being predictably harsh. However, the point is not lost and the significance of this gentlemanly generosity in what is, after all, the least significant area of John Updike's writing is that this reluctance, failure even, to blame³ what he clearly conceives to be weak or confused writing extends from his critical into his creative work where it frequently takes the form of a refusal to engage in even minimal overt authorial moral judgement on the behaviour of his characters. This assuredly is not a weakness per se, a flaw to be listed alongside "stylistic deficiencies" or "implausibility of plot," indeed it indicates a certain strength in Updike's writing, a determination to render fully realized fiction in which moral issues are dramatized rather than debated. It is, however, a fact (perhaps the central fact) of Updike's fiction and inheres in the writing, being part of the creative tension whereby the books unfold. The novelist has himself recognized the tendency, explaining that

my work says, "Yes, but." Yes, in Rabbit, Run, to our inner urgent whispers, but -- the social fabric collapses murderously. Yes, in The Centaur, to self-sacrifice and duty, but -- what of a man's private agony and dwindling? No, in The Poorhouse Fair, to social homogenization and loss of faith, but -- listen to the voices, the joy of persistent existence. No, in Couples, to a religious community founded on physical and psychical interpenetration, but -- what else shall we do, as God destroys our churches? 4

A number of critics have found this sort of ambivalence debilitating and have suggested that it displays, on Updike's part, a lack of

anything to say. This, however, is unacceptable and it should be recognized that this ambivalence does not grow out of any absence of a moral dimension in Updike's fictive world. Indeed, the novelist has more than once stressed the centrality of moral questions to his writing. Bernard Schopen, for instance, records that "Updike has said that the central theme of each of his novels is 'meant to be a moral dilemma' and that his books are intended as 'moral debates with the reader.'"⁵ It is simply that Updike, throughout his fiction, has eschewed "preachiness" (an element he has identified in the work of Saul Bellow)⁶ and the strong, nearly Lutheran, moral element visible in his work has been consistently challenged by an almost transcendent sensuality. This is evident both in his characters' activities and in the narrative itself, which is so texturally rich as to give out an almost physical thrill in its lush precision.

Such verbal dexterity has been far from popular in some literary quarters and is the most frequently criticized aspect of his fiction. It is, perhaps, forgivable to suspect a certain amount of professional jealousy at work in some of these decrials as, for example, in the following passage where the sympathetic reader might just catch the sound of grinding axes behind the objective critical voice: "There is an endless compounding and fusion of unsynthesized impressions. Few opportunities for modifiers or metaphors are passed up, and though these are nearly always sharp and fresh, they finally prove wearisome."⁷ Nonetheless, what David Lodge has described as "Updike's incorrigible stylistic greed"⁸ does result in a tendency to overwrite, to imbue the perceptions of essentially dull working men like Rabbit Angstrom or Piet Hanema with scintillating metaphorical observations or similarly to inject into the sexual activities and lives of otherwise unremarkable and unreflective individuals highly wrought poetic perorations. Thus,

in "One's Neighbor's Wife," the woman of the title asserts that

My pussy is the color of earth, of fire, of air
 shuddering on the vein of a rock by the side
 of a stream, of fine metals spun to a curly
 tumult, of night as to the expanded eye of the
 prowler it yields its tints of russet and umber,
 subtle husks of daylight colors. Each hair is
 precious and individual, serving a distinct role
 in the array: blond to invisibility where the
 thigh and abdomen join, dark to opacity where
 the tender labia ask protection, hearty and
 ruddy as a forester's beard beneath the swell
 of belly, dark and sparse as the whiskers of a
 Machiavel where the perineum sneaks backward to
 the anus. My pussy alters by time of day and
 according to the mesh of underpants. It has its
 satellites: the whimsical line of hairs that
 ascend to my navel and into my tan, the kisses
 of fur on the inside of my thighs, the lambent
 fuzz that ornaments the cleavage of my fundament.
 Amber, ebony, auburn, by chestnut, cinnamon,
 hazel fawn, snuff, henna, bronze, platinum,
 peach, ash, flame, and field mouse: these are
 but a few of the colors my pussy is. 9

Arguably this is part of a short, lyric, overtly romanticized and narrowly unrealistic piece of writing. Inarguably it comes closer to bathos than lyric beauty and is symptomatic of a far wider tendency to surrender, sometimes inopportunately, to a rare and wide-reaching linguistic facility that is clearly the author's and his alone.

Despite this occasional over-abundance Updike has, indubitably, the eyes, ears and nose that make the realist novelist; more importantly, perhaps, he has a love for his characters and sympathetic understanding of their needs and wants. Nowhere in Updike does one find the sort of disgusted or sneering fascination that marks so much of the work of a writer like John O'Hara. It is almost as if Sinclair Lewis had been recast with a clearer, firmer grasp on his own ambivalence toward Main Street, USA and indeed it is this very clarity which is most striking in Updike's fiction, a powerful love of his characters and a sympathy for their desires tempered (to the point of contradiction) by the knowledge that these desires, by which they define themselves, are worthless.

What, however, happens to mitigate this recognition is the intrusion of the fluid Updike prose-style so that, even as the actions of the characters repeatedly describe lives of intrinsic worthlessness and spiritual bankruptcy, the sheer brio, flash and brilliance of the language acts to, in some way, redeem them through the author's quasi-sensual joy in "the word". Thus are the opposite and contradictory impulses of Puritan moralist and sensualist held in creative tension.

This, it must be said, does not conform to everyone's reading of Updike's contribution to the twentieth century American novel. Indeed, there are those who find the conventional realist novel a redundant form, arguing its limitations of form and perspective as being inadequate for contemporary comprehension of the world. Jerome Klinkowitz, for example, argues that

"If the world is absurd, if what passes for reality is distressingly unreal, why spend time representing it? Physical, social and political conditions may be a mess, and to view them from one perspective, imposing a rational order, is an aesthetic mess; so when everything else has changed, including the ways we experience our world, should not the novel change too?" 10

However, when Updike renders social detail with such ordering specificity that it serves to define the sort of world in which we live (as he does most pointedly through the use of radio and t.v. programmes in Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Is Rich) then the reader gains something more than a mirror-image or representation of modern life, gains an explanation of the prevailing moral and aesthetic values. As David Lodge has observed in a review of Couples: "The descriptions of Tarbox, its couples and their way of life... is exquisitely rendered, so that we feel the charm, the allure of this way of life, and also its weakness, its fragility."¹¹

Klinkowitz's remarks were in fact specifically aimed at John Updike who, along with Saul Bellow is repeatedly accused of

exercising a literary hegemony which the 'Disruptionists', including Kurt Vonnegut and Ronald Sukenick, are bent on destroying. It is possible to appreciate Klinkowitz's point. Certainly Bellow and Updike represent the best of what may loosely be termed realist writing since World War Two. Where, however, they differ is not so much in the fact of Updike's Christianity as in his work's lack of any judgemental moralism. To paraphrase Mr. Bellow, he (and, for that matter, Malamud and Potok) "come to the table with a croupier's rake," and work "for the house" which, in this case is the house of an absolute and ordering morality.¹² This is not the case with John Updike for whom, beneath the glittering surface of the prose, no such absolutes exist. Furthermore, this absence of absolutes from the world of his fiction seems to emanate from a specifically Christian/post-Christian viewpoint in which the validity of moral precepts are recognized but set aside in the face of disordering and morally disabling existential fears. To paraphrase crudely, the post-Christian message seems to be one of absolution from individual blame, as if to suggest that "when things are this awful you cannot fault people for acting badly, even wrongly." It is precisely the extension of this sort of comprehensive "understanding" that led to the lionization of Jack Henry Abbot¹³ and prompted Artur Sammler's damning condemnation of the contemporary tendency to "change sin to sickness."¹⁴ None of which detracts from Updike's literary ability. It is not a matter of equating good or bad writing with being on the side of good or evil. It is a question of seeing how the writer, in this case clearly a morally concerned individual, an enquirer into the form and nature of contemporary morality, deals with the subject in his depiction of society and how he deploys his (in this case, considerable) talents in achieving this depiction.

America, and has been concerned with the stuff of such lives: Marriage, divorce, sex, work and suburban values. In essence, then, his concerns have coincided with those of a generation of "pulp" writers and the television soaps. Arguably this has contributed to his relative popularity with the public although it has certainly prompted a good deal of criticism from those who object to a perceived metaphysical smallness at the heart of suburban life. However, one remarkable aspect of Updike's writing has been the way that, as with his depiction of social detail, he has been able to reveal, in the 'average' lives of apparently unremarkable people, the moral and spiritual conditions of our time. Thus, in "Gesturing," a short story dealing with the Maples' separation, a skyscraper described as "a beautiful disaster, famous because it was a disaster (glass kept falling from it) and disastrous because it was beautiful...",¹⁵ becomes a metaphor for marital collapse and divorce, beset as it is by damage, injury and litigation:

It was hideous. Heavily planked and chicken-wired tunnels, guarded by barking policemen, protected pedestrians from falling glass and the owners of the building, already millions in the hole, from more lawsuits. Trestles and trucks jammed the cacophonous area. The lower floors were solid plywood, of a Stygian black; the building so lovely in air, had tangled mucky roots. 16

Furthermore, by an extrapolation of his own marital disorder, Richard Maple is able to uncover the kernel of moral paralysis and an irremediable obsession with self gratification that portends a wider social breakdown in its abnegation of moral responsibility.¹⁷

Of course, as has been said, Updike has the happy knack of being able to turn almost any observation into a metaphor, a remark which fairly suggests his mental and verbal facility while unfairly implying a certain intellectual sleight of hand. What, however, this particular metaphor does underline is the peculiar absence of a convincing "divine" dimension in the contemporary world, prompting the question of how it is that a man who apparently

finds the hand of God so central and moving in his own life¹⁸ so signally fails to demonstrate God's powerful beneficence in the world of his fiction. Indeed, one may ask how it is that religion, when mooted, seems so clearly irrelevant or impotent in the face of the more pressing matters of daily life and how to survive it. This is not to suggest an altogether absorbing richness in the fabric of daily life. In fact, en large, contemporary suburban experience seems more to be characterized by blanched anonymity than it does by any sense of purpose or intrinsic value. Thus, in the Rabbit novels the suburban "units" of Brewer, while infinitely different in tiny detail, are, deliberately, made to convey a sense of bland repetition, of being indistinguishable in their true essentials from hundreds, thousands or even millions of others.

The America of Updike's fiction is characterized by trivia, the trivia described in the conversations of the townspeople at the close of The Poorhouse Fair, the media trivia pumped through the nation's televisions and radios and extensively recorded in both Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Is Rich. The 'quotidienne' in Updike's America is the kind of anonymity that Piet and Foxy Hanema slip into in their life in Lexington, the kind of anaesthetized, blank inertia that characterizes Rabbit Angstrom and his father at the beginning of Rabbit Redux. They are "pale" and the atmosphere "blanched", Rabbit's father is "a thin man with no excess left to him, his face washed empty by grievances..." and Rabbit himself has "a weakness verging on anonymity."¹⁹ The 'exceptional' takes the form of a disruption from this tranquil state, the rebellious search for a deeper entity and individual expression described by the kind of struggle with society into which many of Updike's protagonists find themselves thrust. In essence this struggle takes the form of an attempt to impose a moral code on an amoral, even immoral, society.

Frequently this struggle has a religious dimension as the character recognizes the debilitation of religion by the totally "other" demands of American society which is often characterized as a pervasive poison: "...this poison was their national life,"²⁰ reflects Piet in Couples as he listens to the news over the radio and there is no doubt that the "poisonous mush abroad in the planet,"²¹ is "America, that fountainhead of obscenity and glut,"²² in Ellellou's eyes. For him everything is tainted by contact with the USA: Kush, as an ideal of African purity is destroyed and replaced by a cheap and shoddy replica of American consumerism. The only way to live in such an environment is to abandon all pretense of humanity: "...man has resigned himself to being the animal of animals..."²³ suggests Ellellou in The Coup, thereby implying a fulfilment of Mim Angstrom's prediction in Rabbit Redux. Mim foresees a new code taking over the USA, a harsher code with no humanity in it, a code with "survival rules, rules for living in the desert," to be enacted by a new breed of Americans who will "make themselves hard clean through. Like, oh, cockroaches. That's the way to live in the desert. Be a cockroach... once these kids get it together... they'll live on poison."²⁴ Baldly stated, such a nightmare vision of America may seem extreme and clearly it does not always carry authorial approval but, nonetheless, it occurs frequently as an image, often from the point of view of one who feels that the old values are being torn down and not replaced by anything and as such is an all-too plausible interpretation of the contemporary world.

What is palpably missing from the lives of these characters is a sense of meaning or purpose, the sort of meaning or purpose traditionally supplied by religion ("hopefulness and a sense of reward beyond the immediate..."²⁵) and which Rabbit Angstrom and Piet Hanema, in their religious stumblings, feel that belief could

supply for them. The overwhelming fact of this belief is its conservative literality, its dependence for the force of its moral values on the actuality of the Bible story, particularly with reference to Jesus' resurrection. The power and centrality of this actuality is expressed by Updike in the poem "Seven Stanzas At Easter," from his early collection, Telephone Poles. In it he firmly pins the utility and significance of the Church to the fact of Jesus' resurrection and all that fact implies:

Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse,
the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.
It was not as the flowers,
each soft Spring recurrent;
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled
eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as His flesh; ours. 26

Challenged by scientific knowledge and intellectual questioning, there has been a tendency even among Church of England Bishops to accept the argument that the Bible has a symbolic rather than a factual significance and that part of that significance is its role as metaphor, suggesting, through parable and symbol, the necessity of moral behaviour. For Updike this is not sufficient: without the guarantee of life after death then the whole business of the Ten Commandments becomes a pointless exercise and, in the crude accounting terminology that the hypercompetitive Protestant work ethic has always encouraged, there is no profit in it. It is a point of view against which, not surprisingly, his protagonists have struggled. For instance, in the epigraph to Of The Farm, Updike summarizes the difficulties which beset Joey Robinson (as they also beset Rabbit Angstrom and Piet Hanema) by quoting Sartre:

Consequently, when, in all honesty, I've recognized that man is a being in whom existence precedes essence, that he is a free being who, in various circumstances, can want only his freedom, I have at the same time recognized that I can want only the freedom of others. 27

In short, there is a tension between the reductive absurdity which encourages a selfish and anti-social view of life and an altruistic impulse which seeks to discover some moral bedrock of mutual concern. Unfortunately, this bedrock is never touched, as is made evident through the character of Conner, the poorhouse prefect in Updike's first novel. Conner represents those who wish to secularize religion and substitute an earthly paradise for the heavenly one. However his well-meaning but blundering actions only succeed in robbing the inmates of their status as individuals and are ultimately futile as Hook tells him:

When you get to be my age -- and I shall pray that you never do, I wish it on no one, but if you do -- you shall know this: There is no goodness, without belief. There is nothing but busy-ness. And if you have not believed, at the end of your life you shall know you have buried your talent in the ground of this world and have nothing saved, to take into the next. 28

This busy-ness which Hook detects in a man who is, in essence, offering a secularized version of Christianity (he is "devout in the service of humanity..."²⁹ the narrator suggests) is nothing more than the fear of a man who is terrified both by death and the harsh implications of life untamed by moral imperatives. "We are mostly monster. People speak of loving life. Life is a maniac in a closed room,"³⁰ he tells Hook in an unguarded moment, justifying Hook's assertion that "Your bitterness... is the wilful work of your own heart."³¹ This rather negative summation of the secular principles and ideals of the caring community (which has, increasingly, replaced the spirit of religious brotherhood as the dynamic of human compassion) is a constant in Updike's fictive world. Indeed Conner's contemporary counterpart can be found in the character of Ed Parsley in The Witches Of Eastwick. Parsley is, in a very literal sense, offering a secularized version of human compassion as he moves from the dubiously Christian religiosity of a

minister in the Unitarian Church to become a putative revolutionary in "The Movement." As with Conner, fear and weakness are the keynotes of his conversion, fear rather than conviction the moving force behind his flight into the embrace of human frailty and 'busyness.'³²

Rabbit Angstrom, similarly, is in flight. He runs in panic at the thought of being nothing. He runs from the terrible fear of not being special and from the responsibility of having to assume the mantle of moral judgment formerly worn by God and dictated by the precepts of religion. Such demands are, for Rabbit as for Updike's other characters, too heavy for the individual to bear on his own. For Rabbit neither the secular 'social work' doctrines of the Reverend Eccles or the fear-and-trust-God message of the Lutheran minister Kruppenbach serve to revive his flagging belief in God:

Afraid, really afraid, he remembers what once consoled him by seeming to make a hold where he looked through into underlying brightness, and lifts his eyes to the church window. It is, because of church poverty or the late summer nights or just carelessness, unlit, a dark circle in a stone facade. 33

The "testament to endure his dying..."³⁴ which Hook wanted to tell Conner but could not remember is even further away from reclamation at the end of Rabbit, Run and very close to being completely lost.

This irretrievable loss seems to occur in Updike's fifth novel, the death-haunted Couples, after which religion never again seriously contends in Updike's battles of moral imperatives against transient pleasures. In Couples the language of death is particularly immediate and Piet Hanema repeatedly struggles to "shout down" his fear of its all-embracing power. Following the death of his parents, "the world wore a slippery surface..."³⁵ for Piet and as a consequence of this early trauma there seem to be for him no inspiring certainties. Throughout the novel death's face looms ever-larger before Piet as he tries to come to terms with, successively, the death of his friend John Ong, the Kennedy baby and John F. Kennedy himself.

Even the death of his daughter's pet hamster serves to focus attention on the awful and predatory nature of death. Sustaining the chemical processes of the greedy, corpse-hungry earth he has, placatingly, "thrown it a sop."³⁶ In Couples the facts of life are that the whole experience of existence is a shoddy and irrational process of moving toward death: "We die. We don't die for one second out there in the future, we die all the time, in every direction. Every meal we eat breaks down the enamel,"³⁷ says Freddy Thorne, acting out his role of chorus to the others' actions. This anguish is exacerbated for Piet as he clings to a desire to preserve some moral sense and impose an idea of purpose on life: early in the novel we learn that "Piet wondered what barred him from the ranks of those many blessed who believed in nothing. Courage he supposed."³⁸ He finds, however, that this courage is not sufficient to sustain him, nor to provide him with the spiritual energy to struggle against the washed-out emptiness of the quotidian with its diversionary pleasures and amnesiac joys. Thus the conclusion to the novel provides him with some measure of relief as, with the collapse of the Church building and, symbolically, of the Church as an institution, Piet is able to relinquish the reins of moral purpose. As an act "beyond all blaming"³⁹ the burning of the Church demonstrates the impossibility of purpose and frees Piet from the agony of choice between the spiritual, represented by his wife Angela, and the earthly and temporal, by his mistress Foxy Whitman. Piet's eventual choice of Foxy reflects a wider and more general social refusal to contemplate or conceive of the possibility of a humanly inspired morality and a dependence on the 'stick and carrot' of eternal life to provide and enforce a moral code.

Certain critics have described the conclusion to Couples as a happy ending and, inasmuch as it relieves Piet of the agony of decision, it does offer him the hope of peace and tranquility for the rest

of his life. At the same time he is forced to settle for the anonymity that so terrified Rabbit Angstrom in the first two novels but which he is willing to settle for in Rabbit Is Rich.⁴⁰ As Updike has himself observed: "...when the church is burned Piet is relieved of morality and can choose Foxy, [but] ... with the destruction of the church, the removal of his guilt, he becomes insignificant."⁴¹ With the loss of this significant, human, dimension, a loss which characterizes humanity in decline, Piet retreats into an ever-deepening hedonism and egocentrism. In Rabbit Is Rich, for example, Harry Angstrom has become, in Ruth's words, "A regular Brewer sharpie. A dealer. The kind of person you used to hate..."⁴² and is willing to trade his youthful dreams of personal fulfilment for the unreflective comfort of suburban living. Beset by a burgeoning sense of personal futility Rabbit busily retreats into the absorbing joys of materialism in order to drive away his fears of a vast encircling darkness.

The ultimate futility of "busyness", of goodness without belief, is demonstrated on the widest possible scale by the comprehensive failure of the revolution in The Coup. Fired with revolutionary enthusiasm and idealistic verve Colonel Felix Ellellou^h tries to revolutionize the perceptions and ideals of the African nation of Kush through his own brand of Marxist-Islamic faith. Despite the honourable intentions of Ellellou^h his efforts are doomed to failure, not least because he attempts to manipulate religion and make it fulfil a secular, moral role. "What matters in a myth, a belief, is, Does it fit the facts, as it were, backwards. Does it enable us to live, to keep going,"⁴³ he argues to justify his use of religion for political and idealistic ends: "What is the result of these incredible remors? Slaves lift their heads a fraction of an inch higher. Is this enough result? It is. Nothing less will produce any result at all."⁴⁴ It is not, however, enough for salvation.

Without God and eternal life morality and idealism are absurd concepts, not worth the striving and anguish, as the people of Kush prove by their enthusiasm for the tacky pleasures of consumerism, and Ellellou[^] emphasizes this by declining a martyr's fate in favour of a colonel's pension in exile. In Updike's fiction the facts can never be made to fit backwards: indeed there is only one salient fact and that is the fact of resurrection and its implicit promise of eternal life.

The relative weakness of the Christian ethos in an essentially post Christian era has been underlined in Updike's more recent fiction, notably by the total inability of conventional religion to counter the manifestation of human evil (in truth nothing more than human frailty) as embodied, for example, in the witchcraft of The Witches Of Eastwick. Here, the impossibility of belief prompts a search for alternative forms of commitment and faith. These alternatives emerge in a variety of guises, for instance Ed Parsley's conversion to The Movement or Clyde Gabriel's quest for a universal ordering principle via the study of astronomy. That these are ultimately unsatisfactory is suggested by the tragic, self-induced, deaths of both characters but they hold in common one element: a search for purposive community. Parsley manifestly requires from The Movement a sense of communal objective and animus and similarly Gabriel's efforts to read meaning from the sky can be seen in terms of a disquieting recognition of that existential solitude which is the human condition. Perhaps the competitive and essentially self-centred element implicit in the Protestant work ethic is, in some way, responsible for this sense of divorce from the community as a whole: certainly, nearly all of Updike's central figures are characterized by an inability to relate to others. In some respects perhaps this is a positive circumstance since many such characters also possess genuine qualities and moral convictions which set them

above the rest and account for their (fruitless) search for man's spiritual dimension. Even Skeeter, in Rabbit Redux, takes on these larger qualities as, through Updike's images, he becomes a powerful Christ figure. However, the first such character, Rabbit Angstrom, is still the most notable. "Monstrously selfish,"⁴⁵ in the words of the Reverend Eccles, Rabbit cannot conceive of himself as being in any way connected to society at large: "He wonders, is it just these people I'm outside, or is it all America?"⁴⁶ At the same time he possesses a quasi-heroic quality, a determination not to surrender his significance as a person that attracts Ruth to him: "...you haven't given up. In your stupid way you're still fighting,"⁴⁷ she says when he asks what it is she likes about him. Indeed, despite his clearly failing belief in man's exceptionalism and his almost total abandonment of a sense of quest, this positive attitude still lingers in Harry Angstrom in Rabbit Is Rich. As Thelma Harrison tells him: "You believe in people so.... You're just terribly generous. You're so grateful to be anywhere.... Its wonderful. You're so glad to be alive."⁴⁸ In many ways Rabbit must be compared to Bernard Malamud's Roy Hobbs: both are star players who fail to recognize the team nature of their particular sports; both, in the end, are engaged on unworthy quests. However, for Rabbit there is no question of regeneration, Ruth is no Iris Lemon, and ultimately Rabbit is engaged in a flight he knows to be futile.

In exactly the same way as Rabbit is trapped inside himself, gazing out uncomprehendingly at the rest of the world, so the majority of Updike's protagonists protest or display a similar inability to project their humanity onto others. When Eccles appeals to Rabbit to think of the suffering he is causing his wife, Janice, Rabbit only replies: "Well, I'm not going back to that fatal little dope no matter how sorry you feel for her. I don't know what she

feels. I haven't known for years. All I know is what's inside me. That's all I have,"⁴⁹ and even twenty years later both Nelson and Ruth are able to repeat this charge of selfishness.⁵⁰ Similarly, Peter Caldwell in The Centaur and Skeeter in Rabbit Redux are connected by an image of imprisonment in the self. "You're just so wrapped up in your own skin you have no idea what other people feel,"⁵¹ Penny tells Peter and this sentiment is closely echoed by Skeeter when he explains his selfish actions in allowing Jill to die: "Everybody stuck inside his own skin, might as well make himself at home there, right?"⁵² That this is an abiding and unresolved problem in Updike's fiction becomes obvious in The Coup, in which Colonel Ellellou[^] expresses his compulsive private vision of African dignity and independence through the nation of Kush. With single minded insensitivity Ellellou supervises the near total debilitation of a potentially wealthy nation.⁵³ In a way Ellellou[^] is Kush and his failure to respond to the needs and wants of the people in his charge, although altruistically inspired, is the most extreme and fanatical example of this failure of communication and human understanding which permeates Updike's fiction.

Clearly Updike is aware of the dangers implicit in such dissociation and, indeed, it is part of that contradictory "Yes, but" tension which fuels his work. Furthermore, in contrast to the apparently conscienceless gestures of Kerouac's or Burroughs' characters, with Updike there is a willing admission of the significance of the characters' selfish actions for others and, in the words of Tony Tanner, he "manages to show with a fair degree of impartiality and insight the damage done to society when the insurrectionary self refuses the bondage of its undertaken and imposed responsibilities."⁵⁴ By nineteen-seventy Rabbit Angstrom himself has recognized the threat that this 'insurrectionary self' poses to society and attempts to lessen the threat by arming

himself with hawkish attitudes supportive of the status quo.

Nevertheless, society continues to break down as more people become disaffected and committed to a purely selfish fulfilment:

"Everybody now is like the way I used to be,"⁵⁵ Rabbit tells his wife's lover, Charlie Stavros. In fact, Rabbit's attempt to shore up a collapsing society in Redux is as futile as his attempt to evade its constraints in Rabbit, Run. As Josephine Hendin has pointed out: "At thirty-six, a hard working linotyper, Rabbit would seem to have become his father. But it is no longer possible to live his father's life."⁵⁶ Rabbit is left impotent and riddled with guilt by the end of the second book, nearly destroyed by the attempt to maintain a responsible attitude to society and by ignoring repeated advice to "reason outwards from Number One. To you, you're Number One...."⁵⁷ Indeed, this tension between social responsibility and personal fulfilment is still with Harry, albeit in a more muted form, in Rabbit Is Rich. Thus, he attempts to wash his hands of his son because "Rabbit has decided to live for himself,"⁵⁸ but responds to the suggestion that "The boy's life is his, you live your own," by saying, "That's what I've been telling myself. But it feels like a copout."⁵⁹

Two characters who attempt to make themselves subservient to society are George Caldwell in The Centaur and Joey Robinson in Of The Farm. There are certain other similarities between them, both have connections with small farms near Olinger, one is a school teacher, the other the son of a very similar school teacher and there is clearly an autobiographical element to both. That Updike regards Conner, the misguided Warden in The Poorhouse Fair, as a preliminary study for Caldwell is an indication that the author is not altogether sympathetic to the latter character and this is underlined by the futility of Caldwell's campaign of self-debasement, demonstrated in the ineffectiveness of his actions. Despite David M. Myers'

assertion that Caldwell's self sacrifice allows each member of his family "to pursue the joy which will unite him with God,"⁶⁰ there is little evidence to suggest that anyone, least of all Caldwell's son Peter, (who describes himself deprecatingly as "an authentic second-rate abstract expressionist living in an East Twenty-third Street loft with a Negro mistress...")⁶¹ benefits from the teacher's actions. In any case these bouts of self-effacement which Caldwell undergoes are subsequently violently rejected by Caldwell himself in verbal assaults on both himself and others. Thus, when George considers his mother he speaks admiringly of her as a "super-woman" in one breath and in the next he says that she "made life a hell on earth for him [Caldwell's father]. She ate that man raw."⁶² Similarly, "the awfully nice gentleman..." Caldwell meets in the hotel lobby rapidly becomes the kind "that would walk over your dead body to grab a nickel. That's the kind of bastard I've done business with all my life: they're too smart for me."⁶³ These exhibitions of impotence and frustration demonstrate not only that submission to the notion of common good is damaging to the individual but also betrays the intrinsically egocentric nature of man: a nature so strong it cannot be contained.

Indeed, Updike often makes man's situation appear so wretched that one wonders how Howard Harper was able to suggest, in the conclusion to a study which included both Bellow and Updike, that modern American fiction shows that man "can serve in the heaven of social stability or reign in the hell of freedom. But only in this seeming hell can he find significance and salvation."⁶⁴ That Updike's men ultimately prefer the hell of freedom is indisputable but they can hardly be thought to "reign" in it. Rather, like the young Rabbit Angstrom, they find it an inhospitable environment. Neither can it be said that any of Updike's characters find significance or salvation in such freedom. They are more likely,

as in the cases of Piet Hanema and Felix Ellellou[^], to be forced to surrender all pretensions to a moral or socially conscious dimension in favour of some anaesthetized existence far removed from such crucial but debilitating concerns.

What emerges, powerfully and repeatedly, is a covert recognition of man's failure to find significance, order or meaning in life, overlaid by a preoccupation with phenomena, the sensual play of recognition and naming. Thus, if life does not culminate in the joy of Christian salvation then at least it contains the mitigating joys of experience: a state of affairs which extends beyond the characters' enthusiasm for illicit sex or the diverting trivia of a materialistic society to include the author's stylistic approach to his material. Time and again tragic recognition is averted, swept aside, by the textural richness of the prose which allows the reader quietly to abandon concern for a state of spiritual desperation in favour of a less disturbing appreciation of the narrator's evocative verbal precision. For example, when Rabbit Angstrom takes refuge in Eccles' rectory, once again in flight from the realities of his adult life,

He uses the bathroom stealthily and in underclothes curls up between the rustling clean sheets, making the smallest possible volume of himself. Thus curled near one edge, he draws backward into sleep like a turtle drawing into his shell. Sleep this night is not a dark haunted domain the mind must consciously set itself to invade, but a cave inside himself, into which he shrinks while the claws of the bear rattle like rain outside. 65

However, the following day opens with an exhibition of lyric opulence that dispels the forceful edge of fear and incipient breakdown with its calm, comforting domestic familiarity:

Sunshine, the old clown, rims the room. Two pink chairs flank the gauze-filled window buttered with light that smears a writing desk furry with envelope-ends. Above the desk is a picture of a lady in pink stepping toward you. A woman's voice is tapping the door. 'Mr. Angstrom. Mr. Angstrom.' 66

An existential terror is banished, not by the triumph of purpose or the assertion of religious belief but in a welter of triumphantly showy images and metaphors. Perhaps, as Joyce Carol Oates has suggested, with Updike "the act of writing itself, the free lovely spontaneous play of the imagination is salvation of a kind. Does the artist require anything further?"⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it is very difficult to avoid the suspicion that such salvation, whatever its merits, stands as a not altogether successful substitute for some larger salvation and operates in a way that seeks to mute a profound sense of despair arising out of the absence of this larger salvation. Thus, in Rabbit Is Rich, the chaotic, inarticulable fury which leads Nelson to attempt to crash and destroy the automobiles in his father's garage is translated into an eerie appreciation of the beauty of the tangled wreckage and the power of destruction:

...a roar of speed slam metal into metal.
That black gnashing cuts through the red.
Rabbit turns around and sees Nelson
backing off for a second go. Small parts
are still settling, tinkling in the
sunshine. He thinks the boy might now aim
to crush him against the door where he is
paralyzed but that is not the case. The
Royale rams again into the side of the
Mercury, which lifts up on two wheels.
The pale green fender collapses enough
to explode the headlight; the lens rim
flies free.

Seeing the collision coming, Harry expected
it to happen in slow motion, like on
television, but instead it happened comically
fast, like two dogs tangling and then
thinking better of it. The Royale's
motor dies. Through the windshield's
granular fracture Nelson's face looks
distorted, twisted by tears, twisted small.
Rabbit feels a wooden sort of choked
hilarity rising within him as he contemplates
the damage. Pieces of glass finer than
pebbles, bright grit, on the asphalt.
Shadows on the broad skins of metal where
shadows were not designed to be. The
boy's short haircut looking like a round
brush as he bends his face to the wheel
sobbing. The whisper of Sunday traffic
continuing from the other side of the
building. These strange awkward blobs of
joy bobbing in Harry's chest. Oh what a
feeling. 68

In spite of the joy, both lexical and emotional, which Updike invests in the episode the underlying emotion, the unexpressed motive of the incident, is surely desperate rage: as both father and son find themselves provoked beyond reconciliation by the impossibility of their situation. Recounting the event later Rabbit remarks how "I could take him into my arms. I haven't felt so close to Nelson since he was about two,"⁶⁹ but the opportunity is passed up, hostilities resume, the emotional damage of the episode only intensifies their separate miseries and mutual estrangement. The "beauty" of this incident is, in truth, a terrible beauty, a fascinated report of the powers of anger momentarily unleashed and yet Updike wraps and glosses it in scintillating prose, disarms its fury with the poetic force of description. As George Steiner has suggested, too often in Updike's writing "the letter bullies the spirit" of the narrative.⁷⁰

One area in which this sort of "compensatory salvation," an absorption with describing the physical world of phenomena and sensation, seems particularly prevalent is in the narration of sexual relationships, the frankness and sensuality of which has, from Couples on, become an almost necessary characteristic of Updike's fiction. The aura of obsessive sexual concern which emanates from these books has two sources: one is the persistent verbal aggrandizement which accompanies Updike's descriptions of sexual activity, the other an impulse from within the characters which seems to equate or replace spiritual and religious significance with the immersive pleasures of sexual congress.

The question of style has proved particularly problematic for a number of critics. For instance, in her review of Couples Elizabeth Dalton complains of the

"excessive cleverness [which] afflicts the treatment of feeling and action. The characters, even the ones who did not go to college, think and speak about themselves

with the detachment and sophistication of an analyst with a patient. Their deepest motives are articulated so constantly that insight comes to seem facile and monotonous." 71

There is something in this. Clearly, for all his efforts to render the nap of lives far removed from that of a highly educated, middle aged American novelist, Updike does tend to load his characters with perceptions and sensibilities more appropriate to such a writer than to a carpenter, a car salesman or an animator of television commercials.⁷² Furthermore, the effect of this sort of aggrandizement is occasionally bathetic as even the most perfunctory grope becomes invested with the vocabulary of a transcendent lyric vision. More central, however, are the protagonists' persistent efforts to use sex as a substitute for religious spirituality. It is a vision which, perhaps ironically echoed in the descriptions of such encounters, comments pointedly on the nature of the characters and their perception of their own humanity. As Freddy Thorne announces in Couples:

I believe there are tragic things and comic things. The trouble is, damn near everything, from the yellow stars on in to the yummy little saprophytes subdividing inside your mouth, are tragic. Now look at that fire our penny-pinching hosts broke up to save a nickel. Tragic, Listen to the wind. Very tragic. OK, so what's not tragic? In the western world there are only two comical things: the Christian church and naked women. We don't have Lenin so that's it. Everything else tells us we're dead. 73

In the second half of the twentieth century, "this hazy late age of declining doctrine,"⁷⁴ naked women are not only more attractive than stern, self-denying religious morality but also more available. They are a more viable and comforting alternative to that death recognition which prompted Robert Detweiler to observe that "Angela's comment that 'Piet spends all his energy defying death' reveals the desperate impulse behind much of his lust."⁷⁵

Given the author's religious cast of mind it is not entirely surprising to discover that religious concerns are reproduced, mirrored, in his characters' sexual relationships. One example of this is the triangular relationship of Angela and Piet Hanema and Foxy Whitman. Piet perceives his marriage to Angela (whose name has obvious symbolic overtones) in specifically religious terms, regarding being with her as "heaven" and feeling that to lose her would amount to being "damned eternally." The spiritual intensity of the marital bond is reflected in Marry Me, where Ruth and Jerry's marriage has "the stupid solidity of an unattended church..."⁷⁶ and Ruth continues to fight for her husband's rights after he has decided to leave her: "...she was his wife to the end."⁷⁷ Similar beliefs are voiced in the story "Gesturing," where the Maples' marriage, for all its faults, seems to transcend their extra-marital relationships: "...these lovers however we love them, are not us, are not sacred as reality is sacred. We are reality."⁷⁸ Even the Reverend Thomas Marshfield seems to find some vestige of transcendent strength in his marriage; far from it being destroyed by his affair with Alicia it is Alicia who is broken, trapped between "the matching jaws of a heart breaker."⁷⁹

Nonetheless the spiritual power with which these fictions invest marriage would appear to be waning. The remark made in Marry Me to the effect that "any romance which does not end in marriage fails,"⁸⁰ is contradicted by the image of marriage as a collapsing skyscraper in "Gesturing" and, in the Foreward to the collected stories of the Maples' marriage, Your Lover Just Called, Updike seems prepared to surrender the belief that marriages are somehow made in heaven when he admits: "That a marriage ends is less than ideal; but all things end under heaven, and if temporality is held to be invalidating then nothing real succeeds."⁸¹ Damningly, Clyde Gabriel, in The Witches Of Eastwick, observes that "Marriage is like two people locked

up with one lesson to read, over and over, until the words become madness."⁸² As Updike's heroes find the burden of spirituality too great to bear they turn to more earthly, earthy women. Foxy Whitman, Sally Mathias, Ms. Prynne in A Month Of Sundays, even Ruth in Rabbit, Run or Peggy Forsnacht in Rabbit Redux represent their choices of purely physical, sexual fulfilment over the spiritual fulfilment which is nearly impossible to attain: a state of affairs most pointedly recounted in Piet's physical relationship with Angela but repeatedly depicted in other books. One reason for this choice is that, as Josephine Hendin has suggested, successful sex offers the male a return of the power and significance which seems to have disappeared or been withheld from him in virtually every other sphere of life. For example, Rabbit Is Rich abounds with examples of female power and male weakness. It is the women in the Springer/Angstrom household who battle and make the vital decisions while the men wait, more or less passively, to be controlled. Harry gets the feeling that Nelson is being manipulated by the women at his wedding, that "They're selling him down the river,"⁸³ and the same weakness, or lack of control, is true of Harry's life. "What're you going to do when you run out of women to tell you what to do?" Harry asks Nelson, "Same thing you'll do. Drop dead,"⁸⁴ replies his son, indicating the extent to which men's lives are run by women. It is only in sex that Harry feels a return of the strength and drive associated with "maleness." He feels replenished, once more the conqueror, after "fucking Thelma up the ass..."⁸⁵ and sex is repeatedly seen in terms of conflict, is drawn, as in the episode where they make love among the Krugerrands, in terms of wealth and power. In as early a work as The Poorhouse Fair the challenge to the concept of natural male superiority was conceived of as a threat to the moral well-being of society:

Hook had a very clear inner apprehension of what virtue was: An austerity of the hunt, a manliness from which comes all life, so that it can be written that the woman takes her life from the man. As the Indian once served the elusive deer he hunted, men once served invisible goals, and grew hard in such services and pursuit, and lent their society an indispensable temper. Impotent to provide this tempering salt, men would sink lower than women, as indeed they had. Women are heroes of dead lands. 86

Even though that first novel was intended purely as "a caricature of contemporary decadence,"⁸⁷ the imminence of this 'disastrous' loss of male significance has subsequently become more real for Updike and has played an increasingly important part in his fiction. In a relatively early work, Of The Farm, women occupy dominant positions, as wife and mother battle for control over Joey Robinson. In this context the childlike appellation 'Joey' given to a man well into his thirties is not without significance. By the nineteen seventies Henry Bech felt himself to be witnessing "the triumph of the clitoral, after three thousand years of phallic hegemony,"⁸⁸ a remark amplified by the Reverend Marshfield's exclamation: "How superb to be a woman."⁸⁹ It is superb, however, only in a world devoid of a moral force and integrity, a world given over only to sensual gratification. With Ellelloû's surrender at the conclusion of The Coup, the reader is left with the suspicion that the fears voiced by Hook have become a reality. As the Colonel contemplates the world that awaits his children he reflects how "The Pagans pray to females. It gladdens the writer's heart to contemplate the future of his girls. The boys, he worries about. He fears they may fall, civilian casualties in the war of muchness that is certain to overtake the planet."⁹⁰ It is a suspicion confirmed by the almost total domination of men by women in Updike's latest work, The Witches Of Eastwick. This is a dominance characterized by the uniform and absolute sexual inadequacy of the men, who emerge as rather pathetic

beings, hopelessly unequal to the magical, powerful knowledge of their women.

Nonetheless, in a successful sexual relationship male power is returned and it is the possibility of this power rather than the qualities of the individual which makes the relationship attractive. Thus, Joey Robinson felt himself "in danger of smothering..."⁹¹ in his first marriage and retreated into the relative safety of a second marriage to Peggy, with whom "I skim, I glide, I am free...."⁹² This is overwhelmingly because she bolsters his failing sense of manhood, speaking approvingly of the way in which "You act as though you own me. Its wonderful."⁹³ Likewise, Piet Hanema is, at least in part, aroused by Foxy's being pregnant; her fecundity a demonstration of her susceptibility to male potency and, in Marry Me, Sally's readiness to surrender herself as an independent entity has the effect of making the man significant. As she tells her lover's wife: "I can't justify myself to you. It's not up to us, Ruth. Jerry's the man. I'm his if he wants me. But he has to be man enough to come for me."⁹⁴ Indeed this return of significance recurs in the extra-marital relationships, even if it is only at the level of reminding the participants they are alive and providing them with a hint of excitement "in a world as docilely crammed as an elevator ascending after lunchtime."⁹⁵ An attitude which reduces the relationships to a search for excitement similar to the thrill that Jerry and Sally get from drinking wine out of a broken bottle and one equally as facile.

Ultimately the significance of sexual relationships is that sex offers an escape from, or even an alternative to, the lost power of religion. The connection is made, for instance, in the following passage from Rabbit Is Rich as Harry Angstrom, leafing through backnumbers of Playboy and Penthouse, ponders upon "the Constitutional triumph of open beaver..." identifying in that "blood-flushed nether

world, scarcely pretty, an ultimate which yet acts as a barrier to some secret beyond, within, still undisclosed...."⁹⁶ The parallelling of sex and religion is quite explicit: both offer a hope of transcending that barrier of death in order to impose some meaning upon an otherwise puzzling, indeed absurd, existence. Sex offers, at the very least, a place to hide from the implications of man's reduced status and expectations in a world without God. Thus, in "A Taste Of Metal," Richard Maple, beset by images of aging, dying and disaster, shelters behind a fumble with a sexy divorcee in the wreckage of his crashed car and in Couples Piet Hanema fends off his horror of death by thinking about previous sexual conquests, thereby enabling himself to "re-enter the illusion of security that is life's ante-chamber."⁹⁷ In an age which acknowledges the illusory nature of such security, which increasingly recognizes the futility of the human condition (in Piet's words "the waste" of a life which ends in death), any palliative is acceptable. As John Lennon sang, in what may yet be recognized as an anthem for the era, "Whatever gets you through the night/Is alright."

In a world given over to such existential amnesia and diversionary self-gratification, the notions of self denial, postponed gratification and other, similar, Protestant virtues become absurd. It is, however, consistent with the animus of moral enquiry which informs Updike's writing that none of his protagonists can, successfully or easily, jettison their moral and spiritual baggage. True to the spirit of "Yes, but" which the novelist identified as central to his themes, there remains a certain relish for moral stringency and the value of human suffering; there exists a residual objection to the culture of unrestrained self-gratification. In interview, for instance, Updike has offered the following qualification to the "happy" ending of Couples:

...a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person, ceases to be a person.... I feel that to be a person is to be in a situation of tension, is to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all -- just an animal with clothes on or a statistic. 98

Furthermore, occasional flashes of ironic moral observation illuminate the apparently morally neutral position of Updike's unusually withdrawn narration with a recognition of distaste and disquiet more common to John Cheever. For example, in the middle of a description of a bathing party foursome at Darryl Van Horne's the decadence and artificiality of the scene is suddenly, tellingly, pointed up by the comparison of Van Horne's penis to "one of those vanilla plastic vibrators that have appeared in city drugstore display windows now that the revolution is on and the sky is the limit."⁹⁹ Indeed there is even something of Saul Bellow's Artur Sammler in Ruth Connant's assertion (in Marry Me) that "we all want a fancy price, just for existing."¹⁰⁰

However, such strength of moral commitment is more strongly voiced in the early books. In The Poorhouse Fair, for example, Hook insists that the expectation of pleasure has become far too great in the modern world and confounds Conner's contention that "all suffering comes upon the individual uninvited, and it all interferes with his fulfillment," by arguing that "far from opposing the existence of virtues, suffering provides the opportunity for its exercise."¹⁰¹ It is an opinion also expressed by Kruppenbach in Rabbit, Run, when the Lutheran minister attacks the Reverend Eccles for his social meddling. Kruppenbach insists that it is a priest's job only to give his parishioners a spiritual lead:

If Gott wants to end misery
He'll declare the Kingdom now....
How big do you think your little
friends look among the billions
that God sees? In Bombay now
they die in the streets every
minute.... In running back and
forth you run from the duty

given you by God, to make your faith powerful, so when the call comes you can go out and tell them, "Yes, he is dead, but you will see him again in Heaven. Yes, you suffer, but you must love your pain, because it is Christ's pain." 102

However, even at this early stage there is some sense of the age's religious ambivalence. The faith in suffering's positive values, which seems substantially shaken by the time of Marry Me and The Coup, has already been weakened since the convictions expressed by Hook in the first novel. At least Hook is a significant figure in The Poorhouse Fair, providing an active and vigorous opposition to what he perceives to be the erosion of virtue and value in society. Kruppenbach by contrast (despite his deliberate introduction into Rabbit, Run to make the single, specific point about man's humility and the necessity of accepting suffering) is completely extraneous to the action or the resolution of the novel. In spite of Rabbit's manifest need for religious support of an essentially ascetic nature Kruppenbach, although the family priest, is never considered as a source of help nor does he offer any support and, in the end, is seen to be even less relevant to Rabbit's predicament than is Eccles.

In these circumstances, then, it is interesting to note how, on several occasions, John Updike has flirted with the idea of introducing into his predominantly Protestant communities Jewish characters who are potentially strong moral arbiters. Henry Bech, Ben Saltz and even Mendelssohn, Conner's predecessor as Warden in The Poorhouse Fair, are examples of this. Bech is particularly important in that the book, as an entity, followed Couples in which Piet Hanema's religious collapse is chronicled. In Couples, with Piet Hanema's retreat into a painless anonymity, there was an apparent end to any serious convictions about the good of suffering. The descriptions which attend Ben's release from the mire and

intrigues of Tarbox seem particularly relevant to the mounting problems of conviction which were confronting Piet Hanema and, indeed, have continued to confront Updike's protagonists: he was a man who "had touched bottom and found himself at rest, safe,"¹⁰³ a man "with a life that had truly broken through."¹⁰⁴ Surely an investigation of such a man might lead to a more promising area than the anonymous suburbs of Lexington in which Piet eventually chooses to immerse himself. Such speculation is given greater currency by Ben Saltz's closing remark to Piet, "you're down now... and its a pity you're not a Jew, because the fact is, every Jew expects to be down sometimes in his life, and he has a philosophy for it."¹⁰⁵

Thus, in one way, Henry Bech might be seen as an attempt, on Updike's part, to render a more fulsome and more positive version of the human condition. There is, however, about Henry Bech a teasing ambivalence, an element of indefiniteness, that makes it difficult to establish Updike's intention with the character. For instance some critics, like Mordecai Richler,¹⁰⁶ have seen him as a not altogether friendly parody of the schlemiel while others, like Ruth Wisse, have argued that his creation brings into question the continued validity of the "twin themes of marginality and victimization, which have come to be associated in western literature with the Jew... even the goy has the formula, so enough already."¹⁰⁷

For his own part Updike also appears unclear about his intentions with Bech, seemingly wishing to make him the vehicle for some uncharacteristically stern moral statements even as he uses the character as an opportunity to indulge in an equally uncharacteristic (and somewhat unconvincing) jokiness. Certainly Bech exhibits a stern moral quality that distinguishes him from Updike's usual Protestant protagonists, being imbued with a

tendency to make indignant outbursts against perceived declining standards which in some way call upon his Jewishness. For instance, he feels able, as does Bellow's Moses Herzog, to appeal to a set of standards learned in childhood, to recall his experiences in a "predominantly Jewish" neighbourhood in an attempt to get some perspective on contemporary values.

The brownstone neighbourhoods that supplied students to the school were in those years still middle-class, if by middle-class is understood not a level of poverty (unlike today's poor, they had no cars, no credit and delivery arrangements with the liquor store) but of self-esteem. Immersed in the Great Depression, they had kept their families together, kept their feet from touching bottom, and kept their faith in the future -- their children's future more than their own. These children brought a giddy relief into the sanctum of the school building, relief that the world, or at least this brick cube carved from it, had survived another day. How fragile the world felt to them! -- as fragile as it seems sturdy to today's children, who wish to destroy it. 108

Moreover, it is only through recourse to the language of the old country, Yiddish, that Bech finds the vocabulary to summarize his attitude to the new world he inhabits.

Both rising writers came up to Bech and in all sincerity said how much they had adored Think Big.

"I just wished it was even longer," Lucy said in her lazy, nasal voice.

"I wished it was even dirtier," Seth said, snorting in self-appreciation.

"Aw, shucks," said Bech. Loving his colleagues for their alabaster attire and for having like him climbed by sheer desperate wits and acquired typing skill up out of the dreary quotidian into this apartment on high, he nevertheless kept dodging glances between their shoulders to see if his new friend in her nightie and wig were approaching to carry him off. The piano and harp, running out of white, had turned to "Red Sails in the Sunset" and then "Blue Skies." Radiant America; were else but here? Still, Bech, sifting the gathering with his inspired

gaze, was not quite satisfied. Another word occurred to him. Treyf, he thought. Unclean. 109

Despite these determined efforts to root Bech within a recognizable contemporary mode of New York Jewish fictional protagonists, not everyone has been convinced by Bech's protestations of Jewishness. Cynthia Ozick, for instance, has suggested that Henry Bech has no real existence as a Jew

because he has not been imagined. Bech-as-Jew is a switch on a library computer. What passes for Bech-as-Jew is an Appropriate Reference Machine, cranked on whenever Updike reminds himself that he is obliged to produce a sociological symptom: crank, gnash, and out flies an inverted sentence. 110

Indeed it is hard to escape the suspicion that Bech stands more in contrast than complement to the tradition Updike claims him to have been born out of. 111 His reluctance to involve himself with people: "...fearful of being burdened with more responsibilities," 112 and his profound sense of torpor, expressed in his perception "that the void should have been left unvexed, should have been spared the trouble of matter, of life and, worst, of consequences," 113 might just pass for one of Malamud's unregenerated figures (Arthur Fiedelman, perhaps). However, the lack of development, of enlightenment or hope noted by Dennis Donoghue: "...the chapters are virtually interchangeable: there is no question of development," 114 contrasts radically with the regenerative movement so central to the modern tradition of Jewish American fiction. As Bernard Sherman has demonstrated in The Invention Of The Jew, 115 the Jewish-American novel has been characterized by education and growth -- the bildungsroman and the erziehungsroman -- and clearly Bech's progress, or lack of it, through two volumes of frequently undifferentiated experience stands in direct contrast to this. 116 Indeed, in both volumes, Bech's closing sense of loathing and

futility contrasts radically with the perceptions of any of the characters of the Jewish novelists studied here, in that for all of them the involvement and commitment which Bech so fears are the very stuff of life, the elements that give life meaning.

In place of any genuine sense of Bech's Jewishness Updike trades heavily on the Joke-Jew's ineptitude, young Bech being unable to travel on trains without experiencing nausea, being unable to escape his mother's apron strings, even in his thirties lacking social graces which make him appear gauche beside a young WASP. But even these vulgar and overdrawn strokes lose the value that a genuinely comic Jewish novelist like Bruce Jay Friedman can give them as Updike arms Bech with a cutting rather than undercutting sense of humour and by the bitter tone of much of his conversation which begins to create the suspicion that Bech is, in fact, no more than the usual Updike Protestant in ethnic fancy dress.

This suspicion makes its appearance on the very first page in the form of a letter from Henry Bech to John Updike in which the former detects "something Waspish, theological, scared and insulantly ironical that derives, my wild surmise is, from you."¹¹⁷ Further remarks in the course of the book serve to amplify this suspicion. For example, Bech's "beautiful gift for stagnation,"¹¹⁸ suggests the limbo-like endings in which Updike's characters, from Rabbit Angstrom to Piet Hanema to Jerry Connant have found themselves; the "triumph of the clitoral,"¹¹⁹ speech, indicates the continuing pre-occupation with the end of a male dominated lifestyle that has concerned Updike throughout his career. The depiction of Henry Bech as little more than a displaced East European in search of a dream of lost perfection¹²⁰ seems like nothing so much as an attempt to equate him with Piet Hanema or with Rabbit Angstrom who, in Rabbit Redux, found himself on the wrong side of the gates of Eden, irrevocably stranded outside "a

lost world of blameless activity; he felt that he would never be allowed to crawl back into that world."¹²¹

In the end the picture that emerges of Henry Bech is of another of Updike's Protestant figures wearing the cloak of a schlemiel as an excuse for a shoulder shrugging surrender to life's vicissitudes: an attitude which is inadequate not only as a depiction of a schlemiel but also to Updike's own vision of humanity in view of his stated belief that an "adjusted person is not a person at all."¹²² Bech's attempts to accommodate the forces that face him by bowing before them and refusing to confront them place him alongside characters like David Kern's father in "Pigeon Feathers" or Warden Conner in The Poorhouse Fair as enemies of the life-impulse exhibited in Hook, Rabbit or Piet Hanema. Bech emerges finally as little more than a carbon copy of George Caldwell: "...a normal good-doing Protestant man suffering in a kind of comic but real way,"¹²³ but with no hope, no spirit and no genuine desire to confront and interpret the facts of his life.

Thus a theme emerges in John Updike's fiction, as his books explore the tension between the desire for moral conviction and the relief of moral torpor. It is a theme which describes the dilemma at the heart of his characters' fictive existence, a dilemma which is not thrown up by any literary weakness or failure of specification but which inheres in the fibre of the work's specific task of saying "Yes, but." It is the sort of dilemma Updike described himself as facing in the following passage and it goes to the heart of the Western liberal dilemma:

"I don't want to say that being passive, being inactive, being paralysed, is wrong in an era when so much action is crass and murderous. I do feel that in the generations that I've had a glimpse of -- I can see my grandfather at one end, and I can see my boys coming up -- there has been a perceptible loss of the sense of righteousness. But many evils are done in the name of

righteousness, so perhaps one doesn't want
it back." 124

Extrapolated, this sense of confusion encapsulates the uncertainties of the era: torn between the demands of those large, extra-personal forces that characterize unbending, unyielding righteousness and the recognition that such forces stunt and thwart human individuality, what choice can the individual make? It is a sense of confusion experienced, on some level, by all of Updike's protagonists who are, in various ways, forced to make a decision about the continued value and validity of moral imperatives and absolutes in the modern world. In essence they must decide if the rigidities such absolutes impose on the freedom of the individual are too great a price to pay for the survival of 'the system'. Typically they, like Updike in the interview, find no grounds for accommodating such contradictory forces and seem torn by the effort to contain two such irreconcilable tensions.

Something of this irresolvable tension marks every book. This is not to suggest that the refusal to indulge in explicit moralizing implies an absence of moral concern. Clearly all, or nearly all, of Updike's books have a moral question at their centre. Therefore, it is wrong to suggest, as Deborah McGill does, that in Updike's "fictive universe, moral values are suspended...." Nor is it sufficient simply to assert that

All can be understood and explained, and
no-one is responsible. Updike's novels...
are exercises in absolution that is
unearned, because intention is never
acknowledged, guilt never assigned. The
boy, having sated himself on the pie
cooling in the window, grins and says
"I couldn't help myself," For all the
failed boys who inhabit the level prairie
of Updike's fiction, we are asked to find
this explanation enough. 125

Clearly Updike's books are not efforts to "flatten" the terrain of moral concern, are not in the business of offering the

"readers a peace that passeth understanding."¹²⁶ Nonetheless, as Mc'Gill suggests, there must be some question over the way in which any work of fiction can survive without a degree of morally judgemental overview. In this context there is surely some significance to be discovered in the fact that, throughout John Updike's fiction, any such absence seems born, at least in part, out of the love and sympathy he has for middle America and its dilemma of purpose. This is the soft centre, mistaken for the spirit of "I couldn't help myself," which it is possible to detect in Updike's work. It is a 'softness' which, as much as any desire for fully realized, independent characters, causes him to shy at offering harsh, overt judgements of his characters' actions. In place of these judgements, Updike offers not "a peace that passeth understanding" but an awareness that understands only too well the frailties of the human spirit, an awareness implicit in the concept of "Yes, but" that the novelist has described as being central to his writing.

In an interview some years ago, John Updike made a striking observation: one which provides the key to his whole fictive enterprise:

You can't be satirical at the expense of fictional characters, because they are your creatures. You must only love them, and I think that once I had set Conner in motion I did, to the best of my ability, try to love him and let his mind and heart beat. ¹²⁷

This seems striking on two accounts. First the remark underlines the extent to which Updike has attempted to render dramatic, mimetic fiction, the degree to which he has sought to silence the controlling authorial voice in the name of realism. Second, it intimates very powerfully that tenderness which prompts Updike the novelist to give critical weight and sympathetic attention to characters whose values (indeed their whole lives) might seem to

render them unfit for, unworthy of, such consideration. Clearly an author can be satirical (properly and successfully) at the expense of his characters but not if he carries the great burden of sympathetic awareness, of love, which Updike manifestly has for human life and the human condition.¹²⁸ It is, ultimately, this understanding love, this comprehension of human frailty and fear that forbids satire, that prevents him lightly "assigning guilt" while at the same time providing him with both the intuition and the impetus to make fictions compellingly real and central to human experience.

1. Bernard A. Schagen, "Faith, Morality and the novels of John Updike," *Twentieth Century Literature* 24, 4, p. 386.
2. "Saul Bellow and the Literary Loan-to" first broadcast on B.B.C. Radio 3, 3 February, 1962.
3. John A. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," *Critique* 3, Spring 1962, p. 37.
4. David Thorburn and Edward Hiland, eds., *John Updike* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 91.
5. John Updike, *Swimming to Shore* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), p. 6.
6. Sarah Ellsworth *Literary Disruptions* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 34.
7. Thorburn and Hiland, p. 91.
8. Saul Bellow, *His Wife His Foot In His Mouth* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), p. 12.
9. Abbott was something of a celebrity among New York intellectuals in the early thirties. Convicted of second degree homicide, she refused Kingman, in the name of the heart, got him "screwed" by going alone. Norman Mailer and the editor of The New York Times Book Review she campaigned for his release from jail, not on the grounds of his innocence but

NOTES

1. "Cohn's Dream" New Yorker, 8 November, 1982 pp. 167-170.
2. Martin Amis, "Christian Gentleman," Observer, 15 January, 1984,
p. 48.
3. In Hugging The Shore, Updike argues that "a true critic... wishes not to praise or blame but to comprehend and explicate," (p. 686) In this, Mr. Updike fails, since his praise is unstintingly fulsome but his blame extremely rare.
4. George Plimpton, ed., Writers At Work Vol. 4 (New York: Viking Press, 1974) pp. 439 - 440.
5. Bernard A. Schopen, "Faith, Morality and the novels of John Updike," Twentieth Century Literature 24, 4, p. 526.
6. "Saul Bellow and the latterday lean-to" First broadcast on B.B.C. Radio 3, 3 February, 1982.
7. John A. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," Critique 5, Spring 1962, p. 37.
8. David Thorburn and Howard Eiland, eds., John Updike (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), p. 91.
9. John Updike, Hugging The Shore (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), p.6.
10. Jerome Klinkowitz Literary Disruptions (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p.32.
11. Thorburn and Eiland, p. 91.
12. Saul Bellow, Him With His Foot In His Mouth (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984), p. 15.
13. Abbott was something of a cause-celebre among New York intellectuals in the early eighties. Convicted of second degree homicide, his prison biography, In The Belly Of The Beast, got him "taken up" by, among others, Norman Mailer and the editor of The New York Times Book Review who campaigned for his release from jail, not on the grounds of his innocence but

because they felt he was a good writer. Abbott's creative response was to knife to death a waiter in a coffee bar only days after his release.

14. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972),
p. 140.
15. John Updike, Your Lover Just Called (Harmondsworth: Penguin,
1979), p. 120.
16. Ibid., p. 123.
17. Richard verbalizes something of this in the scene where he goes to meet his son at the station to tell him of the impending separation: "This last hour, waiting for your train to get in, has been the worst of my life. I hate this. Hate it. My father would have died before doing it to me." (p. 116).
18. In a recent radio interview Updike claimed to be "somewhat religious myself..." ("Saul Bellow and the latterday lean-to") and in reviewing an anthology of religious verse writes of its value to "us believers." ("Gathering The Poets Of Faith," New York Times Book Review, 22 April 1982, p. 1.)
19. John Updike, Rabbit Redux (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 9.
20. John Updike, Couples (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 240.
21. John Updike, The Coup (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 149.
22. Ibid., p. 9.
23. Ibid., p. 230.
24. Rabbit Redux, p. 309.
25. Hugging The Shore, p. 840.
26. John Updike, Telephone Poles (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963),
p. 72.
27. John Updike, Of The Farm (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 1.
28. John Updike, The Poorhouse Fair (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968),
p. 102.
29. Ibid., p. 18.
30. Ibid., p. 100.

31. Ibid., p. 98.
32. Repeatedly, Parsley's spiritual limitedness is stressed. He "flinches" on touching Van Horne (the Devil figure) and on making a joke, "his sickly aura widened in pleasure at this blasphemy"(p. 42.) Manifestly, he lacks the strength to sustain religious belief in a "hazy late age of declining doctrine" (p.36) and translates this waning spiritual commitment into generalized social concern. At his funeral his wife speaks "about what a caring minister Ed had been, so interested in Eastwick and its delicate ecology and its conflicted young people and all that, until his conscience... demanded he take his energies away from the confines of this town, where they were so much appreciated." (pp. 200 - 201). Afraid of being seen as "a shrill and ineffectual liberal, the feckless agent of a nonexistent God. Ed wanted to be the agent of another System, equally fierce and far-flung." (p. 43).
33. John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 248.
34. The Poorhouse Fair, p. 159.
35. John Updike, Couples (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 26.
36. Ibid., p. 95.
37. Ibid., p. 409.
38. Ibid., p. 27.
39. Ibid., p. 491.
40. By the time of Rabbit Is Rich, the momentum of Harry Angstrom's life is so low that, like the oil-starved West, he is "running out of gas." (p.3.) In these circumstances even death is no longer the terrifying prospect it once was.
41. Plimpton, ed., Writers At Work, p. 440.
42. John Updike, Rabbit Is Rich, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1982), p.443.
43. The Coup p. 120.

44. Ibid., p. 121.
45. Rabbit, Run, p. 109.
46. Ibid., p. 29.
47. Ibid., p. 76.
48. Rabbit Is Rich, p. 418.
49. Rabbit, Run, pp. 87 - 88.
50. Nelson claims that Harry "just sits there in the middle of the whole fucking world, taking and taking," and Ruth tells him "You are Mr. Bad News, honest to God. You're nothing but me, me and gimme, gimme." Rabbit Is Rich pp. 135 and 442.
51. John Updike, The Centaur (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 166.
52. Rabbit Redux, p. 288.
53. Clearly this debilitation is not malicious. No one else in the book feels as intensely about Kush the way Ellelloû[^] does, he has a dream, an ideal, of Kush as an expression of African peoplehood which surpasses and renders superfluous both the American Capitalist and Russian Communist versions of his country. Unfortunately, for the nation as much as for Ellelloû[^], the ideal is wholly unattainable.
54. Tanner, City Of Words, p. 280.
55. Rabbit Redux, p. 159.
56. Josephine Hendin, Vulnerable People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 89.
57. Rabbit Redux, p. 293.
58. Rabbit Is Rich, p. 215.
59. Ibid., p. 241.
60. David M. Myers, "The Questing Fear: Christian Allegory In John Updike's The Centaur," Twentieth Century Literature 17,2,p.81.
61. The Centaur, p. 95.
62. Ibid., p. 54.
63. Ibid., p. 153.

64. Howard M. Harper, Desperate Faith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 198.
65. Rabbit, Run, p. 167.
66. Ibid., p. 167.
67. Thorburn and Eiland, eds., John Updike, p. 54.
68. Rabbit Is Rich, p. 170.
69. Ibid., p. 70.
70. Thorburn and Eiland, p. 98.
71. Elizabeth Dalton, "To Have and Have Not," Partisan Review 36 (1969) p. 135.

Ms. Dalton also comments usefully on the illusory nature of sex in Couples, observing the false "wealth" with which the characters invest their relationships. Thus she remarks that "The copulation scenes begin lusciously enough -- 'if her touch could be believed, his balls were all velvet, his phallus sheer silver' -- but it all turns to post-coital sadness...." (P.136).
72. This is not to suggest that Updike's work suffers from a general failure of characterization. In fact one of his great strengths is the extent to which he overcomes the barriers of age, class and place in rendering such diverse characters as Harry Angstrom, Piet Hanema and Felix Ellellou.
73. Couples, p. 165.
74. John Updike, The Witches Of Eastwick (London: André Deutsch, 1984), p. 36.
75. Robert Detweiler, John Updike (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 138.
76. John Updike, Marry Me (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 84.
77. Ibid., p. 181.
78. Your Lover Just Called, p. 128.
79. John Updike, A Month Of Sundays (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 82.
80. Marry Me, p. 85.

81. Your Lover Just Called, p. 9.
82. The Witches Of Eastwick, p. 154. As with that between Piet Hanema and Foxy Whitman, the eventual marriages of the witches signal a defeat for the power of individuality, offer a less than cheering vision of marriage as the destructive subordination of self to the exigencies of mere survival.
83. Rabbit Is Rich, p. 194.
84. Ibid., p. 202.
85. Ibid., p. 430.
86. The Poorhouse Fair, p. 138.
87. Ibid., p. 5.
88. John Updike, Bech: A Book (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 119.
89. A Month Of Sundays, p. 162.
90. The Coup, p. 249.
91. Of The Farm, p. 47.
92. Ibid., p. 47.
93. Ibid., p. 82. Yet even this power is illusory, is only what Peggy allows him to have, complaining at other times of his failure to be manly (i.e. decisive) and suggesting that "I'm the first woman he's ever met who was willing to let him be a man." p. 112. (My italics).
94. Marry Me, p. 115.
95. A Month Of Sundays, p. 182.
96. Rabbit Is Rich, p. 458.
97. Couples, p. 285.
98. George Plimpton, ed., Writers At Work Vol.4, p.441.
99. The Witches Of Eastwick, p. 111.
100. Marry Me, p. 83. Despite this remark, Ruth's is clearly a minority opinion and the reader's sympathy tends to rest with Jerry and Sally who, contrary to Ruth, act in a way that suggests that no price is too fancy as a compensation for the

pain of living.

101. The Poorhouse Fair, p. 96.
102. Rabbit, Run, p. 138.
103. Couples, p. 284.
104. Ibid., p. 283.
105. Ibid., p. 464.
106. Mordecai Richler, "Porky's Complaint," London Magazine,
November 1970, pp. 106 - 108.
- Other reviews also touched upon this, including those by
Denis Donoghue and Cynthia Ozick.
107. Ruth R. Wisse, "American-Jewish Writing, Act II," Commentary,
61 (June 1976), p. 40.
108. John Updike, Bech: A Book (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.
131 - 132
109. John Updike, Bech Is Back (London: André Deutsch, 1983), p.195.
110. Cynthia Ozick, "Ethnic Joke" Commentary 50 (November 1970),
p. 107.
111. In the radio broadcast "Saul Bellow and the latterday lean-to"
Updike claimed Singer, Malamud and Bellow as the sources of
his inspiration for Henry Bech.
112. Bech: A Book, p. 24.
113. Ibid., p. 92.
114. Denis Donoghue, "Silken Mechanism," The Listener, 15 October,
1970, pp. 524 - 525.
115. Bernard Sherman, The Invention Of The Jew (New York: Thomas
Yoseloff, 1969).
116. In Bech Is Back, for instance, his experiences of Africa,
Australia and Canada merge into interchangeable parts,
suggesting an undifferentiated, valueless whole.
117. Bech: A Book, p. 9. Clearly, Updike, consciously and
deliberately, has implanted this Waspishness in Bech. In
this respect, the remark serves to fuel the belief that

Bech's Jewishness is, to some extent, parodic; is a subversive, satirical commentary on the Jewish-American genre.

118. Ibid., p. 82.
119. Ibid., p. 119.
120. This sense of loss which accompanies Bech's general malaise is most pointedly depicted in "The Bulgarian Poetess." Here, Updike has Bech describe how, in his novel The Chosen (the title itself having strong Jewish overtones), he had sought to show "a population of characters whose actions were all determined, at the deepest level, by nostalgia, by a desire to get back, to dive, each, into the springs of their private imagery." (Bech, p. 57.) Minutes later Bech and the poetess of the title are involved in a discussion about orgasm as the recovery of perfect memory and the cocktail party at which they fleetingly meet enacts, for Bech, the condition of this nostalgia for something imperfectly remembered. Throughout the party his efforts to rejoin the poetess are thwarted by the intrusion of "America: the voices, the narrow suits, the watery drinks, the clatter, the glitter. The mirror had gone opaque..." (p.59.) Clearly, like the characters of his book, Bech is the victim of a nostalgia for something imperfectly realized or understood -- something clearly owing to his own East European heritage. Nowhere else does Bech 'suffer' the same positive emotions or feel the same kind of warmth or connection to another human being.
121. Rabbit Redux, p. 296.
122. Plimpton, ed., Writers At Work, 4th Series p. 441.
123. "John Updike talks to Eric Rhode about the shapes and subjects of his fiction," The Listener, 19 June 1969. p. 862.
124. "John Updike talks to Eric Rhode....," p. 863.

125. David Thorburn and Howard Eiland, eds., p. 166.
126. Ibid., p. 165.
127. George Plimpton, ed., Writers At Work, Vol. 4, p. 446.
128. As Martin Amis has observed, Updike is "a natural celebrant... a sucker for life, one of life's biggest fans." ("Christian Gentleman", p. 48.)

Lee, records as incident arising from the...
 of the Narrative Squad. Desperate to avoid prison, Lee
 sneaks the two officers and goes into hiding but he becomes
 suspicious when there is no mention of the killing in the next day's
 newspaper. Feeling as an informer Lee telephones the Narrative Squad
 and asks to speak to either Hauser or O'Brien only to be told that
 no such people work in that department. Suddenly

I realised what had happened.... I had been
 deceived from beginning like an owl's egg
 and when I was about to slip out on the way to
 bargain.... I looked out.... After again
 would I have a key, a point of intersection....
 The door was off its hinges and out...
 Dejected with Hauser and O'Brien to a
 lamplight just past where Burin is always
 twenty-eight minutes in a room and you can
 score for you go to the white boundary of
 silver walls.... The side of the world's
 mirror, moving into the past with Hauser and
 O'Brien... showing it a network of telepathic
 bureaucracy, the metaphysics, Central Brass,
 heavy fluid indices.

Thus, I would suggest, is a key passage to any reading of The Horse
Leads or those works which follow it and in a very particular sense
 it separates Burroughs' literary method. Rigorously embracing the
 limitations of realistic, scientific fiction Burroughs' work can be
 used as an attempt to hold up a mirror to the essence of existence,
 to provide an imaginative reality which manifests and subverts our
 understanding of experience by exposing us to allegorical and
 symbolic truths.

Further, the passage offers another passage revealing key to
 Burroughs' relation to the image of the mirror. In this passage Burroughs
 for an escape from the constraints of time and physical existence

CHAPTER FIVEWilliam Burroughs:"On the Far Side of the World's Mirror"

Towards the end of The Naked Lunch Burroughs' narrator, Willaim Lee, records an incident arising from his arrest by Hauser and O'Brien of the Narcotics Squad. Desperate to avoid prison, Lee shoots the two officers dead and goes into hiding but he becomes suspicious when there is no mention of the killings in the next day's newspaper. Posing as an informer, Lee telephones the Narcotics Squad and asks to speak to either Hauser or O'Brien only to be told that no such people work in that department. Suddenly

I realized what had happened.... I had been occluded from space-time like an eel's ass occludes when he stops eating on the way to Sargasso.... Locked out.... Never again would I have a key, a Point of Intersection.... The Heat was off me from here on out... relegated with Hauser and O'Brien to a landlocked junk past where heroin is always twenty-eight dollars an ounce and you can score for yen pox in the Chink Laundry of Sioux Falls.... Far side of the world's mirror, moving into the past with Hauser and O'Brien... clawing at a not-yet of Telepathic Bureaucracies, Time Monopolies, Control Drugs, Heavy Fluid Addicts: 1

This, I would suggest, is a key passage to any reading of The Naked Lunch or those works which follow it and in a very particular sense it describes Burroughs' literary method. Rigorously eschewing the limitations of realistic, mimetic fiction Burroughs' work can be seen as an attempt to hold up a mirror to the essence of existence, to provide an imaginative reality which transforms and subverts our understanding of experience by exposing us to allegorical and symbolic truths.

Further, the passage offers another (perhaps unwitting) key to Burroughs' fiction in the image of the mirror. In his constant search for an escape from the strictures of time and physical dimension

Burroughs has proposed something very much akin to life on the far side of a mirror as, in many respects, the world he envisages is like a reversed image of the one he inhabits. In fact it can be argued that his work is not, as has often been suggested, an effort to subvert society so much as to convert it: to reverse rather than to destroy the power structure he apparently abhors. In this respect Burroughs' work has been much misunderstood. Wrongly but irrevocably viewed as part of the Beat movement there is little which is beatific about Burroughs' work, little of that cosmic generosity of spirit which informs the writings of Corso, Kerouac or Ginsberg, the other Beat luminaries. In its stead can be seen a number of disquieting elements, malign and perverse in intent, which place Burroughs firmly in the tradition of Celine and Artaud.

At the same time it would be wrong to see Burroughs as existing completely outside any American frame of reference. His fictions, most notably The Place Of Dead Roads, are underpinned by a (characteristically perverse and extreme) frontier ethic and in this significant respect Burroughs conforms to André LeVot's description of the American writer as one who turns his "back on society, to roam free and exalt the virile virtues of man facing danger and death."² Indeed, Burroughs' work may most profitably be seen as an extreme and idiosyncratic expression of contemporary American literary trends. Thus, his fractured and refractory fictions may be viewed as ultimate versions of the lexical, literary dislocations practised by the likes of Pynchon and Barthelme: the recurrent scenes of death and violence as a parodic commentary on the brutality of American Society; the rebellious and bitter antagonists of his books no more than the logical extension of that American literary tradition of the isolate hero. In fact Burroughs' work resembles nothing so much as a nightmare version of that already powerful dystopian vision evident in the work of many of

his contemporaries: writers as vitally different as Kurt Vonnegut, John Updike, Robert Coover and John Cheever.

Certainly Burroughs possesses an American dimension and writes in the American grain, but he is readily distinguishable from his contemporaries by the very extremity of his vision and therein lies his singularity. His American contemporaries may invest their characters with a sense of exclusion and rebellion, may draw discomfiting pictures of American society but none possess remotely the same degree of venom as Burroughs. Anger and disgust fairly burst out of the pages of his works, repeatedly underscoring a vision of the author's acute and tortured sense of superiority built upon the pangs of bitter isolation.

In the greater part of Burroughs' fiction the situations and dispositions of his protagonists are clearly imaginative extensions of his own situation both as an adolescent and in adulthood. In an interview in 1966 for the Paris Review, Burroughs responded to a question about his purpose in writing by saying, "I would go on writing for company. Because I'm creating an imaginary -- it's always imaginary -- world in which I would like to live."³ This remark, which is substantially repeated in an interview with Daniel Odier, presents a vulnerable, almost pathetic, picture of Burroughs which he is at some pains to keep out of his fiction.⁴ Nevertheless, elements of this image of the author as a solitary, isolated and even lonely man continually creep into his writing and appear to form the basis of his anger and disdain for society, which he repeatedly depicts as a trap for the foolish. From the beginning, in Junkie, Burroughs has painted a picture of himself as the outsider, hopelessly unfitted to the demands of social behaviour: "I saw there was no compromise possible with the group and found myself a good deal alone,"⁵ he has written, emphasizing this exclusion by remembering his childhood as "a way of life that is now gone

forever,"⁶ and eventually embracing his isolation with the declaration that "I gave up trying to be one of the boys years ago."⁷

Not surprisingly, perhaps, there is a romantic, almost 'French,' quality in this isolation that Burroughs describes: it is reminiscent of Cezanne's social gaucherie combined with the 'unacceptable' artistic ideas that contributed to his disastrous first trip to Paris in the 1860s and of the similar, though more flagrant, behaviour of Arthur Rimbaud on his arrival at Verlaine's house. Certainly, Burroughs' early work similarly dwells upon the 'vulgar' side of life, invoking his lack of hypocrisy, his 'open-mindedness' and his mental and intellectual superiority ("I read more than was usual for an American boy of that time and place...."⁸) as justification (and perhaps comfort) for his isolation. Indeed this mixture of solitariness and arrogance, which so precisely recalls the attitudes of the nineteenth century French writers after Baudelaire (and of their English imitators) is a characteristic feature of Burroughs' writing as he extends this facet of himself to those largely young and always revolutionary personae who are the nearest thing to protagonists to emerge from Burroughs' oeuvre.

Characteristically, these young men are looking for a way out of civilization and they feel, as Burroughs must have done during his St. Louis childhood, sick, diseased and rotten, although the novelist, in typically aggressive fashion, turns this into an advantage and adds it to their armoury of mental superiority and arrogance. Typical of these characters is Audrey Carsons, in The Wild Boys and Ah Pook Is Here, who is described as "eerie ghostly rotten vulnerable reckless,"⁹ and as "a thin pale boy his face scarred by festering spiritual wounds. 'He looks like a sheep-killing dog', said a St. Louis aristocrat."¹⁰ Infact, this "sheep-killing dog"

description recurs in The Place Of Dead Roads¹¹ and, as the novelist reported during a B.B.C. television programme, it was a remark made of the adolescent Burroughs himself.¹²

Such estranged and perverse figures abound in Burroughs' fiction, especially in Cities Of The Red Night, perhaps the closest thing to traditional novel that he has written since Junkie. In this, a group of young men, Noah Blake, Toby, Jerry Green, Audrey Carsons and Juan, appear as "strangers," outsiders, on a planet which they inhabit but are somehow not 'of'. A number of them come together on a pirate ship "The Great White" which, by deliberately evoking Melville's Moby Dick, may be seen as suggesting itself as an ironic counterpart to "The Pequod." It is ironic in that, taken as a microcosm of society, "The Great White" only serves to emphasize that society is nothing more than a group of strangers bound together by a mutual interest in survival and escape.

This view of society as being at odds with the best interests of the individual is, as Tony Tanner demonstrates in City Of Words, by no means unique to William Burroughs. Indeed both John Cheever and John Updike demonstrate in their work how the demands of society tend to drain vitality from the individual; constraining and restricting the very individuality by which the human being can best define himself. In common with them and in contrast to Jewish writers like Bellow, Malamud and Potok (all of whom stress the necessity and consequence of man's social dimension), Burroughs repeatedly depicts isolation and flight as the central elements of contemporary human experience. However, while there is undoubtedly regret in those descriptions of antagonism between self and society offered by Updike and Cheever, a definite sense of disappointment evident in their characters' inability to locate themselves meaningfully within society, in Burroughs writing this is not the case. In his fiction the vision of society is far more vigorous and hostile; he

is much more concerned to stress the innate isolation of the individual, describing a world in which friendship and love have no place, a world which is organized solely on the basis of need and exploitation. The belief springs from Burroughs' perception of the world in terms of the 'junk' hierarchy and of relationships in terms of the society of junkies, each of whom will sell out his confreres for heroin. Junkie is filled with descriptions of the indifference and cruelty with which the addicts use and abuse each other. The man who passes out from a drug overdose is not surprised to find his belongings have been stolen even though the thief is his partner and closest acquaintance: everyone is a potential stool pigeon and the array of characters is remarkable for its total unpleasantness and for Burroughs' contempt and dislike for nearly every one of them. In the end this community is based on mutual need and stays together only for what each one can take from others. There is never once the suggestion that any higher, less selfish motive could possibly exist, a belief which seems to spring from Burroughs' belief in the junky's "separate misery" and the conviction that "basically no-one can help anyone else,"¹³ specifically in terms of drug deprivation but with wider reference and implication for society and life as a whole.

The pseudonymous William Lee, author of Junkie, emerges (in the books that Eric Mottram has called the tetralogy) as a member of the Nova Police, a solitary friendless agent who cannot, with any certainty, identify his own colleagues. This isolation is underlined by his District Supervisor's words in The Ticket That Exploded: "In this organization, Mr. Lee, we do not encourage togetherness, esprit de corps. We do not give our agents the impression of belonging."¹⁴ A later but related character is Clem Snide "a Private Ass Hole -- I will take on any job any identity any body -- I will do anything difficult dangerous or downright dirty for a

price."¹⁵ Despite this claim Snide is manifestly on the side of the angels (as Burroughs construes them) and in the course of The Soft Machine links up telepathically with Lee in an attempt to overcome The Nova Mob. In Cities Of The Red Night Snide emerges as a major character in his own right, using detection methods which coincide with Burroughs' own splice-in and 'telepathic' techniques. The importance of these figures goes beyond their significance as further evidence of the utter aloneness that Burroughs believes to be man's lot. They are indications of how he has, on occasion, been able to fashion his alienation into something more than the languorous perversity of a minor decadent poet, indications of how he has been able to shape it into a violent, splenetic and, in places, cogent attack on what he genuinely regards as an irrevocably hostile society.

In this vision the figure of the "agent" has been of paramount importance -- far more important to Burroughs' total vision than the science fiction motif that has been so much discussed -- and in the formation of this agent-figure Burroughs has drawn heavily upon the work of Dashiell Hammett. At the most superficial level Agent K9 in Nova Express obviously echoes Hammett's Agent X9 just as Clem Snide is a blatant and not altogether unfriendly parody of Sam Spade. Beyond that, however, the connection between Burroughs and Hammett is quite strong and Ann Charters, in her biography of Jack Kerouac, records Burroughs' enthusiasm for Hammett in the late thirties and early forties.¹⁶ It is an enthusiasm perhaps induced by Hammett's early willingness to recognize dispassionately the world of drugs and homosexuality and his sympathetic treatment of the streak of madness in Ned Beaumont in The Glass Key. At the same time Dashiell Hammett was an early practitioner of that distinctly American voice which came out of the fiction of that era from writers as disparate as Hemingway, James M. Cain and Horace McCoy. This voice, vulgar and low-life in essence, must have been very welcome and attractive

to someone like Burroughs, wishing to express his disgust with and alienation from the genteel middle-class of his childhood, and it is essentially this voice and language he has used to recreate the "carny world" of The Naked Lunch: "...an integral part of America [that] existed nowhere else."¹⁷

Furthermore it is possible to recognize a similarity between Hammett's behaviourist and Burroughs' factualist style, both of which are descriptive rather than explanatory. This descriptiveness forces the reader to accept the puzzlement and confusion experienced by the narrator as he struggles to make sense of the unfolding events. It is a device which helps to enforce the sense of bemusement and alienation which is felt by the eternal outsider and in this respect the lack of plot which is evident in most of Burroughs' work has its equivalent in the turns and confusions of plot which characterize Hammett's writing. Indeed, much of Burroughs' best writing is done in this flat, clipped manner, a fact which provides the reader with another cause for regret at the amount of time and space that Burroughs has spent on innovation and experiments. For example, there is this description of a shooting in The Wild Boys: "The CIA man caught a splash of forty-five slugs right across his fat gut. He hiccuped a rope of blood and went down like a sack of concrete."¹⁸ This seems to me quite the equal of anything produced by Hammett or Chandler (the two finest exponents of "hard-boiled" detective fiction) in terms of concise language and vividness of image.

Above all, though, it is the sense of friendlessness and isolation that Burroughs has drawn from Hammett. The unnamed Continental Op. works under aliases and on his own, much as Lee and Snide do. He cannot depend on the support of his colleagues and his description of "The Old Man" (the ^{head} had of the agency who has his equivalent in 'The Chief' in The Wild Boys or the District Supervisor in The Ticket That Exploded) defines almost exactly the tone of

conditions in The Nova Police:

The Old Man was the manager of the Continental's San Francisco branch. He was also known as Pontius Pilate, because he smiled pleasantly when he sent us out to be crucified on suicidal jobs. He was a gentle, polite, elderly person with no more warmth in him than a hangman's rope. 19

As with Burroughs' junky society, friendships are fleeting and the characters make alliances and change sides purely out of expediency and with no regard for belief or convictions.

Finally and most notably there is the agent himself. Like Clem Snide, the Private Asshole, the agents behave in ways that are not socially acceptable, particularly in upholders of the law. They lie, get drunk, are discourteous or even violent towards women and do not hesitate to use the means of evil to advance their cause. Nonetheless, like the Nova Policeman Lee, their dedication to the cause is unimpeachable and they are not, at base, corrupt. For example, in the novel Red Harvest, the Op rejects the financial blandishments of Elihu Willson and fulfils the maxim of Burroughs' good-policemen, the Nova Police Officers: "We do our work and go."²⁰ In providing the model of the agent, at once amoral or immoral and contemptible yet of impeccable ideological credentials, Hammett provided Burroughs not only with the logistics of his objections to society but also with a metaphoric weapon for his offensive against it and a shaping force for his sense of isolation and alienation.

Inevitably this sense of isolation and exclusion is reflected in an unfavourable depiction of society and, ultimately, in a rejection of the possibility of community at any level. Inarguably, Burroughs' has a sense of the individual's separateness and his experiences with drugs seem to have persuaded him of the body's susceptibility to external control. This has led him to posit a division of humanity at the most basic level: "...the human body

is actually two halves. The two halves are not similar,"²¹ he suggested in an interview with Daniel Odier.

This notion of duality and division is ever-present in Burroughs' work and forms a fundamental part of his critique not only of society but of language and, indeed, life and biologic form -- as his attitude to women demonstrates. On a number of occasions Burroughs has suggested that "women are trouble,"²² and has proposed the development of single sex colonies that might allow for the development of "humanoid mutations." In part, this proposal may be an aspect of his militant homosexuality, as his curious suggestion that "there seems to be a very definite link between matriarchy and white supremacy,"²³ indicates. However, it is patently more than that, since a statement like "I think love is a virus. I think love is a con put down by the female sex,"²⁴ obviously contains a remarkable depth of unhappiness and disillusionment with life and humanity's capacity to bring to it any degree of mutual benefit. Burroughs' women, then, constitute an evil but they exist as an expression rather than a cause of the problem, threatening masculinity and male independence (in a manner reminiscent of Updike's women but with a malevolence of intent totally missing from Jamice Angstrom or Foxy Whitman). Lucy Bradshinkel, The Green Nun and the Countesses de Gulpa and de Vile exist to emasculate and enslave men, to achieve the aims of control and remove all possibilities of spontaneous (and therefore uncontrolled) action. Burroughs uses them to reflect the tyranny, violence and oppression that exist in the world and in Cities Of The Red Night he links the male/female duality of human life firmly to the concept of corruption by placing the two countesses in charge of Yass-Waddah and Ba'dan, the cities most involved with the debasement of human life.

As to society itself, Burroughs has used a number of models to suggest its innate corruption, beginning with the 'Junk pyramid.'

This structure is based on junk as the ultimate consumer product and the hierarchy which sells and distributes the drug works as a metaphor for the bureaucracy which purports to organize society. A variation on this theme has been the 'Trak' Agency in The Soft Machine, similarly dealing in consumer goods and similarly able to dictate its terms of sale to the general public. Elsewhere, "Nova flash" has been depicted as the basis of human difficulties, being an energy source created out of conflicts on which the parasitic Nova Mob are able to feed and, more recently, Burroughs has used ancient Mayan civilization to depict the controls exerted over our own society. According to Burroughs the Mayans were controlled by their priests who, through the use of a precise yet primitive calendar system, were able to control events according to the time of year, backed up, he posits, by a harsh punishment system. In a similar way, he suggests, western society is controlled by our enforced ignorance of the options and abilities available to us and our underdeveloped non-verbal communication system.

Irrespective of the relative merits of these models they all contain one essential: the control of the vast majority by a powerful minority able to send out signals or by control agents of one sort or another. It is against this perceived exploitation that all of Burroughs' writing is directed. The extent of his belief in society's desire to enslave the individual reaches surprising limits. Freeland, the Welfare State in The Naked Lunch, is as much of an infringement of liberty as is Trak Enterprises in The Soft Machine and welfare and safety legislation is attacked as violently as the millionaire exploiters in Nova Express.²⁵ In fact, the all-embracing and interfering benevolence of Freeland is indistinguishable from the corporate control of Trak in terms of the power and influence it wields over the lives of its subjects.

The disgust Burroughs evidently feels for society as an

entity spills over into a general disgust for those who comprise it, the 'straights' who have neither the intelligence nor the bravery to act against the control systems. Thus, in Junkie, the increased activity of the narcotics squad is likened to Nazi persecution of the Jews,²⁶ with all that implies by way of the complicity and indifference of the general public while, reversing the metaphor, in Nova Express he writes of the "vast suburban concentration camps of England and America...."²⁷ Equally, from the would-be hipster at the beginning of The Naked Lunch to the 'self-educated' bore in Junkie he has nothing but contempt for the straight's refusal or failure to reject a manifestly unacceptable system.

Chiefly, however, this disgust is expressed through a violent ridiculing of western society's most cherished myths and institutions -- the legal system, advanced medicine, democracy and free enterprise -- by an attempt to impute to them the decadent, 'depraved' values so often associated with Burroughs himself. Clearly, Burroughs' interest lies in reversing the accepted image, establishing the selfishness and callousness that he sees as lying at the heart of all human activities and in stripping off the hypocrisy which covers all attempts to hide this callousness. This he achieves through brutal and scatological satire, a frequently trenchant comic dimension, all too often lost on the prim and outraged reviewers of his books.²⁸

The legal system is particularly reviled combining, as it does, control and punishment, the ultimate expression of which is capital punishment. Capital punishment, particularly in the form of hanging, has obsessed Burroughs throughout his writing. The sado-erotic elements of a hanging (the ultimate degradation of another human being coupled with the uncontrolled ejaculation), with its implications for the totality of "their" mastery of the control/punishment cycle have made hanging, in Burroughs' eyes "the representative act of the human world... attended by all the hypocrisy of language and anaesthetics

of which men are capable."²⁹ Furthermore, it is indicative, for Burroughs, of the total inadequacy of the legal system which he consistently depicts as arbitrary, unfair and ultimately exploitative. Thus, from the Biologic Courts of Nova Express to the County Clerk in The Naked Lunch, the attempt to secure justice is a precarious and ill-starred venture, when a case is likely to rest on the state of the Judge's piles or the advice "be just, and if you can't be just be arbitrary...."³⁰ And of course a hanging is as much a public spectacle, an opportunity for the law to make some money, as the sheriff sells tickets for the hanging. It is this total contempt for human life and dignity that Burroughs repeatedly portrays as the central characteristic of these institutions. Just as the Judge is indifferent to the suffering he causes and the sheriff to the misery of the man about to be hanged so the police use and abuse people indiscriminately. One of Burroughs' earliest 'tilts' at the official mask of humanity was to reveal the way the narcotics squad would use and dispose of a stool-pigeon: "Sooner or later, the peddlers get wise to a pigeon and the pigeon can't score. When this happens, his usefulness to the agents is at an end, and they usually turn him in. Often he ends up doing more time than anybody he sent up."³¹ Ultimately, he has suggested, the police foster and perpetuate drugs and crime to keep themselves in work and increase their power.

If this suggestion, despite its appealing logic, has the ring of fiction to it then Burroughs' depiction of the medical profession has the aura of full-blown comic fantasy. Obviously, the "All-American De-Anxietized Man" and Dr. Benway's cure for schizophrenia (heroin addiction) are intended as satirical fables, more true in a moral sense than in any literal way. Nonetheless, these fables are intended as 'truthful' representations: the abuse, by greedy, egocentric men like Benway, of the trust placed in them is an image central to the theme of exploitation which runs through Burroughs' fiction. In some ways

it approximates more closely to his perception of society as a whole than do his Mayan Priests and addiction metaphors. Just as Doctor Benway takes advantage of the anaesthetized patient to perform his operations so do our leaders abuse our trust in their honesty and integrity; just as Benway washes his hands of his failures: "'Our failure', he says. 'Well it's all in the day's work,'"³² so are we left helpless and abused by those who purport to run the nation on our behalf.

Finally, then, there is no element of life in which we are not controlled, no way in which those in power are not able to exploit us. Even the free enterprize system, bastion and guarantee of freedom through economic necessity, turns out to be merely another form of exploitation as, in Burroughs' world, there is nothing which cannot be sold or made to yield a profit. Thus, one of the millionaires in The Naked Lunch is Placenta Juan, the Afterbirth Tycoon. As Burroughs sees it, society has marked us as cattle, to be slaughtered, skinned or milked of whatever produce the farmer/controller can take from us until we are of no further use.

As a bastion of the free enterprize ethic, America, as the home of multi-national corporations and vast stockpiles of private wealth, has been a repeated target for Burroughs' attacks on the control system. However, a wider, more basic and virulent anti-Americanism exists in much of Burroughs' work and some of his most vicious satire is at the expense of the USA.³³ Curiously, then, William Burroughs comes from solidly wealthy upper-middle class stock and his grandfather, with only a minimum of formal education, invented an adding machine and eventually founded the world-famous Burroughs Adding Machine Corporation. This example of a classically American success story, testifying to the powers of Yankee resourcefulness and opportunity, has done little to inspire in Burroughs a sense of wonder or pride in the USA. Instead, his attitude to the United States Of America

can be described, at best, as ambivalent. He has said that "America may well be the hope of the world,"³⁴ but one suspects that by that he was referring to his hope for the world -- a major disaster that could bring about the scenario projected in The Wild Boys or Cities Of The Red Night -- which America, as one of the military and economic superpowers, has the might inadvertantly to bring about. At the same time his connection with the USA has been difficult to establish in a literary or critical context. Despite his contacts with The Beat Writers of the nineteen-fifties he really stands at the far end of the ideological spectrum from them (joined only by a common 'bohemianism') and, like Edgar Allen Poe in the nineteenth century, he seems, in some respects more significant in a 'decadent' European context than he does in an American one.

Nevertheless, repeated use of his American experience to express his view of modern life mark him as part of the American scene. Thus, Tony Tanner has described him as "an important writer, concerning himself precisely with many of those themes and problems which are central to recent American fiction,"³⁵ and Richard Kostelanetz has called The Naked Lunch "a characteristically American masterpiece."³⁶ At the same time, attempts have also been made to fit Burroughs into the tradition of American literature: for Eric Mottram he "is the radical anarchist who increasingly features in American culture, from ancestors in Woolman and Thoreau through to the hipster variants of the sixties..."³⁷; while for Jeff Nuttall Burroughs appears as "the direct descendant of Henry Miller, Nathaniel [sic] West, Kenneth Fearing, Kenneth Patchen, a clear American tradition of masochistic social criticism."³⁸

Despite this and despite the Huckleberry Finn ending to Junkie, which prom~~ises~~ new territory ahead, an opening-out that arrives in the form of The Naked Lunch, it is possible to sense that Burroughs might regard being given an 'American context' with a certain amount of

antipathy, given some of his remarks about the USA. The general tenor of these may be judged by his assertion that "in America -- they absolutely intend to start a nuclear war. A bomb on New York would solve a lot of their problems."³⁹ Even the apparent playfulness of a scene in which an American housewife is surrounded by hostile kitchen implements has a malign and unfriendly belief underlying it, the conviction that America is the nadir of crass stupidity:

AMERICAN HOUSEWIFE (opening a box of Lux):
 "Why don't it have an electric eye the box flip open when it see me and hand itself to the Automat Handy Man he should put it inna water already.... The Handy Man is outa control since Thursday, he been getting physical with me and I didn't put it in his combination at all And the Garbage Disposal Unit snapping at me, and the nasty old Mixmaster keep trying to get up under my dress.... I got the most awful cold, and my intestines is all constipated.... I'm gonna put it in the Handy Man's combination he should administer me a high colonic awready." ⁴⁰

To transmit an idea of brutality or stupidity Burroughs always allows his characters' American accents and argot to become more pronounced. Accordingly, Dr. Benway performs an experiment on a patient to whom he has caused brain damage and dismisses the result with: "Get these fucking I.D.'s outa here. It's a bring down already. Bad for the tourist business."⁴¹ In Burroughs' fiction, America is continually represented by a mixture of sub-human stupidity (reaching the height of its expression in *The Complete All American De-Anxietized Man*) and inhuman callousness such as that described in Ah Pook Is Here:

Man has jumped from a second story window to escape fire. Impaled on an iron picket fence writhing there groaning from his ruptured guts. A fat American cop chews gum and watches impassively. The photographer is busy with light meters... 'Pull his head back will you Mike. I want a shot of the face before the medics get here with morphine.'
 The cop reaches out and grabs the man brutally by the hair and jerks his head back. ⁴²

Not only is this mixture perceived by Burroughs to be an evil characteristic of America, it is for him an evil peculiar to it. In The Naked Lunch he asserts that "America is not a young land: it is old and dirty and evil before the settlers, before the Indians. The evil is there waiting,"⁴³ an analysis which perhaps represents the ultimate contemporary disavowal of the American Dream, a consummate expression of the dystopian vision which has afflicted post-war American fiction. In Burroughs' fiction, 'straight' America's most eloquent and typical representative is the redneck Southerner, the right wing Bible belt capitalist riddled with prejudice and a total lack of compassion. John Stanley Hart, in Ah Pook Is Here, comes from such stock and his insatiable desire to control and exploit is matched in spirit, if not deed, by his compatriots throughout Burroughs' books. Particularly biting is his treatment of the redneck's traditional racial prejudice: "I wanna say further that Ahm a true friend of the Nigra and understand all his simple wants. Why, I got a good Darkie in here now wiping my ass,"⁴⁴ a southern Senator boasts in The Soft Machine while in The Naked Lunch rednecks set fire to a Negro and indulge in antisemitic outbursts.

Racial prejudice in the old slave states brings Burroughs back to his constant preoccupation with the control of human beings on a wider scale: it is after all, an American ad-man who tries to turn the events of The Ticket That Exploded into saleable, marketable commodities: "You see the action, B.J.?"⁴⁵ In this respect America appears as the home of control: "America is not so much a nightmare as a non-dream... a move to wipe the dream out of existence. The dream is a spontaneous happening and therefore dangerous to a control system,"⁴⁶ Burroughs once said and, in The Wild Boys, he goes on to depict the USA as the master of the "CONTROL GAME." In the following passage the capacity to exploit a situation is matched only by a ruthlessness and dumb, aggressive arrogance that is, in Burroughs' eyes, uniquely American:

'When you want the job done come to the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. AND WE CAN TURN IT IN ANY DIRECTION. You Limey has-beens....' He points to a battery of old gray men in club chairs frozen in stony disapproval of this vulgar drunken American. When will the club steward arrive to eject the bouncer so a gentleman can read his Times?

'YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A BANANA REPUBLIC AND REMEMBER WE'VE GOT YOUR PICTURES.'

'And we've got yours too Yank,' they clip icily.

'MINE ARE UGLIER THAN YOURS.'

The English cough and look away fading into their spectral clubs, yellowing tusks of the beast killed by the improbable hyphenated name, OLD SARGE screams after them.... 'WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS A BEAUTY CONTEST? You Fabian Socialist vegetable peoples go back to your garden in Hampstead and release a hot-air balloon in defiance of a local ordinance delightful encounter with the bobby in the morning. Mums wrote it all up in her diary and read it to us at tea. WE GOT ALL YOUR PANSY PICTURES AT ETON. YOU WANTA JACK OFF IN FRONT OF THE QUEEN WITH A CANDLE UP YOUR ASS?' 47

Again Burroughs uses the sergeant's language to suggest an uneducated, semi-literate America, a barbarian nation bent on destruction and interested only in demonstrating its own power. This recalls those similar characters in The Naked Lunch, nightmare characters who formed "an integral part of America and existed nowhere else."⁴⁸

The hatred he feels for this utterly hostile culture has tended to manifest itself in terms of lampoonery aimed at America's most cherished self-images. This frequently causes his work to read like one of Ed Sanders' exercises of 'épater la bourgeoisie' but there is a far less playful intent in Burroughs' work.⁴⁹ He is attempting to discredit and destroy the self-perpetuating and self-generating myths behind such notions as "the American way" and "the land of the free." When, in "When Did I Stop Wanting To Be President" (a title which, in itself, declares Burroughs' rejection of conventional American ambitions) he reports that his childhood ambition was to be a corrupt Commissioner for Sewers he is making an observation about

American society which not only suggests that it works by corruption but that it is, literally, a lot of shit. Thus, he posits a rupturing of the sewage system through substandard work and materials ("I have made a deal on the piping which has bought me a thirty-thousand dollar home") which brings

sullen mutters of revolt from the peasantry; "My teenage daughters is cunt deep in shit. Is this the American way of life?" I thought so and I didn't want it changed, sitting there in my garden, smoking the Sheriff's reefers, coal gas on the wind sweet in my nostrils as the smell of oil to an oil man or the smell of bull shit to a cattle baron. I sure did a sweet thing with those pipes and I'm covered too. What I got on the Governor wouldn't look good on the front page, would it now? 50

Once again, presumably, Burroughs does not wish to be understood literally but as one who offers as a moral truth couched in the terms of a contemporary fable. In a similar way, he has sought to destroy through parody the gallant, macho image of the USA by 'cutting' "The Stars and Stripes" into scenes of cowardice and panic, as in Nova Express, where the Captain and crew of a sinking ship pose as women in order to get into the life boats.

Perhaps the most flagrant, certainly the most scurrilous, example of this type is "Roosevelt After Inauguration", a section originally deleted from The Yage Letters for fear of charges of obscenity or libel or both. In it, Roosevelt is accused of "such vile and unrestrained conduct as is shameful to speak of."⁵¹ For Burroughs, Roosevelt stands as an archetype of American values but once again, as with his picture of the police, he is at pains to strip away the perceived hypocrisy and stress the self-indulgence and depravity which attends those who assume the mantle of power. Roosevelt's alleged actions, in filling the White House with repulsive criminal-types from the American underworld, is reported with a mock-disapproval by Burroughs: a tone reminiscent of de Sade's in The Misfortunes

of Virtue and with the same intent. In each instance the writer is seeking to convey his active approval for that which he affects to deplore as, in Burroughs' case, Roosevelt brings the machinery of American government to the verge of collapse and reveals that government for the seat of debauchery and inhuman behaviour it has been all along. Unmistakeably, in view of the descriptions of the mutating humanoid species in The Wild Boys and elsewhere, Roosevelt's closing words echo precisely Burroughs' own intent in his writing: "'I'll make the cocksuckers glad to mutate, ' he would say, looking off into space as if seeking new frontiers of depravity.'"⁵²

Ultimately, a vision of Burroughs emerges as a character in an old woodcut which depicts the horrors of hell-fire. He seems like one of the demons, armed with a long fork, pushing the sinners he has helped entrap into the eternal fire and capering with delight. His own vision of what America should be like is so close to that fire that it rather undercuts his complaint that the USA is "transforming this planet into an annex of hell."⁵³

Beneath these bitter and scabrous attacks on the sacred values of Western society, indeed of civilization itself, there lies (or has lain, in recent books Burroughs' vision has been far less ambitious) an apparently revolutionary desire to subvert the whole social process. Much of Burroughs' work speaks of the need to destroy society in order to free the individual, to break down the "control lines" that hold people together and limit their sense of what degree of freedom is possible. The breaking of these "control lines" can be achieved by acting to remove man's physical limitations, typically through biological devolution or alteration. However, the main way for Burroughs has been by a number of methods seeking to break the tyranny of verbal communication and the limits it imposes on human thought processes.

From the first book, Burroughs has been concerned with the

possibility of 'sending': the exercising of control over the brain from outside, and with how "sending" can be combatted:

What I look for in any relationship is contact on the non-verbal level of intuition and feeling, that is, telepathic contact. Apparently, I am not the only one interested in yage. The Russians are using this drug in experiments on slave labour. They want to induce states of automatic obedience and literal thought control. The basic con. No build-up, no routine, just move in on someone's psyche and give orders. 54

Subsequently, much of his energy and time have been spent in trying to alert people to the dangers for freedom which are implicit in the whole concept of language:

The word of course is one of the most powerful instruments of control as exercised by the newspaper -- and images as well, the two together of course... Now if you start cutting these up and rearranging them you are breaking down the control system. Fear and prejudice are always dictated by the control system.... 55

The word is central to our bondage: it limits the images we have access to or, in the case of abstract or 'official' language, denies us access to images at all.⁵⁶ In the word Burroughs detects that duality and division which is so debilitating in society: "The 'Other Half' is the word. The 'Other Half' is an organism. Word is an organism.... The word may once have been a healthy, neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence."⁵⁷ It is this option of silence, through non-verbal communication, that is the basis of Burroughs' 'revolutionary' counter-thrust against control. Silence, as he has paradoxically indicated in interviews, is the desirable state since it precludes the possibility of word-control and accordingly the bulk of his writing has sought to bring about or suggest the demise of the word:

What scared you all into time? Into body? Into shit? I will tell you:

"the word." Alien word "the." "The"
 word of Alien Enemy imprisons "thee"
 in Time. In Body. In Shit. Prisoner,
 come out. The great skies are open.
 I Hassan i Sabbah rub out the word
forever. 58

The chief weapon Burroughs has proposed to use in this way has been "Cut-Up," a 'system' of producing literature for which some fairly extravagant claims have been made. Basically, "Cut-Up" consists of slicing up one or more pieces of writing and rearranging them in a random fashion. "Fold-In" similarly consists of folding up different articles and then placing them side by side, as if reading a newspaper from left to right across the columns. This not only breaks down the old control lines by which 'they' manipulate the reader but also yields wonderful, new meanings. In The Job Burroughs claims that

I would say that my most interesting experience with the earlier techniques was the realization that when you make cut-ups you do not simply get random juxtapositions of words, that they do mean something, and often these meanings refer to some future event.... I have seen enough examples to convince me that cut-ups are a basic key to the nature and function of words. 59

However, this principle of revelation through randomness has been racked with self-defeating contradiction. In the first place Burroughs has continued to exercise control, not only over the selection of material for cut-ups but over the selection and publication of the results, thereby reintroducing the notion of control into the system. Secondly, the Cut-Up manifesto, Minutes To Go, announces its intention in a poem, admittedly by Brion Gysin, which eschews the use of cut-up, presumably for the sake of clarity of intent.⁶⁰ Eventually, even Burroughs has become somewhat disenchanted with Cut-Up, complaining that he left "too much rather undifferentiated cut-up material,"⁶¹ in his early books. Nonetheless, both he and Gysin still hold that the system has validity and a more limited and selective use of it has survived in the books up to Cities Of The Red Night and

The Place Of Dead Roads.⁶² At the same time, his campaign against the word has extended to the projected use of animal whistles and chirps by devolving humanoid species (In The Wild Boys) and a growing faith in the strengths and possibilities of replacing the written word with a pictorial system, as attempted in The Book Of Breeething. Neither idea seems to have caught the avant-garde imagination in the way that Cut-Up did. Nor do they seem to offer him any genuine hope of rubbing out the word, a venture which even Burroughs seems prepared to admit was rather larger and more complex than he allowed: "I don't think when I said that I had any clear idea as to what it would involve, or even what words were. I have a much clearer idea now, as to what would be involved, but its something pretty drastic."⁶³

Elsewhere, people have tended to be less than sympathetic toward Cut-up: perhaps basing their impatience in a widespread belief that Burroughs' experiments have proved to be more deadening than enlightening and many readers must feel drawn to agree with remarks like the one made by David Lodge to the effect that "Nova Express, whatever else it may be, is a very tedious book."⁶⁴ Even the author himself would appear to be in agreement with this particular observation since he has, with regard to his over-use of experimental techniques in that particular book, admitted that "I don't feel that Nova Express is in any sense a wholly successful book."⁶⁵

Tellingly, Gregory Corso, one of the contributors to the first cut-up book, Minutes To Go, became disillusioned with the whole venture which he described as "uninspired machine-poetry."⁶⁶ Ultimately, Cut-Up has been a failure, and a costly one for Burroughs personally, drawing attention away from what he has to say in a flurry of concern about the way he is trying to say it. Too often Cut-Up has simply not worked and, when it has, has worked in a way contrary to Burroughs' intentions. As Ihab Hassan has suggested, Cut-Up is most effective when the method

is used both cannily and sparingly. Catch phrases acquire force because they are forced into sudden proximity with other slogans.... The shock of surprise is a contrived shock, and the method turns out, in this case, to be more cerebral than Burroughs admits. Its chief value lies not in atomizing language but rather in disclosing the connections between the separate facts of outrage in our time. 67

The violence which Burroughs seeks to do to language reflects the violence he sees as natural to society and as necessary to its overthrow. In seeking to dismantle language he is, in Peter Lewis' words, "doing dirt on human life..."⁶⁸ by attempting to destroy "man's supremely distinguishing feature...." And yet, despite wishing us back to a pre-civilized state of development, to an era of hunting packs, chaos and savagery as envisaged in The Wild Boys, Burroughs apparently does not see this massive lack of faith in human possibility as a negative or pessimistic judgement: "...I don't feel that my characters, or the books in which they appear, are reflecting a mood of despair,"⁶⁹ he told Daniel Odier. However, the despair is surely there and can be summarized in a remark he once made, also to Daniel Odier: "I don't think there is room for more than one person, that is, one will, on any planet."⁷⁰

The truth, as Richard Kostelanetz has suggested, is that "Burroughs without his compositional methods can produce better prose than Burroughs-cum-paraphernalia...."⁷¹ it is worth recording that later books, notably Cities Of The Red Night and The Place Of Dead Roads, rely on a far more conventional sort of intertextuality than Cut-up, frequently juxtaposing event and cultural echo, drawing upon and quoting from widely differing cultural sources.⁷² Nonetheless it is the supposedly experimental nature of Burroughs' prose that has won him much critical acclaim and it would seem that it is his abandonment of literary convention as much as his 'message' which has won him the support of the so-called counter-culture. From the Beat

Generation and the British Underground as depicted in Jeff Nuttall's Bomb Culture to the rock music culture of Rolling Stone in the seventies, Burroughs has served as a dark, rather mysterious father-figure, an Alternative Culture leader.⁷³ Yet, on examination, there is little that is genuinely revolutionary in Burroughs' style. "Cut-up," is, in fact, nothing more than an updated Dada -ist device and his idiosyncratic use of capital letters hardly seems revolutionary in the context of a writer like e.e. cummings. Beyond that, Burroughs' 'original' stylistic devices merely amount to the re-creation of regional American and Spanish-American accents and a fondness for ellipses and dashes which serve to echo the 'unfinished' nature of conversation and add to the staccato, discontinuous effect of his subject-matter. Here again, these devices are hardly innovative belonging, as they do, to the 'local colour' style of American writing popularized by writers like Bret Harte, Josh Billings and Joel Chandler Harris and to the pulp-paperback genre of American fiction of the late nineteen-twenties and thirties, notably that of James M. Cain and Horace McCoy.

There is, in fact, very little that could be considered revolutionary in Burroughs' style: as James E. Tanner has observed, "it is interesting to note that he seldom violates the graphic requirements -- linearity, continuity, uniformity of English prose...."⁷⁴ This is not to say that Burroughs has no ability as a writer: he can write with remarkable power and clarity and possesses a considerable comic talent. It is simply that, as an innovator, an experimenter, his style has hindered rather than assisted the expression of his fictive imagination.

Clearly William Burroughs differs, in a number of respects, from the other writers considered here. It is, perhaps, a difference dramatically and over-theatrically underlined by his stylistic idiosyncracies but it exists nonetheless. It is, above all, his

contemptuous assessment of human worth and savage indictment of human society that distinguishes Burroughs, particularly from the Jewish writers, all of whom display a fundamental belief in the value of man as a social being together with a concern to salvage, preserve and honour all that is noble or estimable in human civilization. To a certain extent this also distances him from Updike and Cheever, both of whom can be seen as honouring, through their writing, the liberal, humanitarian virtues of western society even as they show how that society increasingly debases and devalues the individual (as in the case of Lemuel Sears or Harry Angstrom) by its insistent and relentless pressure to conform and submit. For Burroughs "humanitarian" virtues have no value and although there is about the work of both Cheever and Updike a cast of social pessimism absent from or only sporadically present in the writing of Bellow, Malamud or Potok the intensity of that pessimism is significantly greater in Burroughs' fiction, is far more extreme and violent. His vision of the individual, for instance, is darkly pessimistic, as may be observed from his understanding of what he has termed "the Algebra of Need."⁷⁵ Whether describing the drug pyramid or political or religious hierarchies, the individuals in Burroughs' world are always held in thrall and their ultimate purpose is to feed the need for power which exists at the apex of the power pyramid. As this need is, characteristically, a need to preserve and extend the control exerted over the pyramid, the futility and absurdity of humanity cannot be over-emphasized. In The Naked Lunch Burroughs explains: "you see control can never be a means to a practical end.... It can never be a means to anything but more control...."⁷⁶ It is a belief which has led him to make some apparently radical propositions for freeing the individual from restrictions of all kinds and has caused him to reject 'orthodox' revolutionary models as being nothing more than replacement control systems. Whether his own models are genuinely any different in their approach to control is something I

want to turn to later, something central to my conviction that Burroughs' books merely show us life on the far side of the world's mirror.

However, behind these proposals there runs a vein of despair regarding the possibility of freedom for the individual which is present in all of Burroughs' writing and which seems to spring out of an anger at the restrictions which the mortal body places upon the mind. In interview Burroughs has argued "that free men don't exist on this planet at this time because they don't exist in human bodies. By the mere fact of being in a human body you're controlled by all sorts of biologic and environmental necessities."⁷⁷ In fact, for Burroughs, there is no possibility of freedom outside the realm of chaos and formlessness to which it is nearly impossible to escape. In the most profound sense man is imprisoned and, as the word is the key which locks the cell, so the cell itself is the body. Word and body are specifically linked in this context in Nova Express: "What scared you all into time? Into body? Into Shit? I will tell you: 'the word'"⁷⁸ Frequently the body is depicted as an entrapment of the individual and not really part of him, as in The Naked Lunch where a character is described as "wearing a misshapen overcoat of flesh."⁷⁹ Here it has become a garment, an addition, and one which performs no more helpful a function than does a straitjacket or handcuffs.

In fact, Burroughs' pessimism concerning the human condition is characterized by his insistence on the physical existence of deliberate and active disabling factors to human freedom. These imprisoning forces take on an actual presence which contrasts with, say, Potok's vision of a world in which humanity itself acts to define the condition of human life. For Burroughs society is not even accidentally harmful but is prey to "innumerable gods" who have malevolent intentions. He has remarked that "I don't think anything happens in this universe except by some power -- or individual -- making it happen. Nothing happens of itself,"⁸⁰ and this feeling is extended to cover even inanimate

objects and substances. Even heroin is given a physical presence in the otherwise narrowly realistic Junkie: it 'haunts' an area and continues to dwell in a part of a city long abandoned by junkies.⁸¹ Furthermore it "takes hold"⁸² and eats at the bodies of its victims: he reports of one of his acquaintances that "there was not much left of Nick. His constant, unsatisfied hunger had burned out all other concerns."⁸³

This simplistic, almost superstitious, belief in the physicality of what are essentially abstract ideas and effects is one of the reasons why Burroughs has been so at home amid the space monsters in the predominantly escapist mode of science fantasy. It has enabled him to insist upon the literality and actuality of "senders," characters able to issue and enforce their orders telepathically on others, and also of a scheme to suppress (for unspecified reasons) a cure for the common cold. The manifest oddity of such beliefs are placed in context by some of Burroughs' other control and conspiracy theories. Some of the more appealing of these include the belief that the income tax laws were passed to prevent more people from becoming very rich, thereby concentrating corporate wealth and power in relatively few hands, and his contention that the Harrison Narcotics Act outlawed drugs because through drugs the U.S. control machine could be unmasked. In Ah Pook Is Here Burroughs even goes so far as to suggest that the passing of the Oriental Exclusion Acts sprang from a fear that the Chinese language, "which allows for periods of silence and undirected thought..."⁸⁴ might prove unprogrammable for American control forces, unlike the English language which is eminently suitable for the purposes of control.

Unfortunately for Burroughs, his apparent willingness to conduct his arguments by recourse to 'Flash Gordon' style plots and characters tend to undermine what frequently promises to be trenchant criticism on the subject of human bondage. In The Naked Lunch, for instance, he uses his considerable comic talents to attack the world's major

political and religious groupings before being sidetracked by the repeated hanging episodes which dubiously seek to establish "the representative act of the human world as... the erotic act of killing...."⁸⁵ Nova Express similarly opens promisingly, castigating "you powers behind what filth deals consummated in what lavatory to take what is not yours. To sell the ground from unborn feet forever --,"⁸⁶ before collapsing into an over-long catalogue of Cut-Up, much of which is also used in Dead Fingers Talk.

In place of any such concerted attacks on capitalism, communism or Christianity, Burroughs has preferred, too often, to draw his battle line along the broad plain of the generation gap. However, unlike J. D. Salinger or even Chaim Potok he has not truly used the troubled period of adolescence and adolescent rebellion as a way of examining and criticizing the moral flaccidity of the adult world. Rather he has sought to support and encourage potential unrest among the young as an end in itself, suggesting for instance, in 1969, that "it is now virtually a crime to be young."⁸⁷ There is nouseful interpretation that can be put on such a statement, coinciding as it did with a time when the young were achieving greater political and economic power than they had ever had before. In fact, this supposedly revolutionary and oppressed generation has, in America at least, ultimately proved remarkably supportive of society. The 'New Left,' encompassing the Hippie drug-culture, the SDS and even The Weathermen, has signally failed to live up to its revolutionary promise, as the rehabilitation of Tom Hayden and the utter transformation of David Stockman indicate.

Just as Burroughs' prognoses on the nature of the barriers to human freedom are seen to be undermined by poor, occasionally facile, judgement so are his plans for realizing this freedom disabled by the implausibility and fictive "thinness" of his projections. Indeed, given his belief that free individuals "do not exist in human bodies," there is little hope of achieving any real freedom and the attempts that

Burroughs has made to depict such freedom have done little to suggest that there is anywhere else worth going. Obviously, the more fantastic elements of his writing, such as the mutating and reproducing subspecies in The Wild Boys or the "Virus B-23" which "brought about sexual frenzies,"⁸⁸ in Cities Of The Red Night, can be disregarded as nothing more than private and perverse sexual fantasy. It is, however, less easy to ignore the contradiction and failings which underline the broad thrust and direction of much of his work.

The world which Burroughs has consistently attacked and sought to escape from is one marked by cruelty and exploitation. Despite this, he has never, convincingly, succeeded in portraying his heroes as people capable of constructing new societies free of precisely those defects, and it is in this sense that one begins to feel Burroughs' fictive world is merely a mirror image of the one he, apparently reluctantly, inhabits. In Cities Of The Red Night, for example, he hurries over the use of women as forced child bearers to the homosexual warrior hordes by explaining that "they all receive a handsome dowry should they wish to marry..."⁸⁹ and accounts for the revolutionaries' creation of new working classes by saying that "the Indians are offered good pay to work in our ever-expanding shop...."⁹⁰ Such rationalizations inevitably have a hollow ring. Apart from the unsettling sight of the antimaterialist Burroughs throwing money at the exploited in such a cavalier manner, the projects sit ill at ease alongside the revolutionaries' society in which the paramount right is "your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing under laws to which you agree...."⁹¹ Moreover, there is little else in the behaviour of the revolutionaries to authenticate such caring and magnanimous treatment. On the contrary, they demonstrate an indifference to, even an enthusiasm for, human suffering that surpasses much of that imputed to their enemies. Barely a page after offering the Indians such beneficial and enlightened terms of

employment, Noah Blake and his companions come upon and capture one of the enemy: "We then beat the man unconscious and threw him into the harbour and watched him sink."⁹² Such harshness is characteristic of Burroughs' heroes, one of whom, for example, describes an assassination as "easy, greasy and lots of fun."⁹³

All of this implies a double standard at work and nowhere is this more obvious than in the following two examples of a burning. The first, in The Naked Lunch, concerns a bunch of rednecks:

They burned that ol' nigger over in
Cunt Lick. Nigger had the aftosa
and it left him stone blind....
So this white girl down from Texarkana
screeches out:
"'Roy, that Ol' nigger is looking at me
so nasty. Land's sake I feel just dirty
all over.'
"'Now, Sweet Thing, don't you fret yourself.
Me an' the boys will burn him.'
"'Do it slow, Honey Face. Do it slow.
He's give me a sick headache.'
"'So they burned the nigger and that ol'
boy took his wife and went back up to
Texarkana without paying for the gasoline
and old whispering Lou runs the service
station couldn't talk about nothing else
all Fall: 'These city fellers come down
here and burn a nigger and don't even
settle up for the gasoline.' 94

This, Burroughs appears to be suggesting, is the depths to which right wing Bible-belt Christianity has allowed humanity to sink. In

The Wild Boys there is another burning:

"They rush in anywhere nice young couple
sitting in their chintzy middle-class
living room when hello! yes hello! the
gas boys rush in douse them head to foot
with a pump fire extinguisher full of
gasoline and I got some good pictures
from a closet where I had prudently
taken refuge. Shot of the boy who lit
the match he let the rank and file slosh
his couple then he lit a Swan match face
young pure, pitiless as the cleansing
fire brought the match close enough to
catch the fumes. Then he lit a Player
with the same match sucked the smoke in
and smiled, he was listening to the screams
and I thought My God what a cigarette ad...." 95

This time the tone is unmistakeably approving. In any case, Burroughs' position on this is made manifest by his admission that he finds The Wild Boys scenario "desirable. Yes, desirable to me."⁹⁶ Similarly, his apparent opposition to the practice of 'sending' as being antithetical to total human freedom is undermined by his enthusiasm for Hassan i Sabbah. This character, who appears in a number of Burroughs' works, was historically the leader of a twelfth century band of terrorists operating throughout the Islamic Empire. Burroughs approvingly suggests that Hassan controlled his assassins by means of telepathy and drugs from his near-impregnable stronghold in Alamout yet is apparently unaware of how close this brings Hassan to being a 'sender' operating the kind of C.I.A. network that he elsewhere deplores. The determining factor for Burroughs, evidently, is not that of control and exploitation opposing freedom but of whose side the exploiter is on. Hassan i Sabbah as a rebel against Islam is, therefore, a good exploiter in the way that the Wild Boy performs a good burning -- one directed against 'straight' society.

The true extent of Burroughs' belief in freedom and tolerance can be demonstrated by the advice on dissidents he offers the revolutionaries in Cities Of The Red Night: "...as soon as these individuals are discovered, either by advance intelligence or by on-the-spot observation, they will be killed on any pretext."⁹⁷ It is advice which also illuminates the nature of the escape William Lee achieves at the end of The Naked Lunch, an escape to the "far side of the world's mirror...."⁹⁸ In affecting such an escape, Burroughs does not seek to alter materially or improve the world but, rather, to re-define the power balance in favour of those like himself. The eternal outsider, he wants to come inside by reversing the image, thereby moving from his perceived position of exploited to one of undoubted exploiter. Ultimately, Burroughs does not seek to end or mitigate the malign influences he feels are at work in the universe, merely to enlist

them on his side.

Ultimately, the picture which emerges of William Burroughs stands in stark contrast to the accepted wisdom about him. Rather than engaging in any genuine attempt to alter our perceptions of man in society, Burroughs has been content simply to posture and attitudinize, to become something of a literary counterpart to Andy Warhol.⁹⁹ As Leslie Fiedler somewhat tentatively suggested in Waiting For The End, much of Burroughs' writing is fraudulent. He has set himself up as the eminence-grise of a literary movement with which he had no sympathy or points of alignment and as the herald of a youth movement in a generation with which he had little genuine contact and which really never existed in the form and colours he described. Finally, and most significantly, he has not believed some of the ideals he has overtly supported and has not been the revolutionary he has been pleased to pose as being.

He reveals himself, finally, as a decadent. Throughout his work there is a self-regarding complacency in his apparent misery and frustration, a sense of his belief in his own superiority evident from the very first page of Junkie.¹⁰⁰ It is a mood which is encapsulated by Josephine Hendin's description of his "smug vindictive fury."¹⁰¹ There is a certain resemblance to Baudelaire in his celebration of the perverse, his splenetic outbursts and his insistence on the existence of an invisible world which shapes and dictates the events of our own but more pronouncedly, as Malcolm Bradbury has observed, there is a similarity to the 'Decadent' writers of the last years of the nineteenth century or to that of a minor English novelist, Denton Welch.¹⁰² Specifically, Burroughs' work shares with theirs a nausea at being alive which manifests itself in "a sense of overwhelming sickness, belief that life lacks meaning and human significance. It portrays sexual deviance and violence in the context of boredom with man as man...."¹⁰³ that cannot be disguised by a superficial appeal to

change the future. The superficiality of this appeal is made clear by the abrupt and apparently pointless about-face which closes Cities Of The Red Night. Having charted the victory of the rebels over the oppressive colonialist regimes in both Africa and South America, Burroughs suddenly develops 'cold feet' about the victories just as they are within his grasp:

I didn't want to write about this or what followed. Guayaquil, Lima, Santiago and all others I didn't see. The easiest victories are the most costly in the end. I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker. Let others step through. Into what bigger and bigger firecrackers? Better weapons lead to better and better weapons, until the earth is a grenade with the fuse burning. I remember a dream of my childhood. I am in a beautiful garden. As I reach out to touch the flowers they wither under my hands. A nightmare feeling of foreboding and desolation comes over me as a great mushroom-shaped cloud darkens the earth. A few may get through the gate in time. Like Spain, I am bound to the past. 104

It is as if Burroughs is regretting the combative tone, not only of this book but of all his work, and implicitly rejecting the victories he has described in the later novels. The most notable fact, however, is the tone of the last paragraph which brings together familiar 'decadent' themes like flowers, decaying beauty and man's poisonous influence on the world, together with a sense of man's ultimate doom and the particularly tragic implications of this for the artist.

This tone of cloying, cosy regretfulness is amplified in The Place Of Dead Roads where such familiar ingredients as space and time travel, homosexual warrior gangs and ruthless brutality are undermined by the wearied note of melancholy at the novel's core. Indeed, the entire third section of the novel, "Quien Es," records the collapse of Kim Carsons' efforts, the impossibility of escaping mortal and social confines.¹⁰⁵ Despite his time-travelling efforts at revolution Kim is "deadlined" to meet his pursuer, Mike Chase, at Boulder, Colorado on September 17, 1899 and his defeat is ultimate and total. From the beginning of the novel escape is

depicted in terms of blasting a hole in the sky and yet at the end that escape is death, a release from life rather than a release into freedom.¹⁰⁶ In this respect, Burroughs comes very close to that doom laden romantic spirit which moved late Victorian writers like Ernest Dowson and Aubrey Beardsley and he becomes heir to their concerns.

His work, especially that from The Wild Boys to date, is, in the end, deeply unsatisfying since it lacks the genuine impulse for social change and revolution which it purports to carry and which is, indeed, the overt raison d'être of the later books. Burroughs' increasingly hysterical youth-worship takes on the aspect of an aging man trying to put off the spectre of death and much of his writing has the tone of sado-erotic fantasizing given credence by its supposed literary and revolutionary merit. It is, in the end, difficult not to agree with Peter Lewis' assessment that "Burroughs is not a revolutionary but a decadent; he represents bourgeois individualism, not in its healthy artistic state, but at its last, rattling gasp."¹⁰⁷ He emerges as a man who, unable to take the world as he finds it, has withdrawn into a des Esseintes-style of hothouse exoticism in which he can, as a writer, re-assume a sense of control. Through his fiction, Burroughs has been able to create an artificial world, one which rejects either God or moral purpose, a fanciful world yet one which is intensely foolish and profoundly evil: a world existing only on the far side of the mirror.

NOTES

1. William Burroughs, The Naked Lunch (London: Corgi, 1968) p. 243.
2. Andre Le Vet, F. Scott Fitzgerald (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.x.
3. William Burroughs, "The Art Of Fiction," Paris Review 35, 49.
4. Daniel Odier, The Job (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 71.
5. William Burroughs, Junkie (London: Panther, 1969), p. 8.
6. Ibid., p. 7.
7. Ibid., p. 115. From William Lee's feeling of having been "occluded" in The Naked Lunch to Kim Carson's recognition that "he just doesn't fit somehow," (The Place Of Dead Roads, p. 304), a sense of isolation is a constant factor in the experience of Burroughs' protagonists.
8. Junkie, p. 8.
9. William Burroughs, Ah Pook Is Here and Other Texts (London: John Calder, 1979), p. 26.
10. William Burroughs, The Wild Boys (London: Corgi, 1973), p. 30.
11. William Burroughs, The Place Of Dead Roads (London: John Calder, 1984), p. 17.
12. Burroughs. First broadcast on BBC2, 22 February, 1983.
13. Junkie, p. 12.
14. William Burroughs, The Ticket That Exploded (London: Corgi, 1971), p. 14.
15. William Burroughs, The Soft Machine (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), p. 53.
16. Ann Charters, Kerouac (New York: Warner Paperbacks, 1974), p. 57.
17. William Burroughs, "The Art Of Fiction," Paris Review, 35, p. 31.
18. The Wild Boys, p. 105.
19. Dashiell Hammett, Red Harvest (London: Cassell, 1974), p. 96.
20. The Ticket That Exploded, p. 162.
21. Odier, The Job, p. 111.
22. Robert Palmer, ed., "Interview with William Burroughs,"

Rolling Stone 108, 11 May 1972, p. 38.

23. Odier, p. 119.

24. Ibid., p. 92.

25. Witness how, in the first quote, he attacks what are essentially welfare forces mitigating the full force of capitalism and yet how, in the second, he attacks this same capitalist system as corrupt.

(i) "The idea that anyone can own his own factory in America is ridiculous. The government and the unions -- which both amount to the same thing: control systems -- tell him who he can hire, how much he can pay them, and how he can sell his goods."

Paris Review 35, 47.

(ii) "And you powers behind what filth deals consummated in what lavatory to take what is not yours. To sell the ground from unborn feet forever -----."

Nova Express, p. 11.

26. Junkie, pp. 144 - 145.

27. William Burroughs, Nova Express (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), p. 75.

28. "Much of my work is meant to be funny," Burroughs complained in a recent article for The New York Times Book Review ("My Purpose Is To Write For The Space Age," 19.2.1984 pp. 9 - 10.) Nonetheless many remain unconvinced finding, like Thomas J. Main, not comedy or satire but mere "ham-fisted wit...." ("On Naked Lunch and Just Desserts," Chicago Review Winter 1983, pp. 81 - 83).

29. Eric Mottram, William Burroughs: The Algebra Of Need (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 52.

It is curious, however, that Eric Mottram does not seem to recognize the obvious erotic attraction that the hanging holds for Burroughs.

30. The Naked Lunch, p. 22.

31. Junkie, p. 70.
32. Nova Express, p. 75.
33. Curiously this particular aspect is less apparent in Burroughs' more recent work, perhaps because of his return to living in the USA. Certainly The Place Of Dead Roads demonstrates something of a change of attitude, rejoicing as it does in a type of frontiersman's down home philosophizing combined with a more familiar wild-west brutalism.
34. Odier, The Job, p. 71.
35. Tony Tanner, City Of Words (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p. 109.
36. Richard Kostelanetz, "From Nightmare To Seredipity," Twentieth Century Literature 11, p. 128.
37. Mottram, William Burroughs, p. 35.
38. Jeff Nuttall, Bomb Culture (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 99.
39. Odier, The Job, p. 104.
40. The Naked Lunch, p. 145.
41. Ibid., p. 51.
42. Ah Pook Is Here, p. 34.
43. The Naked Lunch, p. 29.
44. The Soft Machine, p. 92.
45. The Ticket That Exploded, p. 172.
46. Odier, p. 97.
47. The Wild Boys, pp. 33 - 34.
48. William Burroughs, Paris Review, 35, p. 31.
49. As early as Junkie, Burroughs was expressing the distance between himself and 'normal' America as a distance so great as to be unbridgeable. In "When Did I Stop Wanting To Be President," he describes the distance thus: "somehow I had not intersected. I was not one of them. Perhaps I was the wrong shape."
Roosevelt After Inauguration, p. 28.
50. William Burroughs, Roosevelt After Inauguration and other atrocities

(San Francisco: City Lights, 1979) pp. 27 - 28.

51. Ibid., p. 20.
52. Ibid., p. 21.
53. Odier, p. 71.
54. Junkie, p. 152.
55. Odier, The Job, 18.
56. Ibid., pp. 98 - 100.
57. The Ticket That Exploded, p. 48.
58. Nova Express, p. 12.
59. Odier, pp. 12 - 13.
60. Burroughs, Gysin, Beiles, Corso, Minutes To Go (San Francisco: Beach Books, 1968), pp. 3 - 5.
61. Palmer, ed., An Interview with William Burroughs, p. 37.
62. Indeed, Burroughs has defended and advocated the continued use of cut up, in a book as recent as The Third Mind.
63. Palmer, ed., p. 36.
64. David Lodge, "Objections To William Burroughs," Critical Quarterly 8, p. 204.
65. Odier, p. 11. Perry Meisel, reviewing The Place Of Dead Roads, made several interesting points about the overall weakness of Burroughs' idiosyncratic prose style, describing the discontinuous, disconnected manner of both cut up and what has succeeded it as "a tiresome immitation of the Joycean approach." Meisel goes onto observe that whereas

Joyce's apparently foolish puns and juxtapositions have an internal logic that detonates almost endless possibilities of meaning; Mr. Burroughs's use of such techniques is meretricious. Rather than build his world, as Joyce does, through montages that yield detail and density when scrutinized closely, too often he takes the short cut of simply swathing

signs and images together to be strange and absurd.

Perry Meisel "Gunslinger In A Time Warp,"

New York Times Book Review 19.2.1984, p. 8.

66. Burroughs et.al., Minutes To Go, p. 63.

67. Ihab Hassan, "The Subtracting Machine," Critique, 6, 1 (Spring 1963), p. 10.

68. Peter Lewis, "Fiction As Metaphor," Stand, 20, 4, 70.

69. Odier, The Job, p. 22.

70. Ibid., p. 91.

71. Kostelanetz, "From Nightmare To Serendipity," p. 129.

72. In The Place Of Dead Roads, for instance, Burroughs evokes such culturally disparate voices as Andrew Marvell, William Wordsworth, T.S. Eliot, Judy Garland and The Sex Pistols.

73. The specific influence that Burroughs has had on genuinely "youth-oriented" culture is difficult to gauge. Certainly David Bowie and The Velvet Underground seem to reflect something of Burroughs' alienation and social hostility but the attitude expressed in songs like "White Light/White Heat," "Heroin," and notably "A Walk On The Wild Side," suggests an enthusiasm for the drug-addict-as-hero which is by no means explicit in Burroughs' writing and points elsewhere, perhaps to the writing of Nelson Algren.

On a less culturally astute level, the use of Burroughs' titles and characters as group names, for example, "Soft Machine," "Dead Fingers Talk," "Steely Dan" and "The Heavy Metal Kids" made for a form of cultural one upmanship in 'seventies youth culture: a game akin to spotting obscure references in The Cantos.

However, while it indicated a desire to embrace Burroughs as a cultural leader, there is little to suggest that these groups absorbed much from Burroughs beyond an admiration for his 'outlaw' status.

74. James E. Tanner, "E.E. Cummings and William Burroughs," Style 10, i, (1976), p. 12.
75. The Naked Lunch, p. 14.
76. Ibid., p. 186.
77. Odier, The Job, p. 22.
78. Nova Express, p. 12.
79. The Naked Lunch, p. 89.
80. William Burroughs, "The Art Of Fiction," p. 46.
81. Long after the junkies have gone, "the feel of junk is still there. It hits you at the corner, follows you along the block, then falls away like a discouraged pan handler...." Junkie, p.42.
82. Ibid., p. 80.
83. Ibid., p. 56.
84. Ah Pook Is Here, p. 32.
85. Mottram, William Burroughs, p. 52.
86. Nova Express, p. 11.
87. Odier, The Job, p. 74.
88. William Burroughs Cities Of The Red Night (London: John Calder, 1981,) p. 20.
89. Ibid., p. 110.
90. Ibid., p. 132.
91. Ibid., p. xv.
92. Ibid., p. 133.
93. Ibid., p. 292.
94. The Naked Lunch, pp. 198-199.
95. The Wild Boys, pp. 112 - 113.
96. Palmer, "Interview with William Burroughs," p. 36.
97. Cities Of The Red Night, p. 190.
98. The Naked Lunch, p. 243.
99. And yet an attempt fundamentally to change our attitudes has been the supposed aim of Burroughs' writing. Allen Ginsberg

dedicated Howl to "William Seward Burroughs, author of Naked Lunch, an endless novel which will drive everybody mad,"

(Howl, p. 3) and Jeff Nuttall has asserted that novel's power is such that it "actually caused at least one unprepared square to vomit on the carpet and leaves the mind of anyone who reads it redirected sexually." (Bomb Culture, p. 108).

100. There is a boastfulness in his observation that "I read more than usual for an American boy of that time and place: Oscar Wilde, Anatole France, Baudelaire, even Gide," (Junkie, p.8.) which overwhelms the overt subject of his loneliness by a desire to impress the reader with his intellectual precociousness and superiority.
101. Josephine Hendin, Vulnerable People (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 55.
102. Interestingly, The Place Of Dead Roads is dedicated to Welch.
103. Malcolm Bradbury, "Saul Bellow's Herzog" Critical Quarterly 7, p. 270.
104. Cities Of The Red Night, p. 332.
105. Carsons, quite clearly, is another version both of Audrey Carsons from earlier novels and of Burroughs himself. Moreover Quien Es, Burroughs informs us, were the last words of Billy The Kid rendered (for obscure reasons) into Spanish. "Who is it," Billy asked just before being shot dead. The answer to "Quien Es," Burroughs posits, is always "Death"(p. 201).
106. In the first chapter, after shooting Chase, Kim fires three more shots. The third
shoots a hole in the sky. Blackness pours out and darkens the earth. In the last rays of a painted sun, a Johnson holds up a barbed-wire fence for others to slip through. The fence has snagged the skyline... a great black rent. Screaming crowds

point to the torn sky.

"OFF THE TRACK! OFF THE TRACK!"

"FIX IT!" the Director bellows....

"What with, a Band-Aid and chewing gum? Rip
in the Master Film.... Fix it yourself, Boss Man."

"ABANDON SHIP, GOD DAMN IT....EVERY MAN FOR
HIMSELF!"

(The Place Of Dead Roads, p. 9)

The escape through the sky suggests an image similar to that of "the world's mirror" and other familiar Burroughs' motifs, notably that of positing reality as a pre-recorded film, are present. However at the closing shoot out, no further shots are fired and while the image of the darkening sky recurs it does so in the context of God having "prerecorded Kim's death" (p.218). Furthermore, the slap on the back recalls a similar incident between Colonel Bickford and Mr. Hart (p.118) and seems to suggest a shot in the back. Quien Es.

107. Lewis Stand, 20, 4, 70.

CHAPTER III

THE JEWISH VOICE

In 1975, four years after "my" former convincingly characterized American fiction of the 1960's in terms of "flight" and "entropy" and two years before Josephine Hendin's survey could summarize the literature of the post-war period as that of a "vulnerable people", Sheldon Grabetz, in reviewing Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, observed that the book extended "some of the basic emphases and materials of the Jewish Movement..." amongst which he numbered "an essentially affirmative view of human nature. At this point the unsuspecting reader, perhaps one who fell among the pages of *Studies in American Jewish Literature* or his/her way from Jonathan Safran Foer to Jerome Klinkowitz (a not altogether apt parallel of the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho), is entitled to make some expression of surprise or at least to do a somewhat uncharitably "double take".

Grabetz is, after all, making an assertion which patently flies in the face of prevailing PART TWO assumptions, which seem to contradict and confound the general outlook and temper of the mainstream of contemporary American fiction. Nonetheless, to the reader familiar with the fiction of Chaim Potok or, for that matter, Saul Bellow or Bernard Malamud, to the reader who has been diligent in his perusal of the critical writings of Leslie Fiedler, Alfred Kazin, Max Scheler and Irving Howe (to name but a very few) such an assertion may not seem all that remarkable. Quite clearly in the years since World War Two an identifiable body of Jewish writer has taken shape in American literary culture in a way that, equally clearly, has not been the case with other, similar cultural or ethnic groups.² Perhaps more significantly this "body" has exhibited sufficient consciousness, sufficient similarity of moral intent and philosophical outlook to justify the generalized interests of a distinguished body of critics. Thus, while it is possible to sympathize with Saul Bellow's often-quoted objection to being regarded as part of

CHAPTER SIX

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Grebstein is, after all, making an assertion which patently flies in the face of prevailing critical wisdoms, which seems to contradict and confound the general outlook and temper of the mainstream of contemporary American fiction. Nonetheless, to the reader familiar with the fiction of Chaim Potok or, for that matter, Saul Bellow or Bernard Malamud, to the reader who has been diligent in his perusal of the critical writings of Leslie Fiedler, Alfred Kazin, Max Schulz and Irving Howe (to name but a very few) such an assertion may not seem all that remarkable. Quite clearly in the years since World War Two an identifiable body of Jewish writing has taken shape in American literary culture in a way that, equally clearly, has not been the case with other, similar cultural or ethnic groups.² Perhaps more significantly this 'body' has exhibited sufficient cohesiveness, sufficient similarity of moral intent and philosophical content to justify the generalized interests of a distinguished body of critics. Thus, while it is possible to sympathize with Saul Bellow's often-quoted objection to being regarded as part of

the "Hart, Schaffner and Marx" of Jewish American literature,³ it is impossible to agree with the implication, made explicit in the words of Bernard Malamud, that there is no such thing as a "Jewish-American novelist" and that "the term is schematic and reductive."⁴ Indeed, so distinguished and distinctive has been this body of literature, so central have been its concerns to the wider concerns of the American mainstream, that it has ultimately if not usurped then become a significant part of that mainstream.

There have been Jews in America almost from the beginnings of the continent as a European Colonial enterprise. The first Jewish settlers arrived, via Brazil and much to the distress of Peter Stuyvesant (the Dutch Colonial Governor of New Amsterdam), in 1654. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that there began to be a sizeable Jewish community in the USA, swelled firstly with the arrival of German speaking Jews after 1836 and subsequently, between 1880 and 1914, with the immigration of some two and one half million East European, Yiddish-speaking Jews, predominantly from Russia and Poland. Similarly there have been, for over a century, Jewish writers worthy of inclusion in the national literary canon. From the publication of Emma Lazarus' volume Songs of A Semite in 1882 to the novels of Daniel Fuchs and Henry Roth in the 1930s there existed a tradition of Jewish writers overtly exploring the explicitly American experience of Jews.⁵ However, perhaps because of the particularized nature of their concerns, these writers were no more than marginal figures on the literary scene, minor writers more interesting for their rendering of a particular type of local colour than for any wider literary distinction. This, not altogether just, judgement has continued to haunt and hinder the appreciation of pre-war works of considerable merit such as The Rise Of David Levinsky, and particularly Call It Sleep and it was not until after the Second World War that the literary presence of American Jews began to be felt in any degree.

A variety of reasons can be adduced for this sudden appearance of

talent, evident to differing degrees in the fields of drama, poetry and criticism as well as fiction. Certainly the greater degree of assimilation achieved by the post-war generation made their acceptance less problematic and it is possible that the burden of status (as the last significant Jewish community of the Diaspora, following the virtual obliteration of European Yiddish culture) has weighed heavily, if somewhat obliquely, on the cultural consciences of Jewish-American artists. More tellingly it might be because, in the words of Leslie Fiedler :

the Jewish-American mind, conditioned by two thousand years of history, provides other Americans with ways of escaping the trap of vacillation between isolationism and expatriation, chauvinism and self-hatred. Jewish-American writers are, by and large, neither expatriates nor "boosters"; and they do not create in their protagonists images of the expatriate or the "booster." More typically, they have begun to produce moderately cynical accounts of in-patriation, the flight from the quasi-European metropolis to the provincial small town. This flight they have, indeed, lived, moving in quest of more ultimate exile not out of but into America....⁶

Whatever the underlying reasons for this success (and assuredly they are as complex as they are numerous) it is undeniable that "with the award of Nobel prizes for literature to Saul Bellow in 1976 and Isaac Bashevis Singer in 1978, Jewish-American writing has taken its place on a world stage."⁷ Moreover, an undeniable part of that success rests on a widespread willingness, on the part of American-Jewish writers, to affirm and to write literature which "contains a strongly optimistic note, a feeling that while the world may be a difficult place, man's task is to attempt to understand his role in it and, more importantly, to have compassion for the difficulties of his fellow men who are in the same position as he."⁸

This is not to suggest that every Jewish-American writer since 1945 has pledged allegiance to the flag of moral optimism. Indeed the European legacy of Franz Kafka and ^{Roth /} Joseph ~~militates~~ ^{militates} against any facilely affirmative vision of the human condition and, closer to home, the concerns of pre-war Jewish writers were hardly the stuff of easy optimism.

As The Rise Of David Levinsky, Haunch, Paunch and Jowl and Call It Sleep readily attest Jewish perceptions of America in the first four decades of the twentieth century hardly reinforce or conform to Emma Lazarus' expressions of hope in "The New Colossus."⁹ However, what is notable is that, in post-war writing, the affirmative, optimistic expression is most apparent in the work of those writers who have a positive relationship to their Jewish heritage and who have been able to seize the spirit of it, injecting that spirit into their literary creations. This is true not only of the three novelists chiefly under consideration but also of that of a number of their contemporaries like Edward Lewis Wallant or the playwright and novelist Arthur Miller and it is evident even in the writing of supposedly bleak, 'black' comedians such as Wallace Markfield and Bruce Jay Friedman. Equally, it is amongst the least Judaized writers -- Norman Mailer, J.D. Salinger, Joseph Heller -- that this sense of affirmation is weakest or least in evidence although the absence of a 'Jewish dimension' is hardly an accusation to be laid at the door of the most public of literary Jewish dissidents Philip Roth. However, even with Roth and Heller there is some sense of their changing perceptions of Judaism and their relationship with it. For instance Good As Gold, the first book in which Heller felt able to work with his Jewishness,¹⁰ has a distinctly more upbeat ending in its closing image of assimilation and reconciliation while there seems to be a sense of expiation, a request if not for forgiveness then at least for reappraisal, in Roth's Zuckerman trilogy.¹¹

Thus it is that Sheldon Grebstein can argue the existence of a Jewish Movement -- although certainly not a Jewish 'School' -- centring on a common, essentially optimistic evaluation of humanity. It is optimistic not in any shallow "boosterish" sense but because, as Leslie Fiedler has suggested, in Waiting For The End, the Jew, a master of marginality at a time when all men feel marginal, is better placed to comprehend and express the nature of such confused times. It is in this sense above all that the

Jewish-American experience has become the central, defining experience of post-war America. The condition of the Jewish fictional protagonist so closely resembles the condition of "everyman" because so

much Jewish-American literature contains the essence of the immigrant experience in its stress upon the individual at odds with the values of the world in which he finds himself. The success of this literature rests upon its awareness that life is difficult and problematical for all men and has always been so. In the twentieth century, however, there are the added strains of alienation related to the pressures of an urban, fragmented society in which man is very small indeed and in which the old sureties of widely accepted value systems no longer exist. 12

This, in some way, is true of all three writers to be considered here. Whether in the form of the abiding moral memories of Saul Bellow's Jews,¹³ Malamud's often-quoted assertion that "all men are Jews", or in Potok's depiction of post-Holocaust Jews as potential healers of our "broken universe," all share in a conviction that the Jew has a special contemporary responsibility as guide or moral leader and emphasize the significant dimension of social concern which traditionally has informed the life of the Jewish community while rejecting any overtly pessimistic evaluation of the human condition.

Arguably, such a rejection emanates from the same moral certitude, the "security of values",¹⁴ which eighteenth and nineteenth century Jews experienced in the oppressive ghettos of Eastern Europe. It takes the form of a willingness to confront the harshest demands of oppressive and antipathetic societies bolstered by a Yiddish culture which provides a retreat from the harsh unpleasantness of the wider society and an instruction into ways of accommodating the ineluctable vicissitudes of life by achieving what Ruth Wisse has described as an "Ironical balance for psychic survival."¹⁵ This balance emanates from

an underlying attitude to life that derives somehow from the core of the Jewish experience: learning how to live and cope with the continuous expectation of uncertainty, contradictions, the unpredictable, the unanticipated, and the unfathomable, with the realization that adversity, trouble, grief, and sorrows, all embodied in the Yiddish word tsuris, are the normal conditions of life. 16

The Jews of the Diaspora, those who were attached to Yiddishkeit, knew that their culture could sustain them, could provide them with sufficient moral poise and spiritual balance to help them withstand the fiercest buffeting and the most demanding attacks on their sense of hope and purpose. It is the survival of this moral poise and spiritual balance in American-Jewish culture, albeit not in the original form, that sustains the optimism of the present day Jewish-American novelists: sustains them even in the face of pressures as severe in their way as those confronting the shtetl dweller depicted by Sholem Aleichem. Saul Bellow has described this "characteristically Jewish" perspective in terms of a mixture of "laughter and trembling... so curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations of the two,"¹⁷ and this uneasy balance -- contemporarily as recognizable in the films of Woody Allen as in the books of Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow -- is nowhere more evident than in the character of the schlemiel, transplanted from Yiddish literature and folklore and placed at the heart of Jewish-American literature and humour. In the introduction to A Treasury of Yiddish Stories Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg asserted that in the schlemiel: "The Yiddish writers express through the theme of anti-heroism their admiration for those who do not exert their social will but live and endure in silence."¹⁸ Which is to say that the schlemiel tries to shoulder the burden of society's demands on his shoulders yet not be broken by them. He is, then, a victim (as many individuals, not only writers, perceive themselves to be) of the incessant and insatiable demands of the world around him.

The significance of the schlemiel lies in his realization that he

must deal with these demands, as must we all. It was a lesson learned by the Jews of the Diaspora, those attached to Yiddishkeit, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bound by the rigid laws of settlement and of property, forced to accept the role of the whipping-boys for the wrath of the peasantry and the Cossacks, subject to pogroms and confiscation of land and wealth, they learned to accept their powerlessness in the face of unreasoning and unreasonable attack, assimilating these lessons into their culture in the form of the schlemiel.

The schlemiel is a loser, a man fated to lose, but is distinguished from other losers by his refusal to accept any such negative self-perception. By applying that invisible 'spirit' of which Saul Bellow spoke in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech the schlemiel is able to translate and refute defeat.¹⁹ His defeat lies only in the terms of competitive society and he emphatically rejects those terms: in the words of Ruth Wisse, "The schlemiel becomes a hero when real action is impossible and reaction remains the only way a man can define himself."²⁰ Unable to act to reform society the classic Yiddish schlemiel becomes the ironic metaphor for the word of God, "the unrealizable ideal of perfection..."²¹ critically commenting on the moral standards of Russian and Polish society in the nineteenth century. Moreover the schlemiel tends to support the position of the Jews, comforting them in their persecution. This, clearly, was his role in the stories of Sholom Aleichem who sought to hold the Yiddish community and culture together by identifying its virtues and achievements, thereby giving it a sense of moral purpose. In his stories Aleichem equated poverty with moral wealth and wealth with moral bankruptcy: his character Menachem Mendel inevitably failed in his ever-changing professional pursuits but was remarkable for his unflagging optimism and his belief, beyond all reason, that each venture would secure his fortune. Even as a comedy, to an audience reared on the sophisticated pessimism of western literature, this may seem naive beyond belief but for a people whose daily struggle

was for survival, who were constantly threatened with obliteration, pessimism was a luxury they could not afford.²²

In an essay examining the schlemiel in American humour Albert Goldman summarized the contradictions implicit in the character, contradictions which enabled the Jewish community to reconcile their status in society with their status as The Chosen People and which enabled them to retain that schlemiel-like optimism in the face of daily rebuttals.

Recognizing himself as an outsider, an alien among Gentiles, the Jew regards his position with characteristic ambivalence: both pride and contempt. Traditionally the Jews think of themselves as clever and knowing, scorning the goyim as dumb and slow-witted. In complete contrast, however, the Jews also traditionally identify weakness, suffering, the disaster with themselves; in turn, they attribute health, physical strength, and normality to the Gentiles. In order to deal with this confusing mixture of pride and contempt, the Jew has classically adopted the figure of the schlemiel as a symbol of his predicament. 23

If that kind of contradictory balance could be achieved then the schlemiel and, by extension, all Jews could not only survive in the world but also retain their individuality and remain impervious to those forces of conformity and self-surrender which so obsess and oppress the modern world.

One of the classic schlemiels of Yiddish fiction has, not altogether surprisingly, been created in the second half of the twentieth century, by Isaac Bashevis Singer, who resides in the USA but predominantly, in his fictional activities at least, exists in the pre-Holocaust world of Eastern Europe. His writing reflects a concern with the traditional themes of Jewish identity and crisis and in "Gimpel The Fool" he uses the background of the shtetl to examine the moral demands and problems which face the man of conscience, the man who wishes to retain his moral integrity. Gimpel's foolishness consists of his gullibility, his willingness even, to be deceived by anyone who wishes to lie to him. This he explains in terms of faith: "What's the good of not believing?"

Today it's your wife you don't believe in ; tomorrow it's God Himself you won't take stock in."²⁴ To the end of his life Gimpel retains this simple faith, his reward being his success as a baker, which he ignores as negligible, and his moral integrity, which amounts to more than a simple faith in God. Speaking of the grave, Gimpel reasons that "whatever there may be it will be real, without complication, without ridicule, without deception. God be praised; there even Gimpel cannot be deceived."²⁵ Patently, the fact of an afterlife is not important to Gimpel; what matters is the integrity of his social dealings -- that he has been true to himself and not given in to the mores of society -- a victory far more considerable than that achievable by any conventional anti-hero.

The attitude of the schlemiel then is indicative of a social and moral concern which has informed Jewish life to an enormous degree. It is a concern which has been identified by Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg in the Yiddish literature of nineteenth century Eastern Europe and by the sociologist Milton M. Gordon in a culture as socially and historically distant as mid-twentieth century America. Gordon reports that Jews "are somewhat more favourable toward welfare state ideals, on the average, than Gentiles of the same class level,"²⁶ a fact which would indicate something beyond coincidence, some kind of East European 'heritage' based on the principle of the importance of the Jewish community to the individual. Indeed, Howe and Greenberg twice observe the importance, in the eyes of the Yiddish writer, of the problem of collective destiny -- a matter they describe in terms of "the choreography of social behaviour..."²⁷ thereby implying the significance for the community as a whole of the actions of the individual. This attitude is voiced more explicitly by Max Schulz who observes that the Jew's survival as an individual has always been closely tied to his function as a member of the group since "His actions affected not only his salvation but also the group's survival."²⁸

Clearly this interrelatedness has two aspects. First there is the awareness of the injustice being done to a group within society and the implication of that injustice for the individual. Second, the awareness on the part of that individual of his relationship with others who, as individuals, together form that group or society. Thus it is possible to see in Jewish thinking what George Steiner has described as a "demand for justice which is the pride and burden of the Judaic tradition...."²⁹ It has also been explained, more prosaically, by Isaac Rosenfeld who argued that the persecution of the Jews, in this case by the Nazis, had an effect on Jewish moral awareness:

Persecution may lead him, as it has in the past, to a further effort to envisage the good society. No man suffers injustice without learning, vaguely but surely, what justice is. The desire for justice... becomes the deepest motive for social change. Out of their recent sufferings one may expect Jewish writers to make certain inevitable moral discoveries. These discoveries, enough to indict the world may also be crucial to its salvation. ³⁰

At the same time as these "practical" consequences of the unjust society were being continually relearned by those who suffered such persecution, Jewish society also taught the importance of justice and fairness -- the interdependence of all the individuals on each other and on society. Judaism stresses the importance of caring for others -- to give to the poor was both a duty and a joy -- and communal caring was, to a great extent, enfranchized in social custom. It was, for example, the duty of the community to provide for the poor student of Torah to enable him to continue his studies. Similarly, custom bound a Jewish household to welcome and care for any Jewish traveller.

There is a direct link therefore, between these concerns of the traditional Jewish community and the receptivity of present day American Jews to the welfare state ideals identified by Milton Gordon. The Jews, certainly, are not unique in having social concerns built into their

religion but they are remarkable in the degree to which religious beliefs have traditionally informed their day to day activities. This point is made by Allen Guttman when he speaks of Judaism as being concerned for "orthopraxis rather than for orthodoxy," and when he attests that, "The secular and sacred are one, so that the commonest acts of 'economic' behaviour are testimonials of faith -- or betrayals of its loss."³² In this way the Judaic religion imposed a code of moral and social practice on the pious Jew to the extent that the code became an almost unconscious force creating a Jewish tradition and standpoint that has outlasted the religious belief of many present day Jews. It is this ingrained belief in justice which provides the Jews both of Milton Gordon's sociological survey and of Irving Howe's Treasury of Yiddish Stories with that moral certitude which so clearly distinguishes them from the uncertain and valueless society which increasingly characterizes modern America.

In her book Vulnerable People, Josephine Hendin picks up on these orderless, negative aspects speaking of "the violence, coldness, sense of meaninglessness and sexual confusion that mark our fiction,"³³ and (substantially echoing Tony Tanner's perceptions) observes that, "Current fiction blocks the flow. It celebrates the discontinuity of people from history and society, and praises separateness of individual experience."³⁴ Over the same period as this breakdown has occurred the Jewish-American novelists have risen to prominence, a contiguity which prompted Leslie Fiedler to remark that, "At the moment of such a breakthrough the Jews must already have become capable of projecting psychological meanings with which the non-Jewish community is vitally concerned."³⁵ Fiedler himself amplifies this proposition with the suggestion that the "urban Jew" has become a guide for all men in the modern world, able to lead them past the pitfalls of alienation. The argument is not without substance, indeed there is much evidence to support it, evidence which the Jews' history of

marginality on many levels reinforces. Even after the ghetto walls of medieval Europe were torn down a tradition of non-acceptance of Jews into European society continued to flourish, a tradition which rests in the Jewish communal memory to underpin the personal experience of alienation. Thus Albert Halper expressed his sense of alienation as being greater than that of his "Christian colleagues." It could not be otherwise, "Not with fifteen years of harrowing education at my back, not with a couple thousand more years of historical shadows flitting in the wings besides." ³⁶ The Symposium on American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews, from which Halper's comments are drawn, abounds in observations of the special sense of alienation which accompanies Jewishness. Even a contributor like Howard Fast who professed "uncertainty as to just what a Jewish Heritage consists of ..." and who asserted that, "For me, a Jew is a man. He is persecuted; so are other minorities. He is libelled; so are others. There is discrimination against him; is there none against the Negroes?" ³⁷ found himself making special claims for the Jewish relationship with persecution and hatred. "An extraordinary knowledge of all the forces which, through the centuries, have attempted to destroy the spirit and the hopes and the aspirations of mankind seems to me a part of the Jewish heritage -- a part understood by some Jews at least -- and to that heritage I owe much." ³⁸

One after another, the writers expressed a belief in the nature of the Jewish experience and its increasingly general application, a belief summarized in the words of Clement Greenberg who believed that the Jewish writer's real need

is a greater feeling of integration with society.... Thus his plight becomes like every other plight today, a version of the alienation of man under capitalism, all plights merge, and that of the Jew has become less particular because it turns more and more into an intensified expression of a general one. ³⁹

Greenberg also recognized in the Jew "a felt if not conscious standard,"

a standard which gave him the 'security of values' identified in Jewish life by Irving Howe, a standard which enabled Jews the more successfully to contain the forces of alienation. In this way, in the words of Saul Bellow, "The Jews, with their precious and refined record of suffering have a unique obligation to hold up the moral burdens everyone else has dumped." ⁴⁰

It is an indication of the completeness of this vision of the Jew as "a specialist in alienation...[in an era when] nearly all sensibility ... is in exile..." ⁴¹ that Lenny Bruce was able to redefine the word 'Jewish' in a completely non-religious and non-racial way in order to express an urban, alienated lifestyle:

To me, if you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish. It doesn't matter even if you're Catholic; if you live in New York you're Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you're going to be goyish even if you're Jewish.... Negroes are all Jews. Italians are all Jews. Irishmen who have rejected their religion are Jews. Mouths are very Jewish. And bosoms. Baton twirling is very goyish. Georgie Jessel and Danny Thomas are Christians.... ⁴²

This typically idiosyncratic statement is significant if only because it demonstrates the degree to which Jewish 'characteristics', in an age of rapidly declining religious faith, have become significant of something totally outside their original terms of reference. Perhaps the increase in observance of Jewish customs, noted by both Irving Howe and Milton Gordon amongst non-religious American Jews, is an indication of the importance of that specialist Jewish knowledge as an aid to survival in the modern world. Thus, Albert Halper was able to predict that

Jews... will be the first to write about the present in a way which the time calls for. They will be the first because of their undertakers' noses. Do not forget it was Kafka, a European Jew, who detected the smell of fascism as far back as 1919, and wrote about it. ⁴³

If the Jew was to become the representative modern man because of his long experience of marginality he was to find himself first proclaimed thus in the USA where the fact of alienation has been more widely and more extremely felt. It was this to which Irwin Stark and Irving Malin were referring when they asserted that, "It is not so much that the Jew has caught up with America -- America has at long last caught up with the Jew. His search for identity is its search. Its quest for spiritual meaning is his quest." ⁴⁴ In this way, of course, to become a representative American was to become representative man, at least in the Western World, where the English speaking nations and Europe tend to limp along some ten to twenty years behind the USA yet unmistakeably following the same trends. However, there are other ways in which the Jewish-American can be seen to have become very much the American and which help to explain the primacy of Jewish-American novelists in contemporary American literature.

Milton M. Gordon in his study of Assimilation in American Life offers the clue when he declares that, "The rise in socio-economic status of the Eastern European Jews and their descendants is, in fact, the greatest collective Horatio Alger story in American immigration history." ⁴⁵ Horatio Alger; rags to riches; America as the land of unbounded opportunity. For many contemporary American writers such an affirmative view of America is heretical. Kurt Vonnegut, for instance, has denounced such a vision as nothing more than delusive self-mythologizing: "Their most destructive untruth is that it is very easy for any American to make money." ⁴⁶ Indeed, the American Dream has been battered and discredited by successive generations of disillusioned writers and disaffected citizens but here, in Gordon's allusion to the Horatio Alger stories, it is possible to detect that, for some at least, a belief in the USA's unbounded opportunity exists. Not least among the reasons for this Jewish success has been a readiness to conform to the standards of the American middle class. ⁴⁷ Clement Greenberg noted it, with exasperation, in his contribution to the Contemporary Jewish Record, and Milton Gordon also

observed that the Jewish immigrant had, "the middle class values of thrift, sobriety, ambition, desire for education, ability to postpone gratifications for the sake of long term goals and aversion to violence already internalized." ⁴⁸ This ability to 'postpone gratification', a willingness, even on the part of the first generation of immigrants to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children's future is recorded by Charles Reznikoff in Family Chronicle: "...my parents had always spoken of their business and all ways of making money by trade with distaste. And, if it was their doom because they had come to the country penniless and ignorant, if they were to be worms and crawl about, their children should have wings."⁴⁹ Reznikoff's parents worked themselves into early graves in order to put him through college and in this sort of endeavour they were not alone. In 1898 Abraham Cahan reported that, "The poor laborer... will pinch himself to keep his child at college, rather than send him to a factory.... At least 500 of 1677 students at the New York City College, where tuition and books are free, are Jewish boys from the East Side."⁵⁰

This, however, was by no means the extent of the Jewish 'success story'. The USA provided for the Jews a uniquely hospitable social and economic climate. Whilst it would be naive to claim there was no anti-Semitism in America and no restrictions on Jews, these elements were by no means universal and indeed, such anti-immigrant restrictions and prejudice as did exist were by no means solely aimed against the Jews. For example, Terry Coleman, in Passage to America, cites cases of employers willing to take on Jews or Negroes but strictly refusing to employ Irish immigrants. In any case, small-scale petty restrictions, unjust as they were, were as nothing to the property laws and pogroms of Eastern Europe so recently experienced by the Jewish immigrants. Indeed whilst socialist activists and trade union leaders attacked with absolute justice the appalling conditions in which the immigrants were forced to work and live, for many Jewish families -- like the Reznikoffs -- America was truly a land of opportunity. Whatever the conditions in America there as nowhere else the

Jews were able to compete, relatively free from restrictions, with everyone else. For the first time in many centuries they were able to determine their economic and social future by dint of their own efforts.

Not surprisingly Russian and Polish Jews came in their millions and, as Abraham Karp has observed, unlike other immigrants, they almost all stayed.⁵¹ This dedication to creating a new life in the New World is indicative of the degree to which the Jewish immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries share similar ideals to those pilgrims who, in the early seventeenth century, founded the colonies and helped shape the American ideals which have currency to this day.

Howard Fast once wrote, "For myself I write as an American and a Jew and I've found no contradiction..."⁵² a remark which would seem to suggest a certain similarity of ideals between Jews and Americans. This statement found an echo in the words of Ben Field, who felt able to claim that, "my education as an American has helped to re-educate me as a Jew."⁵³ That these and other Jewish-American writers have been able to assert a connection between their 'Jewishness' and 'Americanness' is in part due to the very existence of the notion both of Jewish ideals and of an 'American Dream'.⁵⁴ Almost alone amongst groups identifiable by national, ethnic or religious bonds Jews and Americans are expected by the rest of the world to live up to a set of vaguely realized moral standards. It is a moral concern which has been extended in the post-war world to cover Israel, widely regarded as the national expression of the Jewish character and has led Saul Bellow to complain that, "Moral judgement, a wraith in Europe, becomes a full-blooded giant when Israel and the Palestinians are mentioned."⁵⁵ an observation which could, just as appropriately, be applied to the harshly critical judgements so frequently passed on the USA by the rest of the world.

Inarguably, some 'more', some special quality is expected both of the Jewish people and of the American nation and the degree to which this expectation is identical in some degree explains the way in which the Jewish-American has been able to become the representative American in an

era concerned with rediscovering social values. There is, for both, a concern with the rights of the individual which informs their ideologies at the most basic level. To quote Ben Field again: "...a devotion to the cause of the common man, is in the spirit of true Americanism and Judaism. This devotion is proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and in the prayer of the Jew who asks the Lord to raise the needy from the dung hill."⁵⁶ It can be seen in the moral and social concern already identified as an intrinsic part of Jewish thinking and as a moving force behind the Declaration of Independence which, a product of the Age of Reason, articulated and emphasized a belief in the perfect, free society as a possibility on earth. (It is interesting to note that thinkers of that era held that such a society stood a better chance of flourishing in the New World, unfettered as it was by the chains of European history.) Accordingly, the concern of Thomas Jefferson to fulfil "The laws of Nature and of Nature's God..."⁵⁷ and to secure for America the "unalienable rights" of all men finds its echo in the Old Testament Prophets who were as much critics of social injustice as they were of religious backsliding. The emphasis on the equality of all men 'before the law' -- which is at the root of democratic principles -- was matched in Jewish law by the attempts to provide for the poor of the community and the Passover seder at which Jews were required to remember the Egyptian dead: a mark of how God's care extended beyond His Chosen People to all people equally. Indeed, it was a fact of Jewish teaching that heaven was available to the righteous non-Jew just as it was to the righteous Jew. In this way, by recognizing the democratic impulse present in the documents which provide the moral impetus for both the Judaic tradition and the American ideal, it becomes clear that, as Milton Konvitz has observed, "the intent of the Declaration of Independence conforms with the intent of the Hebrew Scriptures, that is, to build the city of man so that it would hardly be distinguishable from the City of God."⁵⁸ It is perhaps as well to underline the word intent since, almost inevitably, the actuality has fallen some way short of the aspiration.

From the earliest days of the Puritan settlers colonial Americans identified their quest with that of the Jews. Puritan typology sought to find parallels between themselves and the lost tribes of Israel and, in envisioning America as The Promised Land, they unintentionally anticipated, to some extent, the entwining of Jewish and American ideals by later generations of Jewish immigrants and the expectation on the part of the men of the Enlightenment that America would be in the vanguard of the struggle to establish a Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Something of the strength and character of these expectations can be seen in Freneau's "The Rising Glory Of America." in which the poet envisions "A new Jerusalem sent down from heaven..." and located in America, where "Paradise anew/ shall flourish, by no second Adam lost." Indeed, the tone is one of paradise improved as Freneau predicts that "Another Canaan shall excel the old/And from a fairer Pisgah's top be seen."⁵⁹ Such enthusiasm was not limited to romantic, nationalist poets: Walter Nicgorski records that

In 1776, Franklin had proposed for the seal of the United States the depiction of Moses lifting his wand and dividing the Red Sea while the Pharaoh was swamped by its waters. Jefferson suggested the portrayal of the children of Israel being led through the wilderness by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. ⁶⁰

Even Abraham Lincoln sought to make the connection between America and the Biblical Promised Land, expressing a wish to "be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty and of this, his almost chosen people." ⁶¹ (My italics)

Appropriately, it was the Jews themselves who, in the explosion of immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, took up this theme of America as the Promised Land, secularizing their desire for the Messiah in the messianic principle and embracing America as the solution to their ills and trials with what Irving Howe has described as "social impatience."⁶² Howe offers one example of this impatience in describing how, in the early years of the twentieth century, "the Reform rabbis had passed a resolution

declaring themselves 'unalterably opposed to Zionism' and, in a startling sentence, had added, 'America is our Zion.' " ⁶³ This serves to underline not only the tightness of the bond between the ideals of America and the Jews but also the enthusiasm and commitment to America on the part of its Jewish immigrants.

Finally, for the Jewish writer there has been the matter of his part in creating a style of language suitable for what has been identified by Leslie Fiedler as the era of 'the urban novel'. In 1959 Harvey Swados, writing in the Hudson Review, observed "a nervous, muscular prose perfectly suited to the exigencies of an age which seems at once appalling and ridiculous," ⁶⁴ and went on to identify the writers of this prose as being, for the most part, both metropolitan and Jewish. Such claims inevitably bring to mind the demands made by men like Noah Webster and Ralph Waldo Emerson for an authentically American voice and the assertion by Whitman that his own 'barbaric yawp' was the realization of that voice. Indeed, Philip Roth, writing with reference to Swados' article, asserted that this urban, Jewish voice was the descendent of that Emersonian and Whitmanesque concern for the true, democratic language of America:

When writers who do not feel much of a connection to Lord Chesterfield begin to realize that they are under no real obligation to try and write like that distinguished old stylist, they are likely enough to go out and be bouncy. Also, there is the matter of the spoken language which these writers have heard, as our statesmen might put it, in the schools, the homes, the churches and the synagogues of the nation. I would even say that when the bouncy style is not an attempt to dazzle the reader, or one's self but to incorporate into American literary prose the rhythms, nuances and emphases of urban and immigrant speech, the result can sometimes be a language of new and rich emotional subtleties.... ⁶⁵

The role played by the Jewish immigrant in the development of this urban American language has been explored by both Alfred Kazin and Irving Howe with similar conclusions. Kazin has written that

the positive, creative role of the Jew as modern American and above all as a modern American writer was, in the first years of this century being prepared not in the universities, not even in journalism, but in the vaudeville theatres, music halls and burlesque houses where the pent-up eagerness of penniless immigrant youngsters met the raw, urban scene on its own terms. 66

It was pre-eminently a culture created by the immigrants themselves on the streets of New York, mid-way between the old world and the New and accordingly it developed with the immigrants' command of the language. It developed into something recognizably American, a language of and by the people, part of a culture transmitted via the vaudeville theatres and, later, radio and the movies. Recalling his childhood, Lenny Bruce described the effect of radio on his awareness and called the movies "the strongest environmental factor in molding the children of my day."⁶⁷ By way of supporting Kazin's assertion that popular culture affected future intellectuals far more than the traditional conditioning cultural elements, Bruce observed that the radio programs of the Depression reached far and wide in their influence: "Proctor and Gamble provided many Fulbright and Guggenheim fellowship winners with the same formative exposure."⁶⁸

The Jewish writer in America has become the representative American writer of the post-war era and the Jewish urban experience has become recognizable and meaningful to large numbers of Christians. The Jew, especially as a novelist, has risen to this position through a combination of circumstances: the hospitability of America as a nation in which the Jews were able to live relatively unpersecuted, the receptivity of the Jews to American values and the striking coincidence of American and Jewish ideals. It is also because, increasingly, Americans have found themselves thrust into unfamiliar territory; lost and alienated they have turned to the men and women who seem best to understand how to cope with this position; writers able to build something positive from the experience. It is not simply that the Jews in America have achieved a level of acceptance and integration never before approached -- that would

simply have signified their disappearance -- rather, they have been able to take centre stage in American letters because of a unique moral positivity that they have been able to offer America in her search for a way out of the moral and spiritual limbo of the post-war world.

In the words of Milton Konvitz:

There is still an ideal America. There is still an America that is deeply concerned with inequalities of opportunity: an America that wants to wage war on poverty, to remove it root and branch... that throws the protection of the Bill of Rights over its aliens no less than over its own citizens... that believes that human rights should be the concern of human beings wherever human beings are found. 69

Which is to say that America at the moment is dissuaded rather than disaffected. It is the unique privilege of the Jewish-American writers that they can once more persuade America of the value and validity of its ideals.

NOTES

1. Sheldon Grebstein, "The Phenomenon Of The Really Jewish Best Seller: Potok's The Chosen." Studies in American Jewish Literature, Spring 1975, 25.
1. I am thinking here in terms of the Italians, Poles, Irish and their descendants rather than the Blacks who are, obviously, a very different case.
3. Alfred Kazin quotes Bellow as saying this in his Bright Book of Life p. 127), and it has also been used, in a broadly approving sense, both by Philip Roth and by Philip French in his radio broadcast, "Saul Bellow and the latterday lean-to." Hart, Schaffner and Marz were a famous New York firm of garment manufacturers.
4. Leslie and Joyce Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection Of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.S.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 12.
5. A brief, cursory list of such writers might include Abraham Cahan, Ludwig Lewisohn, Ben Hecht, Samuel Ornitz, Anzia Yezierska and Meyer Levin.
6. Leslie Fiedler, Waiting For The End (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 83.
7. Edward A. Abramson, The Immigrant Experience In American Literature (Durham: British Association For American Studies, 1982), p. 18.
8. Ibid., p. 19.
9. Such expressions of regret and nostalgia seem to have extended to other American-Jewish cultural media. For instance, "Almonds and Raisins" a film history of Yiddish cinema in the USA, similarly records a widespread sense of Jewish disillusionment with America and a (somewhat fanciful) yearning for a return to the European shtetl and its values. Of course, there was, simultaneously, some

recognition of the benefits that life in the USA had conferred on the immigrants and it is arguable that the events of the Holocaust must have done much to exorcise the belief that the conditions of European Jewry was somehow spiritually and morally healthier than that of its American counterpart.

10. Heller admitted in an interview that the "sudden" presence of a sense of Jewishness in his third novel arose out of his own, more assured relationship to his Jewishness: "I was able to write Good as Gold because... I feel less self conscious about being Jewish in America and less inhibited."

(The Book Programme First broadcast on B.B.C.2,
18th May 1980).

11. Zuckerman Unbound suggests the futile, empty isolation of a man cut off from his Jewish roots while there is clear evidence, in The Anatomy Lesson, of the hand of a tyrannical Yahweh punishing the suffering, errant and penitent Nathan Zuckerman.

12. Abramson, p. 19.

13. In To Jerusalem and Back, for example, Bellow observes that "Jews... have a multitude of faults, but they have not given up on the old virtues." (P. 57.)

14. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, eds., A Treasury of Yiddish Stories (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 37.

15. Ruth R. Wisse, The Schlemiel As Modern Hero (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 41.

16. Abraham Chapman, ed., Jewish-American Literature: An Anthology (New York: Mentor, 1974), p.xlvii.

17. Saul Bellow, ed., Great Jewish Short Stories (New York: Dell, 1963)
p.12.

18. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, p. 40.

19. Bellow asserts that "There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints.... Proust calls these hints our true impressions".

Dialogue 10 (1977), p. 64.

20. Ruth R. Wisse, The Schlemiel As Modern Hero (Chicago: University
Of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 39.
21. Ibid., p. 29.
22. In The Immigrant Experience in American Literature Edward
Abramson attributes a very similar remark to Golda Meir (p. 18).
23. Albert Goldman, "Boy-Man Schlemiel: Jewish Humor," Commonweal, 86,
29 September 1967, p. 607.
24. Isaac Bashevis Singer, Great Jewish Short Stories, ed. Saul
Bellow (New York: Dell, 1963), p. 241.
25. Ibid., p. 247.
26. Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1964), p. 191.
27. Howe and Greenberg, p. 34.
28. Max Schulz, Radical Sophistication (Athens: Ohio University Press
1969), p. 27.
29. Abraham Chapman, ed., Jewish-American Literature: An Anthology
(New York: Mentor, 1974), p. xliii.
30. Isaac Rosenfield, "Under Forty: A Symposium," Contemporary Jewish
Record, February, 1944, p. 36.
31. Allen Guttman, The Jewish Writer In America -- Assimilation and
the Crisis Of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p.6.
32. Ibid., p. 5.
33. Josephine Hendin, Vulnerable People (New York: Oxford University
Press, 1979), p. 5.
34. Ibid., p. 9.
35. Leslie Fiedler, Waiting For The End (London: Jonathan Cape 1965),
p.77.
36. Albert Halper, "Under Forty," p. 24.
37. Howard Fast, "Under Forty," p. 25.
38. Ibid., p. 26.
39. Clement Greenberg, "Under Forty," p. 33.

40. Saul Bellow, To Jerusalem and Back (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.136.
41. Isaac Rosenfeld, "Under Forty," p. 36.
42. Lenny Bruce, How To Talk Dirty and Influence People (St. Albans: Granada, 1975), p. 22.
43. Albert Halper, "Under Forty," p. 24.
44. Chapman, ed., Jewish-American Literature, p. 666.
45. Gordon, Assimilation In American Life, p. 185.
46. Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse Five (St. Albans: Panther, 1972), p.89.
47. This in no way ignores the Jewish element in the history of American socialism. At all levels of "radical" activity Jews have been notable not only by their numbers but by virtue of their eminence. The following (by no means exhaustive or representative) list gives some idea of the strength of Jewish radicalism: anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, politicians Meyer London and Morris Hillquit, writers and artists Abraham Cahan, Mike Gold and Ben Shahn and a host of Trade Unionists including Ben Gold, Aaron Gross, Clara Lemlich and Rose Schneiderman. Indeed it could be said that secularized Jewish Messianism in the USA has taken two forms. One, as with those named above, has been based on Marx and the marxist vision of society. However the second, by far the larger group, has found greater "promise" in the opportunities almost exclusively afforded by the New World.
48. Gordon, p. 187. (New York: Mentor, 1976), p. 15.
49. Charles Renikoff, Family Chronicle (London: Norton Bailey, 1969), p. 274.
50. Abraham J. Karp, Golden Door to America (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p. 11.
51. Karp, Golden Door, p. 15.

Karp reports that

the Jew came to America to stay. Among other European people, a man would go to the New World to "make his fortune"

and then return home to his town in Russia, Poland, Italy, or Hungary. The dollars he brought back enabled him to establish a firm economic base for himself and his family. In the years 1908 - 1925 the remigration percentage was more than fifty per cent for Romanians, Magyars, Italians, and Russians. At that same time the percentage of Jews returning to the Old World was only five per cent relative to those arriving in the New World. Even more striking is the percentage of returnees to Poland between 1919 - 1922, when that Nation had been restored to independent sovereignty : Poles, 369.5 per cent; Ukrainians, 56.5 per cent; Jews, 0.5 per cent.

52. Howard Fast, "Under Forty," p. 27.
53. Ben Field, "Under Forty," p. 19.
54. Less complimentary but equally telling is a remark made by a character in Sinclair Lewis' Dodsworth:

I know only two classes of people who hate their own race - or tribe or nation or whatever you care to call it -- who travel principally to get away from their own people, who never speak of them except with loathing, who are pleased not to be taken as belonging, to them. That is, the Americans and the Jews!

Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth (St. Albans: Panther, 1969)
p. 39.

55. To Jerusalem and Back, p. 135.
56. Ben Field, "Under Forty," p. 20.
57. Richard D. Heffner, ed., A Documentary History Of The United States (New York: Mentor, 1976), p. 15.
58. Milton R. Konvitz, Judaism and the American Idea (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 51.
59. Philip Freneau, The Poems Of Philip Freneau ed., Fred Lewis Pattee (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), I, pp. 82-83.
60. Walter Nicgorski and Ronald Weber, eds., An Almost Chosen People (Notre Dame University Press, 1976), p. 150.

61. Roy P. Basler ed., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln 10 vols
New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), p.236.
62. Irving Howe, The Immigrant Jews Of New York (London: Routledge
and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 250.
63. Ibid., p. 207.
64. Harvey Swados, "Four Novels Reviewed" Hudson Review, 12 (Autumn,
1959), p. 458.
65. Philip Roth, Reading Myself and Others (London: Corgi, 1977),
p. 120.
66. Chapman, ed., Jewish American Literature p. 558.
67. Bruce, How To Talk Dirty and Influence People, p. 25.
68. Ibid., p. 19.
69. Konvitz, p. 32.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"How Should a Good Man Live":The Jewishness of Saul Bellow's Moral Vision.

The noted sociologist Edward Shils, author of Tradition and The Torment Of Secrecy and a long time acquaintance of Saul Bellow, once complained that the novelist

"has a cloacal view of the world... and that is a great pity because he has a certain elevation of spirit. He appreciates superior things, both morally and intellectually. But there is an attraction... for corruption and immorality, baseness of spirit, perversity.... Sin has an especial attraction for Mr. Bellow.... He loves to hear improprieties, he loves to relate improprieties." 1

In one sense this may be true -- Bellow's protagonists are perhaps more likely than most of their fictional contemporaries to come into contact with the brutal, grubby realities of the underworld. Nonetheless, Shils' observation somewhat misunderstands Bellow's fiction since the implication of immorality or amorality neglects the tone of stern moral enquiry to be found at the heart of all Bellow's writing. If sin does have "an especial attraction for Mr. Bellow," it is an intellectual attraction, part of the writer's genuine determination to confront the nature of human experience and behaviour. It is not, whatever else it may be, an attraction based on illicit thrills or perverse pleasures and the reader hoping for a generous literary immersion in "earthly delights" -- perhaps the reader who associates the modern American novel with Henry Miller and Portnoy's Complaint -- is going to have a thin time of it reading Saul Bellow.

One reason for this is that Bellow's novels are essentially novels of ideas, extended philosophical discussions whose perorations turn time and again to one central moral question. It is a question first asked (and explicitly) by Joseph in Dangling Man but its spirit informs the questings and questionings of all Bellow's subsequent protagonists, namely " 'How should a good man live; what ought he to do?' " 2

Continued through a further eight novels and two volumes of short stories, the Terrain over which the argument rages, indeed the argument itself, has changed surprisingly little in forty years. This encourages in the reader a sense of deja vu which is one of the main literary objections to Bellow's work: John Updike is surely not alone in observing in it a certain fictive thinness, particularly in the later books where literary demands are subordinated to the needs of an increasingly shrill argumentative line.

Nonetheless, as Updike also allows, "second rate Bellow is better than first rate most anybody else..."³ and not least because he starkly confronts the moral issues of the age, pressing the barriers to achieving that 'good life' spoken of in Dangling Man. Characteristically, these barriers have been depicted as promoting human dissociation: the fear of death rendering life absurd and the individual experiencing a sense of disconnection from his fellows, alienation from society. In his fiction Bellow has joined in a battle of ideas, using the books as weapons to resist and reject these notions of absurdity and alienation, conducting a spirited argument against the intellectually dominant ideas of the age and ranging impressively across the whole tradition of humanistic thinking in the process.

It is, in part, this very intellectuality in his work that makes Bellow seem so difficult to so many. A typical Bellovian protagonist, even a formally uneducated one like Woody Selbst, ranges easily across the history of western thought, moving readily from Plato to Pascal, quoting Aristotle and Emerson with the same authority. Frequently the action forms only a backdrop to philosophical disputation, 'acts' only in that it triggers or illuminates the discussions of the central characters. And yet Saul Bellow is far more than just an intellectual novelist: no contemporary writer has tried harder than Bellow to get beyond the realm of the academic, beyond theoretical disputation and to the heart of ordinary reality, no novelist has argued as strongly for the existence, vitality and validity of such a reality. Recognizing this,

Chirantan Kulshrestha has observed how Bellow's fiction

involves either the correction of the error with which the Bellow hero begins or the presentation to the reader of a perspective highlighting the continuance of the hero in error. Dissatisfied with his situation, the hero obsessively struggles with the problem of bridging the gap between his self and reality. In order to come to terms with reality, he considers it necessary to invent ideal constructions or confront the ideal constructions of his Reality Instructors. Unfortunately for him, reality constantly outmatches his formulations.... The error is corrected when the hero becomes conscious of the futility of shaping his life entirely on theoretical conceptions. 4

One particularly vivid example of this tendency to overthrow purely intellectual constructs comes in "Him With His Foot In His Mouth," as Harry Shawmut confronts and deflates an intellectual's assertion that "he agreed with Alexander Pope about the ultimate unreality of evil. Seen from the highest point of metaphysics. To a rational mind, nothing bad ever really happens". Shawmut realizes that "He was talking high minded balls. Twaddle! I thought. I said, "Oh? Do you mean that every gas chamber has a silver lining?" 5

Significant in this winning rejoinder is its, somewhat oblique, echo of the Holocaust and the long history of Jewish persecution. Such echoes persist in Bellow's fiction being, perhaps, suggestive of a certain Jewish knowingness about hard realities and they have been caught and commented upon by a large number of Bellow's critics. For all this the nature of Bellow's Jewishness remains no easy thing to define: Chirantan Kulshrestha, in many other respects a sensitive and trenchant critic of Bellow's work, sidesteps the whole question in Saul Bellow: The Problem Of Affirmation by maintaining that

The reason for omitting a discussion of such a vital source of creativity is located in my unfamiliarity with Judaism and my feeling that an alien critical idiom is often inherently ill equipped to analyse nuances developing out of the cultural, ethnic, and religious influences that are unselfconsciously absorbed by a writer during his upbringing and apprenticeship. Besides, even among the more sensitive of Bellow's Jewish critics, there appears to be no acceptable consensus on the expression of Judaism in his fiction. 6

Other critics, however, have been more forthcoming. Allen Guttman, for instance, has discussed the matter at some length and Malcolm Bradbury places Jewishness at the centre of Bellow's entire literary enterprise, observing that "his work displays a deep Jewish humanism, a concern to affirm man, to explore moral and metaphysical questions, to confront displacement and alienation, yet to move towards transcendental humanism."⁷ Indeed, Alfred Kazin has even been prompted to describe Saul Bellow's work as that of "a very passionate Jew, a very faithful Jew...."⁸ It is difficult immediately to see how Kazin intends this observation to be taken: Surely not in a religious sense as it is hard to think of a single character in Bellow's fiction who could be identified as a practising, synagogue - attending Jew. Nor are the characters Jewish in the sense of belonging to or living within a strongly Jewish community since most, like Moses Herzog, seem most at home in the multi-cultural, Melting pot atmosphere of an America no longer familiar with its own past. Bellow's protagonists, especially those in his later novels, are at least as likely to find themselves involved with Italian gangsters or impossibly voluptuous Latin beauties as they are to be in the midst of the Jewish community. Indeed Bellow frequently seems more concerned to depict his characters as Americans rather than Jews. Nonetheless there are ways in which these characters indicate their adherence to a Jewish tradition, a heritage from which they draw a fund of cultural memory, rather than to any specific religious precepts or observances.

One of the most illuminating examples of how this cultural memory activates and shapes an overriding concern for wider moral values is to be found in Bellow's description of the Israeli situation in To Jerusalem And Back. Here Bellow finds in Israel a real (that is, historically grounded) parallel for his declared fictive intent of providing "a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we humans are, who we are and what life is for."⁹ As Steven David Lavine contends, by examining "the conversations and actions of men such as Teddy Kollek and Meyer Weisgal, Bellow has come closer to presenting good men in action than in any of his earlier fiction."¹⁰ This being the case then the situation of Israel, in attempting to express itself as a Jewish state and find itself a place in the post-holocaust world and in the face of near universal hostility, is analogous with that of one of Bellow's heroes, struggling to find himself and then work out a relationship between that self and the rest of the world.

Throughout the book Bellow is at pains to emphasize the intensity and communality of the moral concerns that Jews take upon themselves:

"Jews do, it is well known, make inordinate demands upon themselves and upon one another. Upon the world, too,"¹¹ he observes at one point. Similarly, Bellow's protagonists demand the reinstatement of a moral dimension into the life of modern America as they "struggle toward a latter-day humanism and a new civility."¹² The increasing importance, in Bellow's eyes, of such a morality to the survival of the West (its absence in The Dean's December is virtually apocalyptic) carries with it a special significance for the survival of the Jews as both symbols and carriers of a powerful moral tradition. Thus, not only does Bellow use To Jerusalem and Back as an opportunity to defend the Israeli position in the Middle East but he also uses it to place himself within the Jewish tradition of living close to the maelstrom: "... We Jews seem to have a genius for finding the heart of a crisis,"¹³ (my italics) he muses at one point. There is further evidence of Bellow's sense of Jewishness and its purpose in the essay "Distractions Of A Fiction Writer." In this piece he reflects upon the repeated assertions made throughout history that the Jews are obsolete: "I brooded over Spengler in College. As a Jew I was, in his vocabulary, a Magian and therefore obsolete."¹⁴ he recalls. But, he argues, despite these assertions the Jew is not obsolete, nor is the novel, that "later day lean-to and temporary hovel," about to surrender to the reductivist tendencies of post-modernist aesthetics. This sense of the world being too willing to abandon what Bellow sees as being both valuable and viable is observable in a number of his writings, and in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech he attacks those who proclaim the end both of the novel of characters and of the age of the individual. For Bellow, then, much that is valuable about life is being thrown away by those determined to embrace 'the modern' and this is where the Jews, with their special moral purpose and conscience can be most significant, "Jews, yes, have a multitude of faults, but they have not given up on the old virtues,"¹⁵ he remarks.

Another area in which Bellow aligns the views of his protagonists

with the Jews' situation is in the matter of 'hard-headed' realism, a form of peculiarly American materialistic nihilism against which the typical Bellovian protagonist must constantly inveigh. Perhaps Albert Corde is the character most often and most violently berated for such a lack of 'practical' realism: characteristically, he recognizes that his old friend Dewey Spangler sees him as being "in flight from the material realities of the present age,"¹⁶ while in his nephew's eyes he is "flirting with a delusive philosophy and trying to have an affair with non-existent virtues."¹⁷ However, all Bellow's heroes suffer similar criticism from these 'reality instructors,' characters with a reductive and manipulative attitude to life and human behaviour. Despite their power, these frequently cogent attacks are consistently rejected and nowhere more eloquently than by Bellow himself in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: "How poorly they represent us..." he says of these notions of dehumanization, "we are much more limber, versatile, better articulated, there is much more to us, we all feel it."¹⁸ Similarly, in To Jerusalem and Back there are two examples in a matter of few pages of the novelist opting for an imaginative and positive version of the human condition. Writing of the real concern demonstrated by the mayor of Jerusalem for the welfare of his people Bellow confesses that, "Worldliness demands that I be suspicious of Kollek. But I warn myself not to coarsen my perceptions,"¹⁹ A few pages later Bellow again finds himself in conflict with worldliness (or better judgement -- call it what you will): "My inclination is to resist the imagination when it operates in this way. Yet, I too, feel that the light of Jerusalem has purifying powers and filters the blood and the thoughts."²⁰

For Bellow, then, Israel can be seen as providing a factual embodiment of the efforts and moral strivings of his fictional characters. Moreover it is a distinctly Jewish embodiment, depending on its Jewishness to furnish it with an appropriately humanitarian moral base from which to confront the problems of human isolation and disconnection. In this

respect Jewishness, in all of Bellow's work, can be seen as a somewhat generalized metaphor for positive, affirmative human values. However, unlike his contemporaries, among them Malamud and Potok, who underline a debt to their Jewish heritage through overt gestures to Yiddish culture and language or to Judaic religion, Bellow has tended to present far more assimilated, acculturated Jews, characters apparently unaffected by a European past. Nonetheless, some degree of awareness persists and Irving Howe has written that "Bellow seems to be consciously drawing upon the immigrant tradition, as well as whatever portions of the older European Jewish tradition may have survived in the settings of his youth -- and, what is more, he wishes to filter these experiences through a sophisticated historical consciousness."²¹ Moreover his awareness of this tradition is made evident through certain thematic and stylistic characteristics which bind the novelist both to his Yiddish heritage and to a number of his American-Jewish contemporaries; characteristics which have been sufficiently peculiar to Jewish writers in post-war America as to prompt a number of distinguished critics to talk in terms of a Jewish-American literary school or movement.

Saul Bellow has, perhaps not surprisingly, objected to such attempts to locate him within any tradition or movement. Nonetheless, 'common ground' undoubtedly exists and nowhere more clearly than in the ironic vision which Irving Malin detects at the heart of Bellow's fiction. Malin locates the strength of this Jewishness in the ironic recognition forced on a people who are 'Chosen' yet distinguished only in suffering and persecution. Such ironic recognition has contemporary expression in the descriptions of the contradictory nature of existence offered by writers like Joseph Heller and Bruce Jay Friedman. Significantly, however, it also reaches back into Yiddish folk culture where the dilemma of the East European Jews was played out through a retelling of the misfortunes of comic characters, luftmenschen and schlemiels, whose sufferings acted to remind the audience of their hopeless and absurd position.

At the same time the comic dimension offered some sort of remedy to that position and affirmed a belief in the validity of the concept of 'Chosenness'. For a people unable to affect control of their own fate, the importance of such characters (Holy Fools transcending the limits of circumstance) cannot be underestimated.

Bellow, clearly, is aware of this tradition and derives much from it. In his introduction to Great Jewish Short Stories he describes as "characteristically Jewish" stories in which

laughter and trembling are no curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations of the two. At times the laughter seems simply to restore the equilibrium of sanity; at times the figures of the story, or parable, appear to invite or encourage trembling with the secret aim of overcoming it by means of laughter. 22

In his own work Bellow has often used precisely this sort of ironic response to explain the contradictory and often uncomfortable facts of existence. In "Zetland: By A Character Witness," for example, the old description of East European Jews as living "up to their necks in a cloaca with their foreheads touching heaven," is adapted to fit a situation far removed, both culturally and intellectually, from the nineteenth century shtetl. Zetland argues that "the intellectual (petty bourgeois -- plebeian) was a megalomaniac. Living in a Kennel, his thoughts embraced the universe. Hence the funny agonies." 23 The aptness of the metaphor and the implication which underlies it accentuates the universality and continued relevance of that Jewish experience.

Clearly, traces of the author's Yiddish heritage survive in many of his characters and are transmitted through twentieth century versions of characters like the schlemiel, that sainted fool who gave support and encouragement to the little man and the victim. For instance, Irving Malin, remarks on how

The great sense of the "sanctity of the insulted and the injured" is always present in Augie's remarks. Here too he follows his Jewish countrymen. He is for

the poor versus the silly materialist; he is for his brother, George (the imbecile), his blind mother, and all the crippled. (Indeed, George resembles the child of Yiddish literature: "deprived, yet infinitely loved," as well as foolish - saintly.) ²⁴

Equally clearly, the relevance of what that heritage has to offer transcends mere ethnic boundaries so that, as Edward Abramson has observed, "the Jewishness of a character, like Bellow's Henderson is not a matter of ethnicity or religion but of outlook and personal tone."²⁵

Something of this transcendent significance is evident in the ironic gloss which attends Bellow's repeated portrayal of his characters' 'unworldliness.' This is perhaps best seen in the case of Dean Corde (by no means a Jew) who is accused of "flirting with a delusive philosophy and trying to have an affair with non-existent virtues." Mocked and belittled for his shocking naivety, Corde becomes something of an intellectual version of "Gimpel The Fool." Nevertheless (as with Gimpel) there is a tacit recognition that it is the fool who is undeluded and an ironic affirmation of Corde's beleaguered values is thereby achieved. Thus, much as the Jews of Eastern Europe refused to accept the validity of the roles and limitations placed upon them by political and economic circumstances so Bellow's protagonists refuse to bow to the dehumanizing mores of the materialistic society in which they are trapped.

Such powerful, transcendent irony, described by Ruth Wisse in terms of seeking "an ironic balance for survival,"²⁶ extends into a number of thematic areas whose very conjunction mark Saul Bellow's work as part of a distinct tendency in Jewish-American fiction and one, moreover, which carries echoes of an older, European culture. Several critics have attempted to identify and define the elements of this tendency and have concluded that those areas of concern most typically described in these contemporary fiction have their genesis in a common, cultural Jewish experience which frequently predates the American one.

In examining these concerns one of the most striking facts is that the fictions of post war American-Jewish writers have been, overwhelmingly,

located in an urban milieu. Of all these writers Bellow has been perhaps, the urban novelist par excellence. All of his novels (except Henderson The Rain King) having been set against the backdrop of an oppressive, teeming urban environment and this has allowed him to develop and explore the denatured city as a metaphor for the spiritual aridity of contemporary human relationships. Emerging out of this general awareness of urban hostility has been the many-faceted recognition of the Jew as archetypal marginal man, isolated from his fellows and acutely aware of the existential solitariness of the individual. Clearly, the question of marginality has different resonances for Saul Bellow than for, say, Philip Roth. Nevertheless such awareness can be seen, at least in part, as a vestige of some communal memory of the European ghettos with their enforced isolation and, as Leslie Fiedler has argued, it is the Jewish familiarity with marginality that has made their work seem so apposite to the age. Here again, the extent to which Bellow's protagonists conform to the pattern of isolate heroes is remarkable since from Joseph in Dangling Man to Alexander Corde in The Dean's December his central characters have been marked as men set apart, adrift from prevalent social norms, physically and intellectually removed from their contemporaries and constantly forced to confront the facts of such isolation.

It must, of course, be recognized that Jewish writers are not alone in seeking to depict isolated heroes: William Burroughs, Ken Kesey and Robert Stone, for example, have all provided powerful examples of marginal men, set apart from society, even deliberately cultivating their isolation. However, what is apparent is the Jewish writers' distinctive treatment of the subject, the way in which their protagonists endure rather than escape or embrace such intimations of mortal anxiety. In Bellow's case this positive approach to endurance exhibits itself in the way his characters reject the more fashionably apocalyptic versions of despair and refuse to bow to the shock attending the recognition of alienation as a facet of the human condition.²⁷ Moreover, even as they have become representative men

in an age of marginality and isolation, the protagonists of Jewish-American fiction have been noteworthy for the extent to which they have been held by the intertwined strings of family and an alien tradition reaching back across time and the world to the shtetl. Saul Bellow's Tommy Wilhelm and Moses Herzog, Joseph Heller's Bruce Gold, Philip Roth's Nathan Zuckerman are not free, unfettered loners in the sense that Burrough's Kim Carsons or Stone's Tabor are. Indeed, part of their significance springs from this fact, from the tension of being held between two cultures. As Loren Baritz observed in "A Jew's American Dilemma": "Because of America's rejection of the past, of the fierce commitment to the notion that this land will start anew, the American Jew is pulled apart. To be a Jew is to remember. An American must forget".²⁸ Typically, the hero of a Jewish-American novel has found himself in just such a dilemma: struggling hard, as is the case with Ozick or Malamud, to find a suitable form of memory or, like a Roth or Friedman protagonist, struggling equally hard to forget. This latter struggle has generally proved futile, as Bruce Jay Friedman's Mr. Kessler acknowledges in finally recognizing his Jewishness: "I may have been excused... but I wasn't that excused."²⁹ Bellow's protagonists have tended to belong to the former group, ultimately attempting to translate their ethnic, cultural memories (which inevitably differentiate them from the mainstream) into forms more immediately applicable to the second half of the twentieth century.

Characteristically, for Bellow's protagonists the awareness of such an alien (immigrant/Yiddish) tradition is something learned in childhood, something irrevocably bound up with the solidity and strength of a family unit which enshrined the principles of human caring. Frequently such awareness seems connected to Bellow's own childhood in Montreal and Chicago, most particularly in The Adventures Of Augie March, as, through the Jewish community, Augie learns the kind of secular humanism which has a strong Yiddish accent.

The impression and significance for Bellow of this ghetto childhood

is pervasive. It holds true for Harry Shawmut, Tommy Wilhelm and Woody Selbst and even Joseph in Dangling Man, perhaps the least Jewish in temperament and certainly the least morally generous of Bellow's central characters, is affected by memories of his Montreal childhood: "Little since has worked upon me with such force..." he recalls, "I sometimes think it is the only place where I was ever allowed to encounter reality."³⁰ Moses Herzog is able to draw upon much the same sort of childhood, in the same Montreal slums. For him that childhood has a significance nowhere matched in intensity throughout Bellow's work: "Young Jews, brought up on moral principles as Victorian ladies were on pianoforte and needles point..."³¹ is the way he categorizes those of his own generation. "Here was a wider range of human values than he had ever again been able to find," ³² he recalls, echoing Joseph's sense of a lost intensity.

A mixture of compassion and a sense of being close to the centre of 'real' life marks Bellow's depiction of Jewish ghetto life and its legacy is clearly seen in Moses Herzog, for whom it becomes an important factor in finding a way to piece together the fragments of his life. In one of his letters he attacks an old friend and colleague, Shapiro, for presenting "A merely aesthetic critique of modern History! After the wars and mass killings! You are too intelligent for this. You inherited rich blood. Your father peddled apples," ³² which is to suggest that Shapiro's cultural inheritance, as a Jew from a background very similar to Herzog's own, puts him too closely in touch with the realities of the business of living to be misled and misguided by a view of life, the Western view, distorted by distance from the issues. This claim for Jewish clear-sightedness and a sharp focus on reality is heard once again in To Jerusalem and Back, where Bellow repeatedly suggests that the West's failure to appreciate the predicament facing Israel is directly attributable to its failure to appreciate the tenuous nature of freedom itself. In The Dean's December this lack of clarity is described as a "soft nihilism," common to Western Europe and America where "life is

highly enjoyable and there's great reluctance to focus clearly on a pain level."³⁴ Lulled by a few generations of democratic government they conceive of freedom and the right to live as a birthright -- a mistake that a Jew, even in this day and age, would never make.

It can be seen, then, that certain general thematic qualities of Bellow's fiction indelibly mark him as a "Jewish" American novelist, concerning himself with social and moral attitudes and matters of human potential in the context of his particular cultural experience. Something of this becomes apparent in The Invention Of The Jew where Bernard Sherman investigates the generic aspect of this questioning spirit. Sherman identifies a Jewishness in Bellow's fiction, asserting that his novels fall within the recognizable genre of "Jewish education novels." Borrowing from Jacob Sloan, Bernard Sherman identifies "the novel of education as 'a journey of exploration in which traditional values are being considered, accepted, rejected or transfigured!'"³⁵ a definition which Sherman, rightly, takes to characterize much of Jewish-American fiction. He argues that

The education novel exactly reproduces the central experience of American Jewry: the movement from the enclosed shtetl (Eastern European village) environment, with its highly ordered and pervasive moral system (diffused by present lore and a necessarily realistic view of humanity), to the exacting demands of an industrial society.³⁶

Furthermore, Sherman proposes that the very nature of the Jewish education novel differentiates it from what he calls the American adolescent novel by observing that whereas the adolescent novels of the forties and fifties

are psychological in orientation and cover a shorter period in the protagonist's life.... Most of the Jewish-American novels of the Forties and Fifties continue a concern with societal circumstances equal in importance to the psychological. Furthermore, the Jewish novelist is more likely than the non-Jewish novelist to structure his treatment of the personality of the protagonist around family interrelationships.³⁷

Here again, these generalized observations can be seen as descriptions characteristic of the experience of the typical Bellovian protagonist.

Even in late-middle or old age such protagonists are still "growing", forcing themselves to examine their experiences in an effort, as Mr. Sammler says, "to get a handle on the situation." The success or failure of this effort defines the character's human significance and is central, perhaps vital, to Bellow's fictive enterprise.

Arguably none of the themes and concerns described above are exclusively Jewish. The bildungsroman and erziehungsroman are, as Sherman allows, forms used by Jews and non-Jews alike; non-Jews also treat the themes of isolation and family and write urban fictions. However, what is at issue is not the incidence of the themes but their repeated coincidence in Jewish-American fiction, a coincidence prompting the suggestion that there continues to be a Jewish dimension to the work of those authors who, like Saul Bellow, find themselves heir to a sort of cultural Judaism. Indeed, for many there remains in the writing a certain Yiddish tonality. Philip Roth for instance identified it as a sort of "bounciness" capturing "the rhythms, nuances, and emphases of urban and immigrant speech"³⁸ and, in Saul Bellow's case, Irving Howe has amplified Roth's more general judgement by describing how

Bellow's style draws upon Yiddish, not so much through borrowed diction as through underlying intonation and rhythm. The jabbing interchange of ironies, the intimate vulgarities, the blend of sardonic and sentimental which characterizes Yiddish speech, all are lassoed into Bellow's English: so that what emerges is not an exploitation³⁹ of folk memory but a vibrant linguistic transmutation.

Moreover, Howe locates in this distinctive use of language "a comic rhetoric that keeps turning its head back to Yiddish even as it keeps racing way from it,"⁴⁰ and insists that Bellow's prose is an example of "that sharp, nervous prose American Jewish writers have made their own, a prose that depends on the heightening and tensing of urban speech rhythms...."⁴¹ Certainly Bellow can and does reproduce the Yiddish English of the immigrants through characters like Grandma Lausch (in The Adventures Of Augie March) or Maurice Venice (Seize The Day). More significant, however, is the way in which the Yiddish tonalities of

Bellow's prose lend themselves to the harsh, even brutal, abruptness that characterizes contemporary American English and thereby gives expression to the harshness and brutality that underlies so much of contemporary experience. This fact is recognized in "Him With His Foot In His Mouth" when Harry Shownut describes Yiddish as "a hard language.... Yiddish is severe and bears down without mercy." 42

It is possible to see how this 'hardness' works in helping Bellow attain the "street-tough raciness" 43 which characterizes so much of his writing. In the following passage the sardonic irony and the jarring mixture of high and low speech idioms combine to provide precisely the sort of sharp, taut prose which Irving Howe described.

We were... for instance, at a formal university dinner, and I was sitting beside an old woman who gave millions of dollars to opera companies and orchestras. I was something of a star that evening and wore tails, a white tie, because I had just conducted a performance of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, surely one of the most moving works of the eighteenth century. You would have thought that much music had ennobled me, at least until bedtime. But no, I soon began to spoil for trouble. It was no accident that I was on Mrs. Pergamon's right. She was going to be hit for a big contribution. Somebody had dreamed up a schola cantorum, and I was supposed to push it (tactfully). The real pitch would come later. 44

Clearly, with Bellow it is not so much a matter of specific elements of his Jewish heritage remaining intact to be reproduced in his fiction as it is of the spirit of this heritage surviving, somewhat transformed in appearance, to animate the characters in a distinctive way. In a very particular sense, then, the Jewish voice survives. It is not, perhaps much evident in Dangling Man (though even here the power of Joseph's Jewish family background is acknowledged) but in The Victim the significance of Leventhal's Jewishness is made apparent, as is its connection to the necessary social dimension of humanity. Further, from Augie March on the characters take on the general shape and dimensions of this hard, immigrant Chicagoan, street wise but fiercely intellectual, whose perceptions are undercut with a strong Jewish dimension, a

Jewishness drawing on the ironic humour and special knowledge of reality which his background has given him.

The ubiquity of this character type is such that even Bellow's non-Jewish characters (like Eugene Henderson or Charlie Citrine) seem to share these qualities in some measure. Indeed it is surely this resemblance that Abraham Bezanker was referring to in suggesting of Bellow's protagonists, that "their distinctive dimension arises from the fact that they wear the heart on the sleeve as if it were the Star of David." ⁴⁵ Thus, Bellow's protagonists, predominantly Jews, achieve a comprehensiveness of vision, are able to keep a focus on the world in a way that for others has become almost totally impossible. In an age characterized by atomization and alienation, essentially matters of human divorce, Saul Bellow's fiction attempts a 'reconnection' of humanity to certain eternal verities about the human condition and his self-interpreted Jewish vision is central to that effort.

One area in which this cultural, secularized Jewishness is most evident is in Bellow's treatment of death, the consideration of which is central to most of his works particularly the later ones. The opening lines of "A Silver Dish" provide powerful testimony to the nature of this speculation which is, essentially, a debate on how contemporary perceptions of death influence the value and significance of life.

What do you do about death -- in this case, the death of an old father? If you're a modern person, sixty years of age, and a man who's been around, like Woody Selbst, what do you do? Take this matter of mourning, and take it against a contemporary background. How, against a contemporary background, do you mourn an octogenarian father, nearly blind, his heart enlarged, his lungs filling with fluid, who creeps, stumbles, gives off the odors, the moldiness or gassiness, of old men. I mean! As Woody put it, be realistic. Think what times these are. The papers daily give it to you -- the Lufthansa pilot in Aden is described by the hostages on his knees, begging the Palestinian terrorists not to execute him, but they shoot him through the head. Later they themselves are killed .

And still others shoot others, or shoot themselves. That's what you read in the press, see on the tube, mention at dinner. We know now what goes daily through the whole of the human community, like a global death-peristalsis. 46

The forced and unwilling intimacy which is evident in the physical description of advanced age is characteristic of such considerations. In Bellow's fiction images of death are powerfully immediate and often personalized, being suggestive of its intrusiveness, its power over the process of living. Artur Sammler, for instance, sees "death seated inside the health capsule," 47 Humboldt envisages the world "snatched, ravished by death, throttled, smothered," 48 and the aging Albert Corde feels a funeral to be a personal "death rehearsal," 49 accounting for his reluctance to visit cemeteries with the uneasy joke that "it was just as easy for your dead to visit you, only by now he would have to hire a hall." 50 Even those at some distance from death are prey to its advances: Moses Herzog, for instance, locates on the face of Phoebe Gersbach, "small bloodless marks.... As if death had tried her with his teeth and found her still unripe." 51.

The extent to which the spectre of death, in a post-religious age, governs the nature and meaning of life, has been closely observed by Saul Bellow. "People are dying..." says Moses Herzog, "for lack of something real to carry home when day is done." 52 It is a feeling, a belief in a debilitating cultural emptiness, which has been consistently reiterated in his books. "People go overboard easily. I guess they're not as strong that way as they used to be and when things get rough they give in," 53 observes Asa Leventhal of his sister in law's behaviour following the death of her small son. In Mr. Sammler's Planet the weakness is specifically connected to the fear that death is just oblivion: "What it amounted to was limitless demand -- insatiability, refusal of the doomed creature (death being sure and final) to go away from this earth unsatisfied." 54 The implications of this refusal and fear are terrifying -- carte-blanche for self indulgence -- and it is precisely his conflict with

such implications that makes Artur Sammler Bellow's most liverish and least attractive protagonist. For the sake of humanity a cure for this fear is necessary or, as King Dahfu intimates to Henderson, "all the better imagining will have to be surrendered."⁵⁵ It is precisely this sort of surrender that Bellow consistently rejects, seeking instead for his characters a new understanding of death. Thus Charlie Citrine sets himself "a final and ever higher achievement, namely an indispensable metaphysical revision, a more correct way of thinking about the question of death."⁵⁶

Such epiphanies occur. In "Him With His Foot In His Mouth," Shawmut is able to record how "I thought about death, and also about the best topics for reflection appropriate to my age, the on the whole agreeable openness of things toward the end of the line."⁵⁷ They are, however, extremely hard won, the result of a confrontation with death and a recognition of its essence. As with the vivid imagery of Bellow's language of death, the protagonists achieve an understanding only by submitting themselves to its reality, by focussing closely on its inevitability. Thus Tommy Wilhelm finds a release from terror in his confrontation with an unknown corpse, finding, in the universality of death, an expression of his own humanity. He can, finally, cry "with all his heart," sinking "deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need."⁵⁸

Such understandings are frequently experienced by Bellow's Jewish characters drawing on forms of explicitly Jewish wisdom. For example, Schlossberg and Kaplan are able to discuss death at a birthday party without feeling the sense of morbidity of which other guests accuse them. They agree that the old Jewish custom of sewing one's own funeral shroud was a good one: "At least they knew where they stood and who they were, in those days," remarks Schlossberg who goes on to suggest that the reluctance to think about death stems from a reluctance to relinquish something (life) that the majority have not learnt how to use: "I was born once and I will die once. You want to be two people? More than human? Maybe its because

you don't know how to be one." ⁵⁹ The necessity of being fully human and of understanding exactly what humanity implies is something that Bellow attempts to describe in all his novels: in response to young Moses' question of how Adam came to be created from dust his mother rubs the palm of her hand with a finger until something earth-like appears. "Maybe she offered me this proof partly in a spirit of comedy..." muses the middle-aged Herzog, "the wit you can have only when you consider death very plainly, when you consider what a human being really is." ⁶⁰ These remarks clearly recall Bellow's own assertion that the West has lost its appreciation of the struggle for survival in a way that the Jews, with their long History of struggle and persecution, have not done and in this way they emphasize the apparent Jewishness of Sarah Herzog's position.

That same willingness to accept the truth, however unpalatable, 61
 demonstrated by Sarah Herzog ("Nor had she always lied to spare his feelings," says the narrator introducing the episode), forces Charlie Citrine to lay down his mystical and spiritual pre-occupations in recognition of the real way in which the dead can continue to live -- through the living. Despite his repeated musings on the ideas of Rudolph Steiner and others expounding theories on the afterlife Bellow, through the words of Charlie Citrine, intimates his doubt over the veracity of their ideas when he observes that, "to assume, however queerly, the immortality of the soul, to be free from the weight of death that everybody carries upon the heart presents... a terrific opportunity." ⁶² The words 'however queerly' suggest that these speculations on the spirit world are perhaps just an aid to attaining a constructive state of mind, as also happens with Swedenborg in "Him With His Foot In His Mouth." Certainly, such an interpretation is given credence by the conclusion of the novel, the way in which Humboldt is able to act "from the grave, so to speak..." ⁶³ in a thoroughly rational, material way, implying and demanding no belief in the spirit world. He acts by freeing Citrine from the financial and legal problems in which he is entangled and also by forcing him to recognise the folly of insisting on a 'higher fate'

and the value of the 'serious work' that they had busied themselves with. He acts through the legacy of the film scripts, the capers "which the world found a use for," and it is this use to which Citrine is referring when he tells Humboldt's ex-wife:

Now I begin to understand what Tolstoy was getting at when he called on mankind to cease the false and unnecessary comedy of history and begin simply to live. It's become clearer and clearer to me in Humboldt's heartbreak and madness. He performed all the stormy steps of that routine. That performance was conclusive. ⁶⁴

He acts also in making Citrine confront the facts of death. Unable to avoid attending the reburial of a man as close to him as Von Humboldt Fleisher had been Charlie is made to recognize the strength of severity of the grave: "So the coffin was enclosed and the soil did not come directly upon it. But then, how did one get out? One didn't, didn't, didn't! You stayed! you stayed!" ⁶⁵ However, from this cry of desperation Bellow moves Citrine to a more positive vision; that of a spring flower pushing up through the dead leaves, an image of re-birth and renewal, promising lilacs (or, to be exact, croci) out of the dead land -- and dead in a very particular sense, as the flower is found in the cemetery. The importance of this spring flower is emphasized by Citrine's recognition of the inevitability of spring after winter: "I guess it's going to happen after all. On a warm day like this everything looks ten times deader," ⁶⁶ a remark which mitigates and mutes the force of his earlier outburst on death, and which is given further significance by a remark of Citrine's prompted by the film of their screenplay, 'Caldofreddo': 'Ah, poor character, poor fighting furious weeping hollering Humboldt. His flowers were aborted in the bulb. The colours never came into the light, they rotted in his chest.' ⁶⁷ The implication is unmistakable: the flower, a symbol of rebirth (and of Humboldt's continued existence) has been grown thanks to the care of Charlie Citrine who, in tending Humboldt's ideas, has brought forth flowers which would never, otherwise, have seen the light. ⁶⁸

Finally, supported by an 'inheritance' thousands of years old, an inheritance which insists on the primacy of this life in shaping man's thoughts, Bellow's protagonists are coaxed and prodded by events into a position where they are able to offer a cogent and purposeful interpretation of life in an age in which there is no certitude of life after death. It is an interpretation first offered by Schlossberg, in The Victim, but is of crucial significance to the over-all body of Bellow's fiction and is characterized both by the belief that life is valuable in its own right and by an appreciation of "the strength of the world, the human world and all its wonderful works."⁶⁹ However, as Bellow makes abundantly clear, it is vital that a man be fully human, that he should "meet the terms of his contract,"⁷⁰ since, in the words of Moses Herzog, "We owe a human life to this waking spell of existence, regardless of the void."⁷¹ Such a belief, of owing a human life, is, in its assumption of moral imperatives, a restatement of the importance of discovering how a good man should live. In pursuing a solution to this problem Bellow's protagonists hold firmly to the metaphor of reconnection, to a belief in man's capacity to transcend the barriers (of death, of waning social commitment) to his recovery of essential human virtues, that, in Mr. Sammler's words, "in his heart each man knows".⁷²

However, if as Sammler so emphatically asserts, "we know, we know, we know, we know" why do we, for the most part, behave as if we have so thoroughly forgotten? The answer, in Bellow's view, lies in the powerful, faceless pressures which bear down on the individual emphasizing isolation, weakness and impotence; the total inefficacy of man's social dimension. Herzog, for instance, suggests that "the old proposition of Pascal... that man is a reed, but a ~~thinking~~ ~~reed~~ might be taken with a different emphasis by the modern citizen of a democracy. He thinks but he feels like a reed bending before centrally generated winds."⁷² Arguably, if people have ceased 'to meet the terms of their contracts' it is because mass society has (paradoxically) tended to deny the validity or value of such contracts, has negated the significance of the individual as part of the totality.

Growing out of this unremitting onslaught, Bellow suggests, comes a false life-view, a mistakenly high demand and expectation of the human condition which encourages people to lose sight of their common humanity. Such tendencies are variously described: Dean Corde sees them in terms of a "soft nihilism" while Eugene Henderson depicts a gap between 'being' people and 'becoming' people. All, however, share the same genesis and describe substantially the same problem. In a sense this returns us to the matter of the Jews' special knowledge of reality and Bellow's repeated assertions that intellectual constructs are insufficient to accommodate such a reality. However, Bellow's version of this process of dissociation is perhaps more complex than the description allows and is best seen in terms of a fragmentation of realities, of a high as well as a low reality. Thus, of equal importance to any insistence that reality is beyond the grasp of mere intellectuality and theory is the recognition that the hard, 'bottom line' realism of the materialistic mentality is equally insufficient because it fails to encompass the realm of the human spirit. Perturbed by the apparently widespread abandonment of higher spiritual values, Bellow has persistently argued the need for art to embody them, to become the powerful expression of human spirituality in the twentieth century. Only through art can such values be expressed and art alone has "the strength" to rival the attractions of narcotics, the magnetism of TV, the excitement of sex, or the ecstasies of destruction.' " 74

The more apparent aspect of this conflict of realities, certainly the more publicized and controversial aspect, has been Bellow's attitude to the adherents of the low reality, those who seek to reject the moral and spiritual dimensions of man, either to legitimize their own social-Darwinistic brutality or to excuse the growing evidence of social breakdown as being purely a response to the economic brutalities of the denatured inner city environment. To an extent Bellow has rashly courted, contrarily provoked even, the sort of criticism he (and Corde in The Dean's December,) received by an ambiguous stance on the emotive racial problem and by an apparent absence of human feeling for those on the receiving end of decades of inner

city neglect.⁷⁵ Nonetheless there exists in Bellow's fiction an indisputable concern for the human condition, a concern to safeguard those qualities that constitute humanity and Bellow's intent in writing fiction can be viewed as being consistent with that of Dean Corde in writing his controversial articles for Harper's magazine: both possessing "the high intention -- to prevent the American idea from being pounded into dust altogether."⁷⁶

It is just such a concern about the repeated assaults being made on what is, in essence, the spark of life that can also be seen in Bellow's many articles and speeches. "The human being is not what he commonly thought a century ago. The question nevertheless remains.... What is he?"⁷⁷ he asks in one article which seeks to reject a determinist interpretation of man and these interpretations have their fictional equivalents in the "reality instructors" of Bellow's fiction, characters like Simon March or Rinaldo Cantabile determined to impart some sense of "harsh reality" to dreamer - protagonists like Augie March and Charlie Citrine. In some respects Bellow is eager to embrace this day to day reality as a necessary counter-balance to the higher world: "Luckily... I didn't have the means to get too far away from our common life,"⁷⁸ reflects Moses Herzog attributing this 'limitation' to his continued grasp on reality. What Bellow rejects is the coarsening of this reality, the one which confronts man with the problems of sheer survival, into an ethical justification of brutality: "What makes you think realism must be brutal?"⁷⁹ Herzog asks. It is a remark echoed and amplified by many others: for instance, when Cantabile offers to organize an 'accident' for Citrine's wife, he justifies his suggestion by making an appeal to brutal reality: "I'm only reminding you this is Chicago, after all." Citrine, however, in the tradition of Bellow's protagonists, men committed to the principles of higher imagining and humanity, rejects the power of such a reality: "Ninety-eight per-cent nightmare, so you think I should total it?"⁸⁰ The same refusal is made by others, most obviously Augie March, who rejects the route to wealth and comfort cynically adopted by his brother Simon in favour of finding himself and expresses their common dilemma by saying:

"You couldn't get the admission out of me that a situation couldn't be helped and was inescapably bad, but I was eternally looking for a way out, and what was up for question was whether I was a man of hope or foolishness."⁸¹

Equally invidious, though, is the tendency, or desire, to escape from this ordinary reality and pursue a 'higher fate' -- one remote from the 'real' world. Bellow observes the existence of such a tendency in his depiction of the West as being remote from the problems and dangers of mere survival, but sees it as being particularly marked, as has been observed, among the intellectuals of Western culture, and this desire to escape is an impulse against which many of his characters must struggle. Characteristically they seek for themselves "a separate destiny,"⁸² and, like Tommy Wilhelm, desire only "to be freed from the anxious and narrow life of the average."⁸³ During the course of the books however each one comes to recognize that he has no right to expect to be thus set free, that he is no more justified in "trying to spend [his] whole life in the upper storeys of higher consciousness,"⁸⁴ than is Rinaldo Cantabile in seeking to legitimize thuggery and brutality by appealing to the laws of the jungle.

In fact, as Citrine himself suggests, 'real' life -- the life which participates in the 'real' world -- can only be discovered by achieving a balance between both of these realities:

In Baudelaire I had found the following piece of curious advice: Whenever you receive a letter from a creditor write fifty lines upon some extraterrestrial subject and you will be saved. What this implied was that the vile quotidienne drove you from the globe, but the deeper implication was that real life flowed between here and there. Real life was a relationship between here and there. Cantabile, one thousand per cent here bore this out. ⁸⁵

It is a relationship previously explored in the novel Henderson The Rain King. Henderson, a typical Bellovian hero seeking his way out of a life-crisis, at first feels he has found it in the spirit of 'grun-tu-molani' ('man wants to live') which he learns from the gentle Arnewi tribe. However, as King Dahfu of the Wairiri tells him, "Granted,

grun-tu-molani is much, but it is not alone sufficient. Mr. Henderson, more is required,"⁸⁶ and this 'more' reveals itself in a sort of hardness, a recognition of the harsher forces which shape and govern life as well as those 'higher' desires. As a demonstration of this extra dimension in the Wairiri's thinking Bellow creates a comparison between the Wairiri's attitude to cattle and that of the Arnewi. To the Arnewi cattle are sacred and cannot be harmed, even at a time of drought and famine; the Wairiri, on the other hand, sacrifice their cattle in order to bring rain. The implication would seem to be that the Arnewi, by seeking to abstract themselves from the harshness of life, have in fact condemned themselves to lives of misery, unable to make available to themselves the full potential of life. It is an episode which recalls Bellow's frequently asserted belief that an unremitting history of persecution has kept the Jews in close touch with the realities of the human condition. Moreover it provides some idea of why similarly harsh and unpleasant realities (in the form of American social breakdown) insist on obtruding in much of the later fiction. In fact, Herzog, Mr. Sammler's Planet, Humboldt's Gift and The Dean's December all exhibit the same sort of tendency, to yoke together two separate plots -- one from the higher world of ideals and ideas and a second from the brash, vulgar world of urban America -- in such a way that they act upon and reflect one another, indeed interacting to such an extent that they become interdependent. Observing just such a phenomenon in Humboldt's Gift Sanford Pinsker remarks that "characters like Citrine require a thickly textured counter-balancing if the novel is to avoid spinning off into those 'higher worlds' Rudolph Steiner writes about. In Humboldt's Gift there is no shortage of anchors,"⁸⁷ a statement equally applicable to either of the two novels which preceded it.

Ultimately, as Augie March attempts to make clear, a man must come to the whole world with a more inclusive sense of reality if he hopes ever to understand himself and the nature of humanity:

a man could spend forty, fifty, sixty years... inside the walls of his own being. And all great experience.... And all high conversation.... And all achievement would stay within those walls.... This would be only a terrible hideous dream about existing. It's better to dig ditches and hit other guys with your shovel than die in the walls. 88

This realization is emphasized by Mintouchian's advice to Augie that, "It is better to die what you are than to live a stranger for ever." 89 Augie is the great proponent of fulfilling the self and the living out of life on lines dictated by character and accordingly advocates that a thing should come, "easily or not at all," 90 claiming that "I never tried to exceed my constitution." 91 This stance argues for the sufficiency of being human, a point of view already expressed by Schlossberg in The Victim, as if to suggest that simply achieving humanity -- with the demands it makes in terms of accepting death and recognizing the nature of 'real life' -- is, in fact, no small achievement at all. This, surely, is what underlies Augie March's description of himself as "a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand...", 92 and takes the form of a belief that excellence lies not in the extreme or unusual, not in the romantic rebel or superman but in man doing his utmost to be worthy of the term human. It is a belief which undoubtedly colours Bellow's rejection of the romantic view of life, with its insistence on 'major statements' and the position of the artist as alienated individual but it has equal bearing on the attention, celebration even of the human and 'ordinary' which is evident in Bellow's fiction, a celebration which grows out of a commitment to the perception of reality as a day to day 'ordinary' reality as well as a higher spiritual reality.

The persistent problems that Bellow's protagonists have faced in achieving such a balance and the increasing difficulties that they have experienced in arguing the existence of a realm of the spirit have led a number of critics to suggest a growing pessimism on Bellow's part. There is an argument that the victories for the human spirit achieved in the books from The Adventures Of Augie March to Herzog are far less evident in

his subsequent writings and that there is evidence of a progressively entrenched conservatism in the characters of Artur Sammler, Charlie Citrine and Alexander Corde which corresponds closely to their deepening despair regarding the perceived decline of western society. It is an argument not without merit. Inarguably the later works have a more perceptibly conservative tone to them founded on the liverish ill-temper of Sammler and Corde regarding the folly and unworthiness of most of their fellow citizens and even Professor Shawmut's protestations against being considered a Reaganite tend to confirm rather than dispel the belief that Bellow's more recent protagonists have been quite closely inclined to that particular end of the political spectrum.⁹³ There has also been something of a shrill quality in their social pontificating, bespeaking Bellow's own sense of growing urgency, and a certain tone of anxiousness in their response to the advancing barbarism of the age. This is evident not only in the portrayals of incipient social breakdown contained in Sammler's confrontation with the negro pick pocket or in Corde's experience of the disaffected underclass, but in the depiction of a fundamental erosion of traditional liberal values, like freedom of speech and expression, extending into the very places where they should most firmly be enshrined amid the most precious of humanitarian values. Such an erosion, partially perpetrated by a new intellectual orthodoxy of the left as a way of illegitimizing political dissent, can be seen as beginning to take shape in Bellow's work with the orchestrated heckling of Artur Sammler's lecture during which specific comparisons are made between the demonstrators and barbary apes and there is a deliberate evocation of the laws of the jungle.⁹⁴ It can be seen as progressing through Charlie Citrine's more robust and semi-comic exposure to the vulgarization of intellectual debate in the form of the gangster with the Ph.D wife and culminating in Dean Corde's experience of campus disruption and hostility to his controversial magazine articles. In these cases the new brutalism, the conviction "that real was also brutal. And the acceptance of excrement as a standard,"⁹⁵ for humanity emphasizes Bellow's perception of the debasing

and devaluing of liberal human values.

It is, however, extreme to interpret these alarm calls as evidence of utter despair being at work in Bellow's fiction or to see them in terms of proof of a volte face in the novelist's political thinking. Rather, as the critic John Hollander has argued, this 'reactionary' concern to refute the incoming tide of post-liberal intellectual opinion is essentially consistent with the ideas and opinions that marked Bellow's earlier work. Speaking with particular reference to Mr. Sammler's Planet Hollander, while conceding that the book "could please certain neo-conservative critics," argued that it was not "a political book" or one which marked a noticeable change of heart:

I don't think any of his previous books reflects a political cast which, if extrapolated, would have been very, very different from that. I think as time goes on that book will seem less and less politically polarized and more a matter of what had simply not been allowed to surface all of the time. 96

Indeed the argument which Sammler and Corde in particular have with what Norman Podhoretz has described as "the fashionable, prevalent culture of the period," ⁹⁷ is not so much an ideological dispute, the outburst of gut reactionary feeling, as it is an objection to the dismissal of pluralistic liberal values. It is a reaction to one of the more saddening examples of the squeezing out of the moral and spiritual dimensions of humanity in favour of a materialistic, almost scientifically demonstrable, evaluation of man as the sum total of the social and environmental pressures exerted upon him. Thus, what some have seen as an abandonment of liberal values for the dubious garments of reactionary thinking, can be better seen as an example of the genuine concern that Bellow exhibits for the higher reality, the moral reality he brings alive through his commitment to the spiritual and social functions of art.

Pitted against the clamorous cries of "limitless demand," of the ever wilder tunes played on the personality ⁹⁸ and the "emancipation resulting in madness" ⁹⁹ which, in Bellow's fiction, has increasingly characterized

the individual's response to his perceived social impotence and mortal insignificance, the modest commitment his protagonists make to ordinary humanity may seem muted.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless it is precisely such an, in essence, unremarkable commitment to the sufficiency of one life properly used that has provided them with the impetus to achieve a new understanding of their humanity, a humanity as earthly rooted in the characters of Harry Shawmut and Woody Selbst as it is in the earlier, more illustrious figures like Moses Herzog and Augie March. It is, moreover, in its dense and complex melding of Jew and American, intellectual and rough, a version of humanity which offers a vigorous and compelling response to that large moral question which Bellow's fictional enquiries have, from the beginning, set themselves the task of answering.

6. Saul Bellow *His With His Foot In His Mouth* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964) p. 17.
7. Elishavstein, p. 21.
8. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 134.
9. "Saul Bellow and the latter-day Isaac-Isa."
10. Saul Bellow, "Tehel Prize Acceptance Speech," *Dialogues*, 10, (1977) p. 56.
11. Steven David Levine, "In Defense of Messianic Saul Bellow's *To Jerusalem and Back*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 4, 11 (1978), p. 81.
12. Saul Bellow, *To Jerusalem and Back* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p. 13.
13. Malcolm Bradbury, *Saul Bellow* (London: Methuen, 1962) p. 26.
14. *To Jerusalem and Back*, p. 15.
15. Saul Bellow "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," *The Living Novel* (Granville Hicks (New York: MacMillan, 1957), p. 13.
16. *To Jerusalem and Back*, p. 77.
17. Saul Bellow, *The Dangling Man* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1962) p. 122.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

NOTES

1. "Saul Bellow and the latter day lean to, "First broadcast on BBC Radio Three, February Three, 1982.
2. Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.32.
3. In the radio programme "Saul Bellow and the latter-day lean-to," Updike observes a certain failure of literary realization in some of Bellow's later works remarking how, in Humboldt's Gift the "philosophy threatens to take over from the characters and turns them all into bits of stew in a supernatural broth... they all seem in a strange way versions of himself."
4. Chirantan Kulshrestha, Saul Bellow: The Problem Of Affirmation (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1980), p. 57.
5. Saul Bellow Him With His Foot In His Mouth (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984) p. 17.
6. Kulshrestha, p. 24.
7. Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern American Novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 134.
8. "Saul Bellow and the latter-day lean-to."
9. Saul Bellow, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," Dialogue, 10, (1977) p. 66.
10. Steven David Lavine, "In Defiance of Reason: Saul Bellow's To Jerusalem And Back," Studies in American Jewish Literature 4,ii (1978), p. 81.
11. Saul Bellow, To Jerusalem And Back (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p. 15.
12. Malcolm Bradbury, Saul Bellow (London: Methuen, 1982) p. 26.
13. To Jerusalem And Back, p. 15.
14. Saul Bellow "Distractions Of A Fiction Writer," The Living Novel Granville Hicks (New York: MacMillan, 1957), p. 19.
15. To Jerusalem and Back, p. 57.
16. Saul Bellow, The Dean's December (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982) p. 122.
17. Ibid., p. 78.

18. Bellow, "Nobel Prize Speech," p. 67.
19. To Jerusalem And Back, p. 87.
20. Ibid., p. 93.
21. Irving Howe, The Immigrant Jews Of New York (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) p. 593.
22. Saul Bellow, ed., Great Jewish Short Stories (New York: Dell, 1963) p. 12.
23. Him With His Foot In His Mouth (London: Allison Press, 1984) p.168.
24. Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969, p. 51.
25. Edward A. Abramson, The Immigrant Experience In American Literature (BAAS Pamphlets In American Studies 10, 1982) p.36.
26. Ruth Wisse, The Schlemiel As Modern Hero (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1971), p. 41.
27. The various forms of 'busyness' which afflict, for example, John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, Piet Hanema or Warden Conner strike me as primarily attempts to escape the fear of death. On the other hand the obsessive, hipsterish, isolation courted by Tabor in A Flag For Sunrise seems, like the self-imposed emotional exile of Joe Berman in The Human Season, a form of rehearsal for the ultimate solitude of death. The steady refusal by Bellow's protagonists to indulge in either of these options is perhaps most vividly conveyed by Moses Herzog's declaration that "we must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time, that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it, mere junk from fashionable magazines. Things are grim enough without these shivery games." Herzog, p. 324.
28. Loren Baritz, "A Jew's American Dilemma" Commentary, June 1962 p.525.

29. Bruce Jay Friedman, Far From The City Of Class (New York: Frommer-Pasmanier, 1965), p. 57.
30. Dangling Man, p. 70.
31. Herzog (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 238.
32. Ibid., p. 146.
33. Ibid., p. 81.
34. The Dean's December, p. 276.
35. Bernard Sherman The Invention Of The Jew (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969) p.20.
36. Ibid., p. 20.
37. Ibid., p. 22.
38. Philip Roth, Reading Myself And Others (London: Corgi, 1977) p.120.
39. Howe, Immigrant Jews Of New York, p. 594.
40. Ibid., p. 595.
41. Ibid., p. 594.
42. Him With His Foot In His Mouth, p. 16.
43. Howe, p. 595.
44. Him With His Foot In His Mouth, p. 27.
45. Abraham Bezanker, "The Odyssey Of Saul Bellow", Yale Review 58. Spring 1969), p. 360.
46. Him With His Foot In His Mouth, p. 191.
47. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 127.
48. Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p. 258.
49. The Dean's December, p. 216.
50. Ibid., p. 267.
51. Herzog, p. 271.
52. Herzog, p. 34.
53. Saul Bellow, The Victim (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) p.194.
54. Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 29.

55. Saul Bellow, Henderson The Rain King (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 241.
56. Humboldt's Gift, pp. 397 - 398.
57. Him With His Foot In His Mouth, p. 55.
58. Seize The Day (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.126.
59. The Victim, pp. 207 - 208.
60. Herzog, p. 240.
61. Ibid., p. 239. Essentially the willingness this displays derives from a gritty optimism engendered by the East European Jewish experience.
62. Humboldt's Gift, p. 430.
63. Ibid., p. 9.
64. Ibid., p. 464.
65. Ibid., p. 474.
66. Ibid., p. 474.
67. Ibid., p. 450.
68. In The Dean's December Bellow uses the growth and death of flowers in an unusual way, avoiding the winter-spring cycle by setting the action at the turn of the year. Dean Corde himself grows flowers, African Violets, in his office but during his absence they are allowed to die. The singularity of his care for the plants serves to mirror his "care" for Chicago, which is depicted as an urban jungle or rubbish dump and is characterized by decay and an oppressive lack of any natural vegetation. Indeed this parallelling of concerns is emphasized by Corde's musings in Bucharest: the urban blight of Chicago, particularized by the Richie Lester case; the fact of death forced in front of him by Valeria's condition and his concern for the fate of his African Violets intermingle in a general speculation on life and death.

Furthermore, flowers act as indicators of hope and concern in The Dean's December. Just as the Dean's caring qualities are

underlined by his concern for his office plants so Petrescu's efforts to get carnations for Valeria's funeral are a mark of his humanity despite his official status and the value and goodness of Toby Winthrop, in running the "detoxification Center," is emphasized by the "flowered drapes" and the philodendrons. All three -- Corde, Petrescu and Winthrop - are men putting nature back into de-natured areas, just as they are making a stand for humanity and compassion in the face of the forces of cynicism and reductivity.

69. Humboldt's Gift, p. 305.
70. Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 252.
71. Herzog, p. 321.
72. Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 252.
73. Herzog, p. 169.
74. The Dean's December, p. 187.
75. The choice of a threatenintg black pickpocket invites and indeed has received sinister interpretations as have the depictions and references to the "black underclass" of Chicago in The Dean's December. Similarly harsh, some might argue hysterical, have been the narratorial pronouncements like the following from The Dean's December: "The end of philosophy and art will do to advanced thought what flakes of lead paint or lead exhaust fumes do to infants. Which of these do you think will bring us to the end of everything?" (p.227).

It is possible to appreciate the point being made, even to admit of a certain truth in the simile, whilst retaining a strong sense of disapproval at the implied lack of significance of what lead may do to infants and to feel that the implication of a choice to be made between art, philosophy and a healthy environment does little to enhance Bellow's humanitarian stance.

76. Ibid., p. 123.

77. "Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," Encounter, 21
(Nov.1963), p.29.
78. Herzog, p. 329.
79. Ibid., p. 225.
80. Humboldt's Gift, p. 183.
81. The Adventures Of Augie March, p. 405.
82. Dangling Man, p. 140.
83. Seize The Day, p. 27.
84. Humboldt's Gift, p. 236.
85. Ibid., p. 448.
86. Henderson The Rain King, p. 204.
87. Sanford Pinsker, "Meditations Interruptus: Saul Bellow's Ambivalent Novel Of Ideas," Studies In American-Jewish Literature, 4 ii, p.32.
88. The Adventures Of Augie March, p. 525.
89. Ibid., p. 560.
90. Ibid., p. 225.
91. Ibid., p. 238.
92. Ibid., p. 617.
93. In this case Shawmut is detailing his particular form of political and philosophical exile and solitude, a condition which has marked echoes in the situations of both Sammler and Corde. What it seems to underline is Bellow's general, philosophical acceptance of those attitudes closely associated with the political conservative, although the novelist, perhaps not surprisingly, hesitates to align either himself or his characters too closely with the more particular platforms and issues of a specific version of those attitudes.

I am very much alone in Vancouver, but that is my own fault, too. When I arrived, I was invited to a party by local musicians, and I failed to please. They gave me their Canadian test for U.S. visitors: Was I a Reaganite? I couldn't be that, but the key question was whether El Salvador might not be another Vietnam, and I lost half of the company at once by my reply: "Nothing of the kind. The North Vietnamese are

seasoned soldiers with a military tradition of many centuries -- really tough people.

Salvadorans are Indian peasants."

Him With His Foot In His Mouth, pp.16/17.

94. The heckling is pointedly described as "barbary ape howling"(p.37) and one of the hecklers denounces the lecture as follows

'Orwell was a fink. He was a sick counter-revolutionary. It's good he died when he did. And what you are saying is shit.' Turning to the audience, extending violent arms and raising his palms like a Greek dancer, he said, 'Why do you listen to this effete old shit? What has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He's dead. He can't come.' (p. 36.)

The last remark seems to apply a survival of the fittest condition to legitimacy of opinion, and the whole outburst encapsulates the kind of dictatorial orthodoxy that has become familiar through the sloganizing of what was once debate and dialectic. Thus "The National Front Is a Nazi Front" No Platform for Nazis" or the repeated assertions that any conservative is ipso facto a fascist replaces the legitimate, reasonable and (I would venture) worthy, reasoned opposition to repression, brutality or even uncaring and, in so doing, debases it.

95. Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 37.
96. "Saul Bellow and the latter-day lean-to."
97. Ibid.
98. Mr. Sammler, perhaps, most clearly outlines the "new kinds of grief and misery" (p. 183) which face modern man in his efforts to assert his status as an individual. "Modern man, perhaps because of collectivization, has a fever of originality," (p. 184) he remarks, observing the hysterical intellectual paucity at the heart of this "individuality boom.... The most monstrous kind of exaggeration." (p.187) "Perhaps," he suggests, "when people are so desperately impotent they play that instrument, the personality, louder and wilder." (p.187).
99. Herzog, p. 223.

100. Herzog, for instance, comes to reject his own efforts
 "to be a marvellous Herzog, a Herzog who perhaps clumsily,
 tried to live out marvellous qualities vaguely comprehended,"
 (p.110) and instead recognizes that "the strength of a man's
 virtue or spiritual capacity is measured by his ordinary life."
 (p. 99).

Back home where The Tiger has been widely read to mark another step on
 a downhill path with no U turning. Partly this can be attributed to
 the fact that Malamud did not begin to publish until he was nearly
 forty: he did not work up to literary activity, he began with it.
 His works of genuine literary apprenticeship exist and this, in a very
 real sense, has given Malamud much to live by for: The Assistant, by
 any standards, would be a hard act to follow, as a mere second novel it
 must have made promises that were almost impossible to fulfill.

Moreover, as his more recent publications have received a less
 than rapturous reception so opinion of his earlier works seems to have
 been revised downwards. The nature of the objections has been varied:
 it has been argued that his writing lacks a contemporary social
 dimension; that it possesses a social dimension which seems artificially
 applied; that his characters fail to move beyond mere stereotype; that
 he is guilty of transparent self-indulgence and pedestrian moralism.
 On the other hand, he has a number of vociferous supporters. Anthony
 Burgess, for instance, has recently been making some fairly extravagant
 claims on Malamud's behalf and has included The Assistant and Quign's
 among his collection of Black Dog Press as well as giving
 favourable reviews to The Tiger and Life's Journey.

On one point, however, there has been consensus: if the era of
 post-World War II American writing Malamud has been the representative
 and paradigm of the 'moment'. An author who is now and obviously
 in greater and of the Jewish tradition. This is not to say that there
 has been no controversy about the nature of Malamud's Jewishness:

CHAPTER EIGHT

"All Men Are Jews".Bernard Malamud's Secular
Transformation of Judaism.

It has been Bernard Malamud's particular misfortune to spend half of his career suffering a declining reputation among the critics. Each book since The Fixer has been widely held to mark another step on a downhill path with no U turning. Partly this can be attributed to the fact that Malamud did not begin to publish until he was nearly forty: he did not work up to literary maturity, he began with it. No works of genuine literary apprenticeship exist and this, in a very real sense, has given Malamud much to live up to: The Assistant, by any standards, would be a hard act to follow, as a mere second novel it must have made promises that were almost impossible to fulfil.

Moreover, as his more recent publications have received a less than rapturous reception so opinion of his earlier works seems to have been revised downwards. The nature of the objections has been varied: it has been argued that his writing lacks a contemporary social dimension; that it possesses a social dimension which seems artificially applied; that his characters fail to move beyond mere stereotype; that he is guilty of transparent plot manipulation and pedestrian moralism. On the other hand, he has a number of vociferous supporters. Anthony Burgess, for instance, has recently been making some fairly extravagant claims on Malamud's behalf and has included The Assistant and Dubin's Lives among his collection of Ninety Nine Novels as well as giving honourable mentions to The Fixer and God's Grace.¹

On one point, however, there has been consensus: in the era of the Jewish-American writer Bernard Malamud has been the representative par excellence of the 'movement', the writer who seems most obviously to operate out of the Jewish tradition. This is not to say that there has been no controversy about the nature of Malamud's Jewishness:

clearly there has. It is simply that, overwhelming these considerations, there has been a general critical recognition that Bernard Malamud has a secure and certain relationship with his Jewish heritage and that it informs and gives distinctive shape to his fictions. This, perhaps, is not surprising. Born in Brooklyn in 1914, Malamud grew up in a community more confident about the nature of its Jewishness than subsequent generations of American Jews could ever be. The effect of acculturation, of the 'Melting Pot' of American society, on ethnic subcultures was less marked then, as was the tendency to politicize and radicalize Judaism which, though born in the sweatshops of nineteenth century New York, received its greatest boost in the years of the Depression. Furthermore, though the Jews of these years were no strangers to pogroms and persecution, the scale and intensity of the Holocaust would forever change the sense of what it meant to be a Jew. All of this goes some way to explaining the facility with which writers of Malamud's generation have been able to handle the fact of their Jewishness. Younger writers, all too often, fall either into an aggressive ethnicity occasioned by their having to search for and assert their part in the Jewish tradition or, as in Bruce Jay Friedman's story "When You're Excused, You're Excused,"² they seem uncertain as to the value, the exact nature or even the continued existence of such a tradition. Malamud, on the other hand, seems to have suffered no such confusions, apparently learning from his Jewish childhood in New York much the same lessons and values as Saul Bellow did in Montreal and Chicago, learning to care for "the welfare of human beings, to be aware of other human beings, what makes a man function as a man."³ In fact, Malamud's absorption of Jewish and Yiddish tradition and culture is so strong, so profound that Irving Howe has been prompted to observe:

Malamud not only draws upon Jewish figures and themes, not only evokes traditional Jewish sentiments regarding humaneness and suffering, he also writes what can only be called the Yiddish story in English... which makes him seem a grandson — but a grandson without visible line of descent — of the best Yiddish writers. For, as far as one

can tell, he does not work out of an assured personal relation to Yiddish culture; he seems to have reached out for the idea of it rather than to possess its substance. 4

Certainly, Malamud's appreciation of Judaism seems to be cultural rather than religious in inspiration and there is about his writing a sort of folk story teller's consciousness which emerges in a variety of ways and gives a distinctive shape to his literary fictions. Paramount in this shaping process is Malamud's use of language to create what he has self deprecatingly described as "immigrant English" ⁵ but which Sheldon Grebstein sees in the rather more impressive terms of "a dialect style which deliberately evokes the sound of Yiddish [and] demonstrates Malamud's familiarity with the old mother tongue, the common language once spoken by seven million Jews regardless of their country of habitation." ⁶ This style, as Grebstein has pointed out, has two essential aspects. The first is a very precise rendering of dialect speech, most notably in The Assistant and in early stories such as "Take Pity", capturing the inversions, inflections and syntactic peculiarities of Yiddish-English with uncanny accuracy. The following example is taken from the story, "Take Pity." Davidov is interviewing Rosen about the death of Kalish, a poverty-stricken grocer.

'So? - Nothing. He didn't get out. After a couple months he tried to sell but nobody bought, so he stayed and starved. They never made expenses. Every day they got poorer you couldn't look in their faces. "Don't be a damn fool," I told him, "go in bankruptcy." But he couldn't stand it to lose all his capital, and he was also afraid it would be hard to find a job. "My God," I said, "do anything. Be a painter, a janitor, a junk man, but get out of here before everybody is a skeleton." 'This he finally agreed with me, but before he could go in auction he dropped dead.'

Davidov made a note. 'How did he die?'

'On this I am not an expert,' Rosen replied.

'You know better than me.'

'How did he die?' Davidov spoke impatiently.
 'Say in one word.'
 'From what he died? - he died, that's all.'
 'Answer, please, this question.'
 'Broke in him something. That's how.'
 'Broke what?'
 'Broke what breaks." 7

Dialogue is notoriously difficult to emulate realistically but Malamud not only succeeds in transcribing living speech onto the page but achieves, through the tortured syntax and tortuous constructions ("broke what breaks") a picture of the stoic and fatalistic philosophy moving within the man who speaks it. It is, moreover, a philosophy that could not be rendered so directly through conventional English. The second aspect concerns the absorption of some of these peculiarities into a higher and more consciously literary style, frequently in the form of interior monologue, where they serve to emphasize a pattern of thought or an attitude rather than to provide a sense of local colour. Thus even the thoughts of Malamud's most literate, educated and apparently assimilated characters are liable to be littered with Yiddish inflections such as the ones that come to biology teacher Albert Gans in 'The Silver Crown';

In the subway, Albert figured he would call it an investment in experience and see what came of it. Education costs money but how else can you get it? He pictured the crown as he had seen it established on the rabbi's head, and then seemed to remember that as he stared at the man's shifty face in the mirror the thickened lid of his right eye had slowly dropped into a full wink. Did he recall this in truth, or was he seeing in his mind's eye and transposing into the past something that had happened just before he left the house? What does he mean by his wink? -- not only is he a fake but he kids you? Uneasy once more, the teacher clearly remembered, when he was staring into the rabbi's fish eyes in the glass, after which they had lit in visionary light, that he had fought a hunger to sleep; and the next thing there's the sight of the old boy, as though on the television screen, wearing this high-hat magic crown. 8

In this case Gans' willingness to accept that "Education costs money but how else can you get it? reveals that he still draws upon a well

of mordant, fatalistic humour while the question "What does he mean by his wink? -- not only is he a fake but he kids you?" suggests an ironic almost self-mocking outrage. Both examples offer what might be described as a Jewish perspective on the possible fraud couched in distinctly Jewish language. In this respect, however, what is really significant is the way in which Malamud melds these colloquialisms with passages of 'straight' American-English, once again using them to express attitudes and emotions either difficult to convey or unavailable in the expressions and rhythms of the language 'orthodoxly' used. In a very real sense this is bringing 'immigrant English' out of the ghetto and firmly into the mainstream.

Aside from this, very individual, use of language as an expression of a sort of folk wisdom, there are a number of other ways in which Malamud's writing echoes the world of common folk and the mode of the folk story. These echoes survive chiefly in the manner of his storytelling, a blending of sophisticated artistic consciousness with a deliberately simplified, naive approach to plot and character. It is, perhaps, this that prompted Alfred Kazin to remark that Malamud "writes, a little, the way Chagall paints..."⁹ since there is, for both, a willingness to reach back into a communal, essentially Yiddish, folk heritage, to mingle reality and fantasy, to suspend the borderline of disbelief which separates the two or, at the very least, to blur that distinguishing line into meaninglessness.¹⁰ Such blurring has, of course, a sophisticated purpose but, certainly in Malamud's case, there is an apparent artlessness that separates his work from (for example) the fabulations of John Barth and which possesses the substance of the folk tale tradition. Thus "The Jewbird," "The Talking-Horse," and the apes and monkeys of God's Grace exist in the tradition of animals who talked to, instructed and even married humans, a tradition which is common to the folklore of almost all cultures. Such similarities are supported by a certain narrative baldness, a pared-down simplicity of plot exposition

and flatness of character, which is observable in much of Malamud's work and combines with an absence of social specificities (such as would be present in an Updike or Bellow novel) to suggest a timeless quality in the stories themselves, a significance that (even in the case of a book about a nuclear holocaust) transcends their immediate social and temporal boundaries and concerns.

The purpose that such carefully crafted simplicity serves, even in the 'artless' folk tale of a pre-literate culture, is overtly didactic and Malamud's fiction is similarly, and explicitly, moralistic. Once again his intent in recording the moral growth and struggles of suffering Jews can be seen to have clear parallels, indeed an obvious ancestry, in the Judaic folkloric tradition which, even in the post-Biblical era, demonstrates a tendency to somewhat homiletic expositions of scriptural precepts. As with those tales much of Malamud's writing is given over to a consideration of such basic human concerns as the relationships between man and man and between man and God. Certainly Calvin Cohn's somewhat querulous and argumentative relationship with an apparently fallible yet still omnipotent Supreme Being has its genesis in a uniquely Judaic version of the bond between God and man, Judaism allowing a far more dialectical relationship than is the case with Christianity. Indeed, even Malamud's use of Judaism as a metaphor for the moral conscience of humanity has a precedent in the Lurianic Kabbalah and the story of the Breaking of the Vessels.¹¹

Significant though it is, Malamud's contribution to the canon of American-Jewish writing is far greater than the recording of a vanishing dialect style or the recreation of a literature and way of life of a by-gone age. Though this sort of folksiness has a strong and honourable tradition in American letters, if Malamud was simply a sort of Jewish Josh Billings he would hardly have received or warranted the kind of critical attention and standing afforded him since the publication of The Assistant in 1957. What makes Malamud's sense and use of his

Jewishness both important and interesting is his ability to transform and widen its meaning in a way that not only universalizes Jewish experience but makes it central to the contemporary human condition. ¹²

Such a powerfully moralistic version of Judaism has not been universally accepted -- even among Jews. Philip Roth, in "Imagining Jews," has called The Assistant "a manifestation of ethical Jewhood with what one might legitimately call a vengeance," describing the moral authority Malamud exercises over the novel as that of a "tyrannical Yahweh...." ¹³ While Roth is correct in identifying a strong ethical element in this (and all other) Malamud novels he is, arguably, overreacting to see this ethical element as tyrannical. The circumcision which Frank Alpine undergoes and which Roth regards as "an attack, as something more like cruel and unusual punishment than poetic justice..." ¹⁴ is also a pre-requisite of entry into the Jewish faith. If, in the symbolic scheme of the novel, it serves equally to highlight Frank's contribution (an act of self mortification to atone for raping Helen) then the extreme nature of the self imposed atonement is surely matched by the extreme nature of the crime.

Certainly Malamud's Jewishness possesses a moral force but it is, as I have tried to suggest, wrong to see that morality as harsh or cruel: on the contrary it is a moral sense frequently characterized by gentleness, a meekness best described as Christlike (however inappropriate that may appear). "In Malamud's fictional world..." Jonathan Baumbach was written, " a good man is not too hard to find..." ¹⁵ and certainly Malamud's work abounds with good, gentle characters usually, though not invariably, Jewish. The most celebrated of these is undoubtedly Morris Bober in The Assistant and it is through Morris that Malamud gives the clearest, least equivocal, description of Jewish moral aspirations. It is, by now, a commonplace that the Jewish religion, and not only contemporary literary versions of it, has traditionally placed greater emphasis on deed than creed but this fact is repeatedly emphasized in The Assistant and is

revealed as a concept central to Malamud's Jewish vision when Morris tells Frank, "My father used to say to be a Jew all you need is a good heart," and explains this by contending

"Nobody will tell me that I am not Jewish because I put in my mouth once in a while when my tongue is dry, a piece Ham. But they will tell me, and I will believe them, if I forget the Law. This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. We ain't animals. This is why we need the Law. This is what a Jew believes." 16

This assertion, that Jewishness is primarily a response to the harshness of life coupled with a determination to lessen rather than increase that harshness, is given 'official sanction' by the rabbi at Morris' funeral:

"Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered, and with the Jewish heart. Maybe not to our formal tradition -- for this I don't excuse him -- but he was true to this spirit of our life -- to want for others that which he wants also for himself. He followed the Law which God gave to Moses on Sinai and told him to bring to the people. He suffered, he endured, but with hope." 17

The rabbi's speech incorporates the history of the Jews into the life and experience of one man. This, essentially, is Malamud's point about Judaism, that it is a heritage available to all Jews but one which brings with it certain duties and obligations. The first among these is the obligation to respect the humanity of all individuals: "My work, all of it, is an idea of dedication to the human," Malamud has said. "That's basic to every book. If you don't respect man, you cannot respect my work. I'm in defense of the human." 18

What being "human" involves, in Malamud's eyes, is amply demonstrated in his most recent novel, the perversely impressive God's Grace. Here, while lamenting the end of man in a thermonuclear explosion, the only human survivor, Calvin Cohn, is still able to speak approvingly of

"civilization, goodness, daring, joy; and all that man had done well." ¹⁹ Further, he wishes to teach these positive elements in man's make-up to the chimpanzee survivors so that they might overcome the failings of their uncivilized, animal natures (in a way man was, ultimately, unable to do) and improve upon human civilization. In the end the very closeness of the parallels between human and chimpanzee nature foreshadow and shape the failure of Cohn's efforts.²⁰ Nonetheless Malamud never loses his sense of human worth and constantly seeks to stress the existence of higher human values even as he remains aware of the difficulties of asserting them:

Cohn said he thought to be human was to be responsive to and protective of life and civilization.

Buz said he would rather be a chimp. 21

Just as Malamud's work stands in defense of the human so Judaism has stood in defense of the Jews, especially in enabling them to maintain the humanitarian tradition which is central to the thinking of so many contemporary Jewish writers. Jewish history is a history of persecutions and subjugation, nonetheless the incorporation of elements of Judaic faith into everyday facets of Jewish life, allied to an insistence, inherent in the Jewish faith, on each individual's significance as a human being has ensured the survival both of people and religion and nowhere in modern literature is this more clearly recognized than in the work of Bernard Malamud.

In Malamud's world a Jew cannot afford to neglect or abandon his Jewishness: if he does he will be denying his humanity and it will have serious repercussions for him. Thus in "The Lady Of The Lake," Henry Levin-become-Freeman loses the girl he loves because she, a survivor of Buchenwald, embraces her Jewishness as meaningful and can only marry someone who does likewise. Critics have tended to ridicule this story as a piece of contrivance: Mark Schechner has written that "The lesson of this parable, that you should never lie about your Jewishness because if you do the woman of your dreams will pass you by; dissolves in

absurdity and non-sequitur as soon as it is thought about." ²²

Arguably there is an element of schematic manipulation in Freeman's rejection by the girl. As always with Malamud (and in keeping with the folkloric mode) the moral concerns of his story are never far from the surface action. Schechner's reductive and heavy-handed disingenuousness, however, does not itself stand inspection since the obvious point of the story is that Levin, by withholding and denying part of himself, is barring his own route to personal and emotional fulfilment.

The importance of a Jew holding fast to Judaism is illustrated in Malamud's fourth novel The Fixer. In this book the entire history of Jewish persecution is shaped into a cohesive whole based on the Mendel Beiliss case. Here the nature of anti-Semitism is laid bare in its awfulness and illogicality. Once again the assertions are made that the Jews are both creatures of a lower order than humanity and fantastic in their cunning and desire to destroy society and repeatedly their communal blood-guilt is stressed. "No Jew is innocent..." ²³ observes Prosecutor Grubeshov to Yakov Bok when Yakov demands a pardon. This assertion, based on generations of Anti-Semitic prejudice, recalls a remark made by Yakov earlier in the book which demonstrates the dangers of such ideas to those they are directed against: when arrested "The Fixer readily confessed he was a Jew. Otherwise he was innocent." ²⁴ Obviously Yakov at this point substantially believes the things that are said about the Jews. Not perhaps the details of blood rituals and secret plots but the burden of the ideas, the implication that the Jews are a menace. Indeed this is exactly Yakov's position at the beginning of the novel. He blames his problems on the Jews rather than their persecutors and it is this sense of shame (the shame which prompted Henry Levin to become Henry Freeman) against which he struggles throughout the book. "What was being a Jew but an everlasting curse? He was sick of their history, destiny, blood guilt," ²⁵ he despairs at one point. Nevertheless, despite his early desire to abandon his Jewishness he is ultimately unable to, partly because the Russians will

not allow it but most notably because only Judaism can sustain him as he struggles "with ten fingers to hold onto his mind...." ²⁶ He finds that only the artefacts of his religion, ironically provided by his captors, serve to comfort him. The prayer shawl which he wraps around himself for warmth continues to warm him long after it has become ragged and full of holes; a few blood stained pages of a Hebrew Bible occupy his mind; the phylactery box, which he breaks open for more reading matter, gives off "a curious human odour...." ²⁷ The blood, the warmth, the human odour, all these serve to remind Yakov of his humanity and strengthen his resolve to prove his innocence as a Jew and his right to be treated as a human being. In regaining his sense of being a Jew, Yakov regains his sense of moral and human responsibility. He becomes aware of his duties to and for others as well as the burden that is placed on him by "the accident" of his being a Jew. This social dimension dictates that he must not endanger the rest of the Jewish community by selfish actions that might gain him a pardon or bring an end to his suffering. Furthermore, he gains compassion. Early in the novel he is markedly bitter about his wife leaving him but experience teaches him that it is better to lessen than increase the sum of pain and misery in the world and by the end of the novel he is not only able to accept his part in the marriage's failure but is prepared to give his name to Raisl's child in order that it has a nominal, if not actual, father.

Despite his sufferings and privations and the feelings of discontent and defeat which beset him before the troubles recorded in the novel, The Fixer records Yakov's growth as a human being, his redemption, and this redemption is due largely to his embracing the Jewish faith. A noticeable factor in this redemption is the way in which he gains a sense of social responsibility, a sense of the way in which Jews must be responsible for each other. This responsibility is "enfranchized" in Jewish tradition and is very important to Malamud both as an example of the mutual caring required to make society work and for the recognition of one another's

humanity implicit in this caring. In the short story "The Jewbird," when Schwartz flies into Harry Cohen's apartment and asks for food and accommodation he is simply invoking an old Jewish custom binding a household to provide for a Jewish traveller who demanded their hospitality. Repellent as this assertive, vulgar and demanding sort of behaviour is to English genteel sensibilities, it is vital to recognise its importance as a strand of communal caring. Schwartz is one of a number of Malamud's characters who serve to remind others of their duty to humanity through appealing to their common Jewishness and in their way these characters are the assertive counterparts of the gentle tzaddiks like Morris Bober and Shmuel. Thus the apparent paradox of Schwartz and Edie calling Harry Cohen an "anti-semeet" underlines the paradox, in Malamud's eyes, of one human being behaving without humanity to another. Other characters who suffer similar fates are Fidelman (whose escape to Italy is reminiscent of that made by Levin in "The Lady Of The Lake") who is pursued by the Israeli Luftmensch Susskind and Harvitz who is asked for help by the suppressed Soviet-Jewish writer Levitansky in "Man In The Drawer." In each case aid is sought from a Fellow-Jew but equally importantly from a fellow human: "...I do not ask tourist -- I ask human being -- man..." 28 responds Levitansky when Harvitz objects that he is seeking help from an uninvolved stranger. In Malamud's world there is no such thing as an uninvolved human being, especially a Jew. What both Harvitz and Fidelman seek is moral slumber. They wish to be allowed to divert themselves by pursuing their own trivial artistic interests without heed to their fellow men: Fidelman spends the whole of his time in Italy trying to become the artist he plainly does not possess the talent to be and Harvitz is in the USSR to research an article on literary museums, too involved with the collected trivia of dead writers to give his time or concern to a living one in need of help. Both respond to the appeals for help by trying to disclaim responsibility or interest: "Ah, that's so long ago," 29 says Fidelman of Susskind's oblique reference to the Holocaust, obviously

attempting to refute their fellowship as Jews. Similarly Harvitz feels that Levitansky has no right to claim his help and yet he is drawn by the writer's struggle: "It's a contagious business, what happens to men,"³⁰ he observes almost helplessly.

None of the characters in these stories is a religious Jew and yet their religion is, in the end, a crucial factor in determining each one's behaviour. Fidelman's failure to help Susskind returns to him with increasing vehemence and anguish and Harvitz is finally persuaded to help Levitansky get his stories published: "... the least I can do is give him a hand. When one thinks of it it's little enough he does for human freedom in the course of his life."³¹ Throughout his writing Malamud relates Jewishness to a sense of humanity rather than to worship of God; it is not God's word that Yakov or Harvitz seek to fulfil but a debt to their fellow human beings. Similarly, it is not religious comfort that attracts George to Judaism in God's Grace but a recognition of how well Judaism comprehends the basic facts of living. The possibility of an afterlife is not much stressed in Judaism, a fact which emphasizes the need to strive for perfection in this life. Malamud has pushed this tendency to its logical extent and almost completely abandoned the idea of God as an entity from his version of the religion, substituting for God an idea of moral perfection.

This is even true of God's Grace in which God, so to speak, makes a personal appearance. Paradoxically, the link between 'humanity' as a quality of moral behaviour and Judaism is never more apparent in Malamud's work as Cohn appeals to his religion with a specificity unequalled even in The Fixer. He quotes Rashi and teaches the principles of civilization by almost exclusive reference to the Old Testament (i.e. pre-Christian Bible) and despite the book's death-drenched plot the possibility of an afterlife only occurs to Cohn as he faces death on the final page. Further, the curious religious mix of Judaism and Calvinism (the protagonist changed his name to Calvin Cohn) in the book emphasizes Malamud's lack of concern

with an afterlife since Calvinist Protestantism rejects the possibility of earning eternal life, instead stressing the necessity of living a good, moral life. Thus Cohn argues that "God made man seriously imperfect. Maybe what was on His mind was that if He made man whole, pacific, good, he would feel no need to become better, and if he didn't, he would never truly be a man," ³² and he tells Luke that "What you do improves you." ³³ This contrasts strongly with the reductive materialism of Esau and the morally ineffectual claim that "God is love" which Buz uses, primarily as an excuse for his own amorality.

For Mendel, in the title story of the collection Idiot's First, God's help is no good for if it comes it will only be "in the grave..." ³⁴ when it will be of no use. What he needs is the compassionate aid of a fellow Jew who understands what it means to be a human being. For Malamud, to be human, with all its trials, is to be offered an exalted position and the finest opportunities available on earth. Just as Bellow's fiction seeks to celebrate "the human world and all its wonderful works," ³⁵ so Yakov Bok elevates humanity by the speculation that "human experience baffles God.... God envies the Jews: its a rich life. Maybe he would like to be human...." ³⁶ Such speculation serves to emphasize the significance and value of man, rather than propose the existence of God: "If God's not a man he has to be," ³⁷ Yakov decides, shouldering the moral burden created by God's 'absence' and even when Shmuel argues that "we're not Jews for nothing. Without God we can't live. Without the covenant we would have disappeared out of history," ³⁸ the thrust of his argument is that the principles which give moral force to the Jewish religion render life meaningful and give Jews a sense of purpose. When Yakov surmizes that "The purpose of the covenant... is to create human experience..." ³⁹ he is doing no more than giving voice to a recurrent feeling in contemporary Jewish-American writing that life is a cause for joy rather than despair, for action rather than resignation. In Malamud's work Judaism is given

a secular impetus of such spectacular force that God is not merely removed but replaced by man. Thus, Shmuel's remark that "The true miracle is belief," ⁴⁰ is borne out elsewhere in Malamud's fiction making it clear that the belief is a commitment to mankind. The miracles which occur are miracles of human endeavour, as in "Angel Levine" where Manischevitz not only saves his wife from illness but also rescues the negro-Jewish Alexander Levine by affirming that he believes Levine indeed is an angel from God. The miracle, indeed, is belief but it is belief in Levine, rather than in the existence of God, that Manischevitz is required to affirm: it is their fellowship as Jews that is being tested. Given this community of purpose (the community of Judaism), things which pass for miracles can be achieved, as in "Idiot's First" where Mendel is able to overcome Ginzburg, the angel of death, by virtue of his absolute conviction in his mission. To send an idiot on a journey across the country to stay with an eighty-one year old uncle he has never met may well summarize the futility of all human striving but in Malamud's eyes a man, if he is to be worthy of the title, must make such strivings, must, in the words of Saul Bellow's Artur Sammler: "...meet the terms of his contract." ⁴¹ This contract is, for Malamud as for Bellow, very much a matter of involvement and concern for mankind, a concern which finds its highest expression in the Jewish sense of community.

Even a cursory examination of Malamud's writing leaves the reader with the impression that the novelist, in writing about Jews, casts his net fairly wide. This has led to certain objections: Philip Roth, for instance, has taken exception to "the statement attributed to Malamud which goes, 'All men are Jews.' In fact we know this is not so..." ⁴² and Allen Guttman has similarly asserted that "what Malamud has done explicitly throughout his work is widen the definition of Jew to the point of meaninglessness," ⁴³ and in certain respects this objection has validity. When Malamud, in talking to Tony Tanner, described Seymour Levin of

A New Life, as a "marginal Jew" many critics must have felt that the marginality was considerably more apparent than the Jewishness and there must be a similar suspicion about Frank Alpin's conversion achieved, as it is, with no formal religious instruction or investigation, no clear statement of religious belief. From the point of view of those committed to the notion of peoplehood, Malamud's version of Jewishness must threaten the destruction of Jewry that even the Nazis were unable to achieve. Such a view, however, does Malamud scant justice since it has surely been his intention to universalize the Jewish attitude to life, to suggest (as Bellow has also done) that this attitude offers a solution to the despair so often voiced by writers in contemporary society. Malamud himself has said:

I handle the Jew as a symbol of the tragic experience of man existentially. I try to see the Jew as universal man. Every man is a Jew though he may not know it. The Jewish drama is a ... symbol of the fight for existence in the highest possible human terms. 44

For Malamud the Jewish experience, as lived by Morris Bober, Yakov Bok and even Calvin Cohn, combats the worst tendencies of fate with the highest possible human commitment, since "The amount of love a man is willing and able to commit to life is, in Malamud's universe, the measure of his grace," ⁴⁵ and no one, in that same universe, exhibits more grace than does a man like Morris Bober, by following the "Jewish Law" and being true to the spirit of Jewish life.

One particular element of Judaic folk culture on which Malamud has drawn heavily and with singular results is the schlemiel, the ill-fated dreamer (part failure, part victim of circumstance) who so much represents the historical Jewish condition, particularly in Europe where aspiration was continually confounded by repression and persecution. Nearly all critics of Malamud's work make at least a passing reference to the presence of the schlemiel in his writing. Even Mark Schechner, in a generally

unsympathetic review of Malamud's literary career, recognized the character's particular significance: "...the schlemiel has a special place in the stories of Bernard Malamud, where the idea of circumstantial failure as spiritual success is the very bedrock of Jewish moral insight." ⁴⁶ Moreover, Schechner related Malamud's schlemiel not only to "traditional sources" but also identified in him an essentially American quality: "More often than not he is an isolated American type: a drifter, an orphan, a writer or a deracinated intellectual....," ⁴⁷ thereby providing a further example of the way in which the Jewish experience, as interpreted by Malamud, is able to stand for the American experience in the post-war world.

The significance of the schlemiel to the Yiddish speaking Jews of Eastern Europe lay in the moral poise, the alternative vision of life he gave to those who lacked political or social power. Ruth Wisse has written that "the schlemiel becomes a hero when real action is impossible and reaction remains the only way a man can define himself," ⁴⁸ (my italics) and the schlemiel's willingness, eagerness even, to embrace his suffering and tribulations as a matter of moral superiority and social responsibility could be seen to transform the hard, unrewarding lives of an oppressed people into something altogether more positive and significant. However, as Sanford Pinsker has pointed out, with the arrival of large numbers of Eastern European Jews in America most of the fetters which restrained them politically, physically and economically were removed; "reaction" was no longer the only way in which the Jew could define himself. In a land where any Jew could succeed along the lines of David Levinsky, Meyer Hirsch (in Haunch, Paunch and Jowl) or Sammy Glick there would seem to be very little room left for such as Menachem Mendl or Tevye the dairyman.

This has not been the case. The Holocaust served to reinforce the traditional Jewish sense of insecurity and marginality whilst the new technology, tensions and speed of post-war life have acted to spread the sense of dissociation and disaffection, working like a huge generator of

centrifugal force to fling humanity out closer to the margins of social experience and impotence. In this way the western world has become more appreciative of the schlemiel figure which could teach it how to adapt and adjust to this new sense of lost power and significance in exactly the same way as it had taught generations of Jews who were immersed in Yiddishkeit. The rise in popularity of Jewish humour, from Woody Allen and Mort Sahl to the re-creation of archetypal Jewish mothers, luftmensch fathers and schlemiel sons in popular television series, is directly attributable to the rise in the feeling of helplessness and a sense of disillusionment which

has fused with the feelings of disenchantment, anger and ambivalence that are the stuff of Jewish humor; and this fusion explains not only many of the symbols of this humor, but also the source of its appeal generally.... Jewishness itself has become a metaphor for modern life. The individual Jew -- the alien in search of identity -- has become a symbolic protagonist. As he dares more and more to expose his inner turmoil to self-satire, the Jew is discovering in turn that Americans are more and more receptive to his comic consciousness.... 49

One aspect of the character which Malamud has reproduced with huge success is the bumbling and comic ineptitude which fuelled the Yiddish stories of the wise men of Chelm. Even Calvin Cohn exhibits a genuinely comic aspect to his character that connects him both with Malamud's many other schlemiel protagonists and his Yiddish forbears. For instance there is the following passage in which the chimpanzee "Buz" first speaks to him:

"Fontostisch///" he exclaimed as he knuckle-galloped down the slope with his palm branch. "I-con talg/// pong-pong."

Calvin Cohn, flushed with the excitement of unexpected adventure, could almost not believe what he had heard.

"A miracle," he conceded. "But what do you mean by pong-pong?"

"Thot's nod me/// Thot's the sound
the copper wires mage when they vibrate
ot the end of a sendence/// I hov on
artifiziol lorynch/// pong-pong." 50

Other such incidents occur. Cohn goes exploring with a Winchester rifle although "Why he had brought it along on his present jaunt into the far country, he wasn't sure. He had overoiled the weapon, and the dripping barrel smelled,"⁵¹ and his attempt to wrestle a white ape ends in the latter capturing him. His display of macho bravado having failed dismally, Cohn reverts to ineffectual type, begging "Lets talk about this." ⁵² Even Cohn's relationship with God has its comical side, as the lone human survivor reminds himself to watch his thoughts since "He who knoweth the voice of the bird way up there isn't above knowing what C. Cohn thinks,"⁵³ or finds himself struck on the head with a stone for just such an incautious thought.

There are two distinct types of schlemiel in Malamud's fiction: the first type is the fool at whom the reader is invited to laugh, seeing the deflation of his ridiculous pretensions and outrageous expectations. Secondly, there are those at whom other characters laugh for their naivety, their failure to operate rationally (that is callously) in the modern world but for whom the reader's sympathy and admiration is solicited. In truth, it might be more correct to say that there are two distinct stages of schlemieldom in Malamud's fiction since, invariably, the former type evolves into the latter and if it is too much to see that evolution in terms of a clownish moth becoming a saint-like butterfly then at least the comparison gives some idea of the transformation these characters undergo.

Of the first type perhaps Seymour Levin, in the underrated A New Life, is the most accessible example. Levin suffers from recurrent bouts of "ass-scratching pride," constantly inflating his own importance and abilities and being made to pay for it by a series of incongruous humiliations. Accordingly, when one of Levin's flights of fancy lead him to imagine himself giving a thunderously applauded speech on democracy

and humanity the daydream takes place in a lavatory and the reverie is concluded by this terse, deflationary sentence: "The instructor took a bow at the urinal." ⁵⁴ Similarly, an apparently rapturous reception to his inaugural lecture at Cascadia College turns out to be due to his openly and his sexual adventures are marked by ineptitude and misfortune. With Laverne he has his trousers stolen and with Nadalee his dreams of nude bathing together are undercut by the knowledge that his "legs cramped after a too hasty immersion in cold water...." ⁵⁵ When they finally do come together the rapture of their first kiss is muted by the fact that "they kissed so hard his hat fell off." ⁵⁶

In much the same way Malamud urges the reader to laugh at Fidelman as he flees from the realization that he is neither a great artist nor a great lover but encourages laughter with and for him in the story "Naked Nude" as the painter steals his own copy of a Titian in preference to the original and escapes to Switzerland with it. It is, incidentally, worth noting that Fidelman's escape with the painting parodies Frederick and Catherine's escape in Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms and that Malamud uses a similar device in Dubin's Lives, allowing Dubin to mistake his wife's panic and flight from a bee for a kind of fertility dance, such as that performed by Anna Brangwen in D.H. Lawrence's The Rainbow. Here again, Malamud is carefully undercutting the pretensions of his characters in an attempt to make the point that life must be lived in the real world and not in a literary or artistic one of high or refined sensibilities. Such an attitude inevitably recalls remarks made by Moses Herzog and Von Humboldt Fleisher as Bellow similarly attempts to assert the primacy of ordinary, day-to-day reality.

With the second type of schlemiel, Malamud employs a perspective which leaves his characters somewhere between "Bontsha The Silent" and "Gimpel The Fool" in that, if his tone does not convey Peretz's depth of bitterness neither is the reader left with a sense of high comedy as financial success accompanies Gimpel's spiritual elevation. The reader,

though, is left in no doubt as to the transformational powers of the schlemiel figure as, by adjustment of perspective and an emphasis on the moral superiority of the meek and exploited, disasters take on the aspect of victories and blessings. Thus, in "The Bill", although the credit which the Panessas offer (and which their customers, like Willy Schlegel, abuse) drives Mr. Panessa to his grave, the unpaid bill effectively becomes a weapon against Willy, torturing him for his callousness and inhumanity. Equally, in "Life Is Better Than Death," the disaster which befalls the widow Etta, namely finding herself pregnant and abandoned, is transformed into a blessing inasmuch as the affair and the unborn child force her to stop constantly mourning the death of her husband. So, in a very literal way, life (in the form of the unborn baby) is better than death.

Patently, for Malamud the validity of schlemiel-dom does not depend on its possession of a comic dimension. Indeed, there is even some evidence of the schlemiel in The Fixer where a more sober adaptation of the character enables Yakov Bok to overcome the terrors of imprisonment and helps him rediscover his own humanity. Sanford Pinsker, for instance, has noted⁵⁷ that Yakov identifies himself with the schlemiel in his remark that "if I dealt in candles the sun wouldn't set,"⁵⁸ and there is another example of this stoical yet unyielding attitude to forces too great to combat directly in his response to being imprisoned in the first place: "... Yakov, after his first disappointment, felt relief that things weren't a lot worse. A month in jail is not a year, and three weeks are less; besides, if you wanted to look at it that way, rent was free"⁵⁹ (my italics). However, the clearest example of Yakov's acceptance of schlemiel-dom comes with his assumption of the cuckold's mantle in claiming Raisl's child as his own. Gimpel and Bontsha both allow themselves to be placed in the role but Yakov, by conferring the title upon himself, negates the mockery traditionally associated with the cuckolded husband and achieves a level of human dignity rarely attained and even more rarely appreciated. In fact, the failure of the majority to appreciate the noble

qualities which enable characters like Yakov to endure their suffering is part of the ironic balance and superior moral sensibility that goes into the make-up of the schlemiel.

From a rational (selfish?) point of view nothing could be more foolish than to condemn oneself to a prison sentence in order to protect others or to refuse a pardon on a matter of principle, both of which Yakov does in The Fixer. Equally, in A New Life, the difference in perspective between Gerald Gilley and Seymour Levin over Levin's "adoption" of Pauline and the children is indicative of the fact that Levin continues to be a schlemiel but is no longer the ridiculous, slightly pathetic, clown that arrived in Marathon. Gilley sees the relationship only in terms of the inconvenience and difficulties that the family would cause for Levin, suggesting that he would be crazy to take them on. For Levin, on the other hand, it is a matter not only of accepting responsibility for a situation of his own creation but of acting for the happiness and best interests of Pauline and the children.

The hidden virtue in the behaviour of Levin and Yakov Bok is also present in both Morris Bober and Frank Alpine. Indeed, Sanford Pinsker has been prompted to speculate whether Morris might not be one of the "Lamed-Vav," the thirty-six anonymous saints who, according to rabbinic tradition, exist in every generation. Certainly Morris would qualify on the grounds of anonymity. A man who once "ran two blocks in the snow to give back to a poor Italian lady a nickel that she forgot on the counter," ⁶⁰ a man who, like the Panessas, gives credit to people realizing that they will never pay him back; Morris is perhaps the raw material of sainthood but no-one in the book, aside from Frank, seems to recognize it. To Sobeloff, his ex-partner, Morris is the "sucker" on whose gullibility 'Sobeloff's Self-Service Market' was founded; to Julius Karp he is "inept, "unfortunate" and "a shlimazl." Even his family fail to see the goodness in him: "Everybody is a stupe but not Morris Bober," ⁶¹ says Ida sarcastically, a misunderstanding which is repeated at the end by Helen:

"...who can admire a man passing his life in such a store? He buried himself in it; he didn't have the imagination to know what he was missing. He made himself a victim. He could, with a little more courage, have been more than he was."⁶² Frank is similarly misunderstood: he is the schlemiel who falls into an open grave and is considered to have "danced on the grocer's coffin,"⁶³ when the act, although an accident, serves to symbolize his acceptance of Morris' place in the store, frequently referred to as a grave or a tomb.

So Morris' place is filled, physically and morally, and Frank becomes the new schlemiel, holding to an ethical code which seems suicidally out of step with the rest of the world. In the hands of John Updike, Morris or Frank might have become, like George Caldwell or Henry Bech, men so badly beaten as to evoke merely pity. For Malamud, however, their behaviour demonstrates a moral positivity and a strength of purpose which is evident in the schlemiel's commitment to his wilful innocence and this transcends the amorality (or even immorality) of society and insists that, in Robert Alter's words: "...the very act of wholehearted commitment to the world of men means being a blunderer and a victim."⁶⁴ In this way a man's actions can redeem him socially even though that redemption is no guarantee of eternal life. As Sam Bluefarb has written: "If Malamud's work may be said to contain a major theme, it is perhaps that life is better than death...",⁶⁵ a belief which is constant in Malamud's fiction and is allied to his sense of Judaism. Even William Dubin, the most successful and cosmopolitan of Malamud's characters, returns to his Jewish roots and regains a Jewish inflection when advising his daughter Maud not to give up on life: "Emptiness I know about. It's nothing. Take something, you're only twenty,"⁶⁶ he tells her, substantially echoing Leo's words to his son Harry in "My Son The Murderer,"

One of the ways by which Malamud describes and enacts the movement of his schlemiel figures from unregenerated selfishness to moral responsibility is through their relationships with women. Characteristically

in Malamud's fiction there is, during the course of the novel or story, a deepening of the love or sexual relationship or in the central character's capacity to have such a relationship and this coincides with the growth of the character's moral awareness and responsibility. Accordingly, the 'unregenerated' figure in Malamud's work has relationships that are unsatisfactory in terms of suitability of choice or are mishandled in a way that demonstrates his unworthiness and selfishness. In the words of Sandy Cohen: "Their basic drives are erotic in nature: typically they seek sterile satiety of their lusts rather than true love relationships."⁶⁷ A number of the books combine these elements, doubly emphasizing the shallowness of the character -- not only does he choose badly but, when confronted by the "real thing" is unable to perceive it or seize it. Thus Harry Lesser's relationships with women are purely an expression of his sexual desire and Arthur Fidelman makes an unworthy choice in his dogged pursuit of Annamarie Oliovino. Even her eventual submission to his ministrations serves only to degrade him in his symbolic self-denial as she accepts him only in the vestments of a Catholic priest. In a later story Fidelman betrays his essentially exploitative vision of women as he turns his relationship with Esmeralda into that of a pimp and a prostitute.

Perhaps the most notable example of this inability comes in The Natural where Roy Hobbs' poor moral judgement and intense selfishness is reflected by and irrevocably bound up with his choice of women. His career as a baseball pitcher is finished before it has begun in a shooting incident. He is shot by Harriet Bird because he fails the test of humility and yet, hears later, in his comeback as a batter, Roy makes substantially the same error in falling under the spell of Memo Paris in much the same way and for much the same reasons as he was attracted to the "nutty dame" with the silver bullets. Despite the obvious signals that relate Memo to Harriet, Roy persists in his pursuit of her and, as the following passage implies, to his ultimate disaster:

She drew her legs back. Her expression puzzled him. It was not -- the lights were wavering, blinking on and off. a thundering locomotive roared through the mountain. As it burst out of the rock with a whistle howl he felt on the verge of an extraordinary insight, but a bolt of shuddering lightning came at him from some unknown place. He threw up his arms for protection and it socked him, yowling, in the shattered gut. He lived a pain he could not believe existed. Agonized at the extent of it, Roy thudded to his knees as a picture he had long carried in his mind broke into pieces. He keeled over. 68

In fact, Memo's intentions towards Roy are exactly the same as Harriet's and he is punished just as severely for the dethroning of 'Bump' Baily as he is for the defeat of 'Whammer' Wambold, even down to a repeat of the shooting incident as Memo shatters Roy's image in the mirror. Furthermore, if Roy's downfall is because of an intensely selfish vision of what baseball can do for him then his personal unworthiness is stressed even more by his treatment of Iris Lemon, from whom he is perfectly willing to accept help and sexual comfort in his times of trouble only to reject her as his situation improves and he makes the discovery that she is a grandmother. He is distressed by this fact because it makes him aware of his mortality and the responsibilities he is not prepared to accept, although the fact that she is a grandmother so young is really an indication of her fecundity which, in the context of the Fisher King/Wasteland images in the novel, contrasts favourably with Memo Paris's sick breast.

The hint, the possibility, that Roy has learned something at the very end of The Natural and that moral improvement is possible recurs more forcibly in The Assistant as Frankie Alpine moves in Sandy Cohen's words, "From eros to caritas."⁶⁹ The possibility is, if anything, a little stronger in The Assistant as Helen feels, following the death of Ward Minogue, "a waning of outrage,"⁷⁰ towards Frank. Ward Minogue, Frankie's fellow thief, represents that unregenerated element in the assistant's make up, an element gradually eliminated as Frank comes

increasingly under the influence of Morris Bober, and its eradication is signalled and symbolized by Ward's death in a fire he starts while robbing a liquor store.

With Malamud's third novel, A New Life, the possibility of regeneration through a man-women relationship becomes an actuality. The 'lighter' subject matter and tone enables Malamud to give Levin a comic dimension which would have been totally out of place in the previous books and the comic elements already identified in Levin's early sexual escapades serve to warn the reader of the folly and absurdity of approaching such an important matter as a serious relationship in a purely self-interested manner. Levin, too, receives his warning in the form of a medically undiagnosable 'pain-in-the-ass' which he recognizes as being the pain of "Love ungiven." This recognition signals a new emotional maturity in Levin and the beginning of his emotional and moral commitment to Pauline Gilley. In the light of this, Steven J. Rubin's remark that "sex... is frequently portrayed by Malamud, in spite of its complications, as both creative and pleasurable,"⁷¹ might be extended to suggest that it is an essential element of life, particularly in view of the disasters which befall Harry Lesser after his rejection of Irene in The Tenants. Indeed the extent of Malamud's commitment to sex as an expression of love is underlined, however strangely, in Dubin's Lives where the familiar ingredients of moral growth enacted through the deepening of a sexual relationship by personal commitment are given as unexpected and not altogether convincing twist by Dubin's involvement with two women.

X Initially, Dubin enters into an affair with Fanny Bick as a sort of diversion and, as might be expected, his brief holiday in Venice with her only frustrates his intentions as their lovemaking is forestalled by her sudden bout of diarrhea and his place is subsequently taken by a gondolier. As his relationship with Fanny becomes more serious so his marriage to Kitty begins to suffer but, unable to surrender either of them, Dubin's torment can only be resolved by achieving a balance which

includes them both. This balance is finally achieved on the last page as, leaving Fanny's bed, "Dubin ran up the moonlit road, holding his half-stiffened phallus in his hand, for his wife with love." ⁷²

There are, perhaps not surprisingly, critics who have expressed considerable reservations about this ending, who feel it shares with Fidelman's revelatory discovery of glass blowing and bisexuality, Frank Alpine's conversion or, indeed, with the ending to "The Lady Of The Lake," a too obvious tendency toward moral propagandizing resulting in banal contrivance. Clearly there are those who find Malamud's "fondness for telling tales arranged for the purpose of a specific moral lesson...." ⁷³ an unfulfilling literary mode as did Mark Schechner in his vigorous attack on "The Lady Of The Lake," and his objection to Malamud's "pedestrian moralism." ⁷⁴ Certainly it is possible to see occasions in Malamud's writing when his fictions become mere structures, struggling to carry the burden of his message and Dubin's Lives with its utterly unconvincing ending and overblown treatment of the mid-life crisis is the most glaring example of this. It is at such moments that the notion of "drivenness" which Schechner detects in Malamud's efforts to maintain a sense of optimism in his writing gains some credence and many critics, notably Joseph Epstein in his vituperative review essay "Malamud in Decline," ⁷⁵ have struggled to reconcile the tenor and quality of his later novels with what came before.

Arguably most of these criticisms share the same roots as some of the more trenchant criticisms of Malamud's use of Judaism as a metaphor. Mark Schechner certainly makes the connection between these perceived failings when he complains of Malamud's books being "like real ghettos with imaginary Jews in them," ⁷⁶ a remark which substantially echoes Philip Roth's assertion that Malamud's Jews lack a contemporary identity. ⁷⁷ Both criticisms hint at an apparent lack of substance pervading Malamud's fiction and can be reduced to a single, more general, argument against it.

This argument is based on an objection to his work's perceived schematic and manipulative tendency resulting in an apparent 'thinness' of plot and character which vitiates the power of the fictions themselves by creating the suspicion that the overt concerns of the books are not truly founded, fully enacted or satisfactorily concluded within their pages. Simply put, they lack sufficient novelistic density or analytical insight to create a convincing tableau of contemporary society. This, I think, is to miss the point about Malamud's fiction: its very strength is its overt and powerful concern for moral virtues and its rendering of those virtues through a twentieth century equivalent of the fable. On the contrary Malamud is at his weakest when, as in Dubin's Lives, he attempts to curb his capacity to conjure a vivid tale with a few broad strokes and offers instead something nearer to the carefully worked and closely detailed novel of manners.

More problematic and puzzling are the criticisms which have been directed specifically at his later books. The Tenants and God's Grace in particular seem to have uncovered a well of critical bitterness, chiefly among those who seem to demand from Malamud stories of moral and spiritual uplift. Many critics have suggested that these more recent works are evidence that Malamud has lost his optimistic vision of humanity and point to the contemporary themes, racial prejudice and the nuclear threat, as being the source of this new bleakness.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly there is some truth in this, there is indeed a certain bleakness about both The Tenants and God's Grace but it is hardly a new element in Malamud's writing and early stories such as "The Cost Of Living," "Take Pity" or "The German Refugee" provide ample evidence of the ubiquity of hardship, suffering and misery in the author's world view. There is, then, about almost all of Malamud's writing a knowledge of hardship and suffering that prevents the joys from becoming bland or a right of life and recognizes how difficult the day to day business of simple existence can be. Indeed, what distinguishes his fiction is not its avoidance of these facts but

its acceptance of them. As Malcolm Bradbury has suggested, Malamud provides "fiction whose theme is life as an imprisonment which must be transcended."⁷⁹ Malamud has readily acknowledged this power of transcendence in himself, suggesting to one interviewer that "life is a tragedy full of joy,"⁸⁰ and explaining to another: "I was influenced very much by Charlie Chaplin's movies... by the rhythm and snap of his comedy and his wonderful mixture of comedy and sadness -- one of his major gifts that I've studied with great care."⁸¹ Accordingly, most of his characters live in circumstances of economic and social deprivation, added to which many also suffer severe emotional set-backs and disappointment. From "The Girl Of My Dreams," in which Mitka has to come to terms with the disappointment of his literary career and the insufficiency of his love life, to "God's Wrath" in which Glasser is forced to surrender his few remaining hopes for his daughter when she becomes a prostitute, Malamud's world is filled with rebuffs and reminders to expect little from life. "Who says life is easy? Since when?"⁸² Leo asks his son, Harry, in "My Son The Murderer." In this context the attempts to evade suffering which are made by Frank Alpine, Yakov Bok or Seymour Levin are doomed to failure because by a simple change of place ("Change your place, change your luck..."⁸³ says Yakov to Shmuel) they are trying to avoid the human condition and are bound to find, as Levin does, that "the new life hangs on an old soul...."⁸⁴

Each of Malamud's characters, then, is forced to embrace his fate and commit himself to suffering the world's imperfections. Whether the commitment comes in the form of Levin's revelation:

"Question 'What have I done to deserve my fate?'

Answer 'I am worthy of no other,' " ⁸⁵

or in the form of Morris Bober's soft groan of resigned despair which indicates that "he knew his fate,"⁸⁶ it is vital that the character should divest himself of all such illusions of life's grandeur. However, from this point of seeming despair, comes a state of moral grace which transforms Malamud's world into that "tragedy full of joy" of which he spoke in the

Lask interview. As Iris suggested to Roy, the experience of suffering in itself is important in that "it teaches us to want the right things,"⁸⁷ and is the beginning of moral growth. As much as Frankie Alpine learns from Morris Bober, it is the guilt he experiences and embraces that brings about his regeneration: "...I'm telling it to you so you will know how much I suffered on account of what I did... if you could see what's been going on in my heart you would know I have changed,"⁸⁸ he tells Morris during his confession. This sense of the positive value of suffering in terms of human experience is so strong that it is even evident in that least amenable of Malamud's heroes, Roy Hobbs, who realizes "I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again."⁸⁹ This realization indicates, at least, a maturation of Roy's attitudes in that he will no longer seek to avoid suffering and can begin to learn from it.

Set in this context can the books God's Grace and The Tenants be taken together as evidence of a new pessimism emerging in Malamud's fiction? I would suggest not and would argue that, as with the other criticisms, such objections emanate from a failure to perceive Malamud in relation to his literary heritage. Thus, the two books form a logical extension to his work as a latterday folk story teller, conforming wholly to a pattern of admonitory and cautionary fables in the tradition of Aesop, La Fontaine and even The Tales Of The Hasidim. They can, however, be taken together in the respect that they mark a development from his previous work. Certainly both books fail to provide the sort of guardedly affirmative endings that mark Malamud's other novels and both are concerned with the breakdown of society (although in this respect God's Grace works on a far more ambitious scale than The Tenants). Both, incidentally, also draw on the Robinson Crusoe motif, obviously so in God's Grace desert island setting, rather more obliquely in The Tenants. Here the contrivance of Literary reference as self-conscious device promotes the fictionality of the enterprise through narratorial statements which tend to underline the manner by which the story is being organized for the 'education' of the reader. In The Tenants Malamud

frequently elects to violate his usual narratorial position of unintrusive omniscience in order to describe the activities of Lesser and Spearmint, almost surrealistically, in terms which recall Defoe's novel. Thus, when Willie Spearmint and his friends smash up Lesser's flat it is related in terms of a raiding party attacking Crusoe's island:

Here's this tiny accursed island.
 The war canoe touches the wet shore
 and the three missionaries, tucking
 in striped paddles and holding up the
 skirts of their robes, hop on to the
 sand and beach the long bark.
 The drowsy air is stirred by whispering
 voices, insects buzzing, muted strings,
 a flute in the lonely forest, woman
 singing or sobbing somewhere.
 The Headman Minister, in voluminous
 black robe with leopard epaulets and
 hood, and the two missionaries in
 white robes, wearing black masks, wander
 from room to room of the long hut,
 uncovering hidden stores. They find
 the wrecked man's everything: Dutch
 cheese, dried meat, rice, nails,
 carpenter's saw, jug of rum, cornbread,
 compasses, ink, and paper.
 Sitting in a triangular circle they
 feast on his dried goat's flesh and
 drink his spirits. 90

Such echoes also occur at a less metaphorically sustained level, as when Malamud describes how, waking one morning, "Lesser beaches his battered raft."⁹¹ These stealthy authorial intrusions first appear in the latter part of Pictures Of Fidelman but become more evident and powerful in The Tenants, with the narrator opening scenes by directly addressing the reader in a way which emphasizes how both the book and the reader's responses to it are being shaped by what the author/narrator chooses to reveal. Thus the didactic tendencies at the heart of Malamud's work are reinforced by the self-conscious organization of material. For instance, the observation "Here's Lesser enjoying Harlem,"⁹² carries with it an implicit instruction to observe the nature and manner of his enjoyment -- and in doing so learn something about Lesser himself. Similar remarks can be made about the alternative endings to the novel itself: clearly the reader is being presented with a 'fiction,' which is purposive in its

instructional intent rather than a painterly representation, a piece of mimetic literature.

In the case of God's Grace the early appearance of God Himself is one indication of the book's nature, as is the reference to "the thermonuclear war between the "Djanks and Druzhkies..."⁹³ which, pointless as a coy joke, has the clear objective of indicating that the characters inhabit a world similar to, yet other than, the real one. Their world is real not in the specific, detailed way that, for instance, Harry Angstrom's world is real but in the sense that their fictional concerns very much echo our own. Subsequently this rather tangential relationship with 'the real world' is amplified by the introduction of talking monkeys whose presence, as I have suggested, place the work firmly within the context and tradition of fable. Curiously, the monkeys have proved extremely unpopular with a number of critics who have found them a bar to serious consideration of the novel. However, to have left them mute, as Alan Lelchuk has suggested,⁹⁴ would have deprived Malamud of the opportunity to make the case for a Jewish viewpoint distinct from that of the Christians and to have used a group of human survivors would only have succeeded in demonstrating old prejudices, old ideas and might, at best, have resulted in a reworking of The Lord Of The Flies.

In any case, given the context of the book, talking monkeys are not so hard to accept. The subject is gradually introduced through the well-documented area of more general communication between man and chimpanzee⁹⁵ and the deliberately humorous approach to Cohn's teaching Buz to talk rather undercuts objections to it. Thus, when other animals begin to speak the imaginative leap required of the reader is not great. Surely a readership which can accept works about talking farm animals, a man who turns into a beetle, conversations between the decomposing dead, or the collected thoughts of a sperm during ejaculation should not have too much difficulty with talking monkeys.⁹⁶

I would argue that God's Grace is one of Malamud's best works and a powerful and disturbing, even distressing book. However, it is not distressing simply because of its bleakness of vision, its prediction of thermonuclear devastation, since, as I have already argued, the events take place in a parallel, fabulous world which is manifestly not our own.⁹⁷ It is not, ultimately, nuclear war-mongering that Malamud is attacking so much as a wider human failure to value the concept of humanity. In Calvin Cohn's words: "... man destroyed himself by his selfishness and indifference to those who were different from, or differed with, him. He scorned himself to death."⁹⁸

Seen in this light, Mordecai Richler was wrong to call God's Grace "out of character"⁹⁹ since it clearly shares the same concerns as The Tenants and Malamud's earlier work. There is, undoubtedly, a tone of greater urgency about the message being conveyed but, given the extreme and unremitting pessimism of early pieces such as "The Mourners" or "The German Refugee", it is as untrue to see The Tenants or God's Grace as marking "a new pessimism in Malamud's work"¹⁰⁰ as it is to regard them as evidence of how, in his latter years the novelist has been "transformed from a central to a now almost negligible figure...."¹⁰¹

On the contrary, Malamud's is a consciousness powerfully aware of the dangers and vices at work on the American soul and one, moreover, alive to the extent to which they pervade modern society. Thus he does not minimize the difficulties implicit in accepting and coming to terms with the human condition, a fact which a number of his critics fail to appreciate.¹⁰² Ultimately, the point about Malamud's writing is not that it lacks contemporaneity but that it goes beyond the merely contemporary and presents, starkly and clearly, the eternal issues confronting humanity. It is in this sense that his work is "in defense of the human," unequivocally presenting what it means to be fully human, cataloguing the duties as well as the privileges of humanity. Malamud is, then, a presenter of modern folk tales, of fables for a sophisticated age and it

is his chief artistic achievement to have so successfully presented moral tales in the Jewish tradition but of equal application and validity for the wider American society.

The substance of this essentially secular transformation of basically religious Jewish beliefs is a commitment to the perfectability of humanity. It is a commitment which offers a wider interpretation of life's significance than does the profit and loss account mentality of material achievement and one which, although optimistic in its summation of humanity, is tinged with sufficient awareness of tragic reality to recognise that without faith and trust in the fellowship of human beings the concept of humanity is a hollow shell. It is a commitment which enables one of Malamud's poor grocers to find, in the teeth of financial adversity, good reason to give credit to a customer: "He said that everything was run on credit, business and everything else, because after all what was credit but the fact that people were human beings and if you were really a human being you gave credit to somebody else and he gave credit to you."¹⁰³ Such positivity, such optimism about human possibility, springs from what the rabbi in The Assistant called "the Jewish experience" and it is entirely appropriate, given Malamud's belief in the universal relevance of that experience, that this particular grocer was an Italian.

This willingness is particularly acute of the Jewish tradition of myth and legend. For instance, Josephine Neponsach records that

It is the legacy of the era [the Haskalah] and of the West European Enlightenment that makes us talk about fantasies and fairytales. The priority of the rational and irrational is regarded as such literature does not historically exist for Jews, at least not in the way we regard existence as rational and practical on the one hand and fantastic and irrational on the other. A clean split, which literature and the social movements try to bridge and turn into a dialectic.

Josephine Neponsach, Great Works of Jewish Literature (London: Picador, 1974), p. 10.

FOOTNOTES

1. Anthony Burgess, Ninety Nine Novels: The Best of English Since 1939 (London: Alison and Busby, 1984),
2. Bruce Jay Friedman, Far From The City Of Class (New York: Frommer-Passmantier, 1965).
3. Thomas Lask, "Malamud's Lives," New York Times Book Review 21 January, 1979, p. 43.
4. Irving Howe, The Immigrant Jews Of New York (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p.595.
5. Ralph Tyler, "A Talk With The Novelist," New York Times Book Review, 18 February 1979, p. 31.
6. Lesley and Joyce Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection Of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffe, N. J. : Prentice Hall, 1975), p. 37.
7. Bernard Malamud, The Magic Barrel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 81.
8. Bernard Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 24.
9. Alfred Kazin, "Fantasist Of The Ordinary," Commentary 44, 24 July 1967 p. 90.
10. This willingness is particularly true of the Jewish tradition of myth and legend. For instance, Joachim Neugroschel records that

It is the legacy of the era [the Haskalah] and of the West European Enlightenment that makes us talk about fantasies and fairytales. The polarity of the rational and irrational in regard to such literature does not historically exist for Jews, at least not in the way we regard existence as rational and practical on the one hand and fantastic and irrational on the other: a clean split, which literature and the occult movements try to bridge and turn into a dialectic.

Joachim Neugroschel, Great Works Of Jewish Fantasy
(London: Picador, 1978), p.xi

11. This complex concept was contributed to Kabbalist lore by the sixteenth century mystical thinker Isaac Luria who posited the creation of the finite world through three stages. These are tzimtzum (contraction), shebirath ha-kelim (the Breaking Of The Vessels) and Tikkum (restoration) which is still in progress. Hopefully without over-simplification: contraction occurred by a voluntary action of the Infinite to make way for the finite world:

Into the dark vacuum thus formed the Infinite projected His light, providing it at the same time with the 'vessels' which were to serve as media for its multifarious manifestations in creation. But some of the 'vessels', unable to endure the inrush of the light emitted from the En Sof, gave way and broke. The Breaking of the vessels' (Shebirath hakelim) caused a deterioration in the worlds above and chaos and confusion in the world here below. Instead of its uniform diffusion throughout the universe, the light irradiating from the Infinite was broken up into sparks illuminating only certain parts of physical creation, while other parts were left in darkness, a state which in itself is a type of negative evil. Thus did light and darkness, good and evil, begin to contend for the mastery of the world. The Divine harmony was disrupted and the Shechinah exiled. At the same time, scattered hither and thither, the sparkle of Divine Light intersected everywhere the darkness, with the result that evil and good became so mixed that there is no evil that does not contain an element of good, nor is there a good entirely free from evil.

Isidore Epstein, Judaism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), p. 245.

It is the duty of man to restore the state of original harmony and of particular significance in this process are the Jews, whose dispersion has the purpose of "the salvation of all human souls, the purified souls of the Israelites unifying with the souls of the men of other races in order to liberate them from the power of evil," (Epstein, p. 246). Such a restoration will result in the world's redemption.

12. Some hint of this intent was provided by Malamud in discussion with Tony Tanner. On the subject of Sy Levin in A New Life Tanner reported that "I have it direct from Mr. Malamud that by a pun on 'leaven' he is suggesting what the marginal Jew may bring to the American scene." (Tony Tanner "Bernard Malamud and The New Life," Critical Quarterly 10 (1968), p. 158.)
13. Philip Roth, Reading Myself And Others (London: Corgi, 1977) p. 211.
14. Ibid., p. 210.
15. Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape Of Nightmare (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 102.
16. Bernard Malamud, The Assistant (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 112 - 113.
17. Ibid., p. 203.
18. Haskel Frankel, "Interview," The Saturday Review, 10 Sept. 1966, p. 40.
19. Bernard Malamud, God's Grace (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p. 10.
20. Of chimpanzees Cohn reports that "though they can be as nasty, brutish and mean as men, their natures are essentially affectionate. They kiss and hug on celebratory occasions and some -- I have heard -- even die of broken hearts." God's Grace, p. 163.
21. Ibid., p. 70.
22. Daniel Hoffman, ed., The Harvard Guide To American Writing (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1979), p. 209.
23. Bernard Malamud, The Fixer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 204.
24. Ibid., p. 66.
25. Ibid., p. 206.
26. Ibid., p. 102.
27. Ibid., p. 208.
28. Rembrandt's Hat, p. 54
29. Bernard Malamud, Pictures Of Fidelman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p. 13.

30. Rembrandt's Hat, p. 57.
31. Ibid., p. 70.
32. God's Grace, p. 75.
33. Ibid., p. 185.
34. Bernard Malamud, Idiots First (London: Eyre, Methuen, 1972) p.16.
35. Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) p.305.
36. The Fixer, p. 216.
37. Ibid., p. 246.
38. Ibid., p. 230.
39. Ibid., p. 216.
40. Ibid., p. 232.
41. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)
p. 252.
42. Philip Roth, Reading Myself and Others, p. 116.
43. Allen Guttman, The Jewish Writer in America (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1971), p. 118.
44. Field and Field, eds., Bernard Malamud, p. 7.
45. Jonathan Baumbach, "The Economy Of Love," Kenyon Review, 25
(1963), p. 457.
46. Daniel Hoffman, ed., The Harvard Guide to Contemporary American
Writing, p. 206.
47. Ibid., p. 206.
48. Ruth R. Wisse, The Schlemiel As Modern Hero (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 39.
49. Albert Goldman, "Boy-Man, Schlemiel: Jewish Humor," Commonweal 86,
29 September 1967, p. 608.
50. God's Grace, pp. 64 - 65.
51. Ibid., p. 83.
52. Ibid., p. 155.
53. Ibid., p. 34.
54. Bernard Malamud A New Life (London: Four Square, 1964), p. 213.

55. Ibid., p. 130.
56. Ibid., p. 134.
57. Sanford Pinsker, The Schlemiel As Metaphor (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 121.
58. The Fixer, P. 131.
59. Ibid., p. 89.
60. The Assistant, p. 202.
61. Ibid., p. 13.
62. Ibid., p. 204.
63. Ibid., p. 206.
64. Robert Alter, After The Tradition (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969), p. 119.
65. Field and Fields, eds., Bernard Malamud, p. 75.
66. Bernard Malamud, Dubin's Lives (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1979), p. 281.
67. Sandy Cohen, Bernard Malamud and The Trial By Love (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1974), p. 9.
68. Bernard Malamud, The Natural, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 179.
69. Sandy Cohen, p. 9.
70. The Assistant, p. 211.
71. Steven J. Rubin, "Malamud and the theme of love and sex," Studies In American-Jewish Literature, 4,i, p. 19.
72. Dubin's Lives, p. 362.
73. Alan Lelchuk, "Malamud's Dark Fable," New York Times Book Review, 29 August 1982, p. 1.
74. Hoffman, ed., Harvard Guide To Contemporary American Writing, p. 209.
75. Joseph Epstein, "Malamud In Decline," Commentary 74 (October 1982), pp. 49 - 53.
76. Hoffman, ed., p. 212.
77. Philip Roth, Reading Myself And Others, pp. 116 - 117.
78. Morris Dickstein has suggested that The Tenants marks "a new

pessimism in Malamud's work" (New York Times Book Review 3, October 1971, p. 18) an opinion which has been widely held. David Mesher, for instance, in his article "Names and Stereotypes in Malamud's The Tenants," described it as "Malamud's most pessimistic book to date," (Studies In American-Jewish Literature 4. i, 58). Similar but understandably more stark pronouncements have been made about God's Grace and what frequently emerges from them is the critic's sense of betrayal, a belief that Malamud has departed from the themes and norms which marked his work in the fifties and sixties.

This sounds clearly in the review by Joseph Epstein who wonders: "Why do novelists seem to feel the need always to be changing...?" ("Malamud in Decline" Commentary, 74, October 1982, p. 52.) Moreover Epstein ponders the reasons why a novelist of Malamud's stature might begin to produce "bad" books: "He may become unfocused morally, the world suddenly seeming more complicated to him than once it did and hence less susceptible to being dealt with by his art," (p. 52).

Manifestly what Epstein is objecting to is some perceived change in the nature of Malamud's humanitarian vision, an apparent failure to inject suitable quantities of optimism into his newer works. Epstein is not alone in this: Mordecai Richler, for instance, claims to feel some perplexity in considering God's Grace: "I'm not sure what Malamud -- Malamud who in the past has written so lovingly about the way we live now -- is up to here," (New York Review Of Books, 18 October, 1982, p. 29). The perplexity, I would suggest, is as spurious as the suggestion that in God's Grace Malamud fails to write "lovingly" about humanity. "Lovingly" would seem to stand, in this context, as a euphemism for optimistically and we are left with the vision of Mordecai Richler, the reviewer, complaining about Malamud's apparent inability to provide the kind of optimistic vision that is so signally missing from the work of Mordecai Richler, the novelist.

79. Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern American Novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 140.
80. Thomas Lask, "Malamud's Lives," New York Times Book Review, 21 January, 1979, p. 43.
81. Tyler, "A Talk With The Novelist," p.33.
82. Rembrandt's Hat, p. 133.
83. The Fixer, p. 15.
84. A New Life, p. 57.
85. Ibid., p. 243.
86. The Assistant, p. 176.
87. The Natural, p. 149.
88. The Assistant, p. 176.
89. The Natural, p. 222.
90. Bernard Malamud, The Tenants (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) pp. 133 - 4.
91. Ibid., p. 62.
92. Ibid., p. 71.
93. God's Grace, p. 3.
94. Lelchuk, "Malamud's Dark Fable," p. 15.
95. Clive Sinclair reports that the descriptions of chimpanzee behaviour in God's Grace are authoritative and scientifically well documented.
(Clive Sinclair, "The Falling Out In Paradise," Times Literary Supplement, 29 October, 1982, p. 1188.)
96. These works are, in order, George Orwell's Animal Farm, Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis and the short stories "Bobok" by Fyodor Dostoevsky and "Night Journey" from John Barth's Lost In The Funhouse.
97. Thus the book works in a way precisely opposite to films like The War Game or The Day After which attempt pointedly to force the audience to consider the specific horrors of nuclear war.

98. God's Grace, pp. 199 - 200.
99. Mordecai Richler, "Chumps and Chimps," p. 28.
100. Morris Dickstein, "The Tenants," New York Times Book Review,
3 October, 1971, p. 18.
101. Joseph Epstein, "Malamud In Decline," Commentary 74: October 1982,
p. 53.
102. There is a line of criticism, perhaps fuelled by the notion that
Malamud's work has no contemporary dimension, which argues that
his values lack relevance to contemporary realities. Once again
this line is most powerfully voiced by Mark Schechner who insists
that

Malamud expects his heroes to take instruction in co-operation and humility in a world in which other values, like narcissism, self-interest, or David Levinsky's brand of social Darwinism, are likely to be more appropriate. In a world in which the ethics of Gemeinschaft are impractical, Malamud punishes his characters for harboring attitudes and enacting desires that many of us will regard as reasonable.... Not everyone is ready to concede that Roy Hobbs, Malamud's imperfect natural, should not have an eye for fancy women or not want to be the greatest hitter of all time. Nothing intrinsic to the morality of baseball calls upon him to acknowledge the deeper resources of his humanity, his menschlichkeit, as some critics now call it. Ted Williams was never struck down by fate for failing to tip his cap to the Red Sox fans.

(Harvard Guide, p.207)

This particular argument seems to me fallible. This is partly because of the dubious moral interpretations, is Schechner really suggesting that modern readers applaud for example the rise of David Levinsky? They may incline to the argument that his is the way to success and approbation but that is a rather different matter. It is fallible, however, because Schechner also seems to demonstrate a lack of awareness about Roy as a professional sportsman and team player. Roy's failure to be a team player is not simply a metaphor for his failure to comprehend human values and it works because it

is apt: the star player who fails to play for the team ultimately damages the team be it baseball, soccer or basketball that he plays. Wanting 'to be the greatest hitter of all time' is an invidious ambition and does violate the 'morality of baseball' if it supplants (or is pursued at the expense of) team success.

103. The Magic Barrel, p. 130.

CHAPTER NINE

"A Tzaddik for the World" :The Duties of a Chosen People.

Towards the end of The Chosen Reb Saunders, surrendering the last of his objections to his son Danny's immersion in twentieth century culture, encourages the young man to make a success of his work in psychology, to go out and be "a Tzaddik for the world. And the world needs a tzaddik." ¹ Apart from a slight problem over the word tzaddik the scene may not seem remarkable as denouement: proud father expresses the hope that his scholarly and intelligent son should make a success of his chosen profession, a profession moreover which is high in status and lucrative in financial reward. All in all the scene may seem to smack of middle class smugness, the calm untroubled surface of their world may appear unruffled by such a reputable and sensible decision. First appearance, however, would be deceptive since Reb Saunders is the leader of an orthodox Hasidic sect and as such is a man implacably opposed to such secular (god forsaken) pursuits as psychology. Moreover, Danny is his eldest son and thus is destined to assume the father's mantle of tzaddik and leader of the sect. So, the father's blessing is remarkable, accepting and acknowledging as it does a momentous break with tradition and it is made even more remarkable when one comes to understand the term tzaddik: "A person outstanding for his faith and piety; an ideal of moral and religious perfection... intermediary between God and man." ² Thus Reb Saunders, as leader of a religious group who even shun contact with other Orthodox Jews, is seen as sanctioning dealings at the most profound level, with the Mitnaggedim (opponents of Hasidism) in the outside world. Clearly what has taken place is a significant upheaval, a revolution which, if it lacks the pyrotechnics and bitterness generally associated with such radical about-turns of belief, is no less profound or extreme for that.

Such revolutions and similar confrontations occur in each of Potok's

novels. The author has described them as "core-to-core- culture confrontations" ³ and has suggested that they explore the possibilities for the survival of Judaism in the latter years of the twentieth century.⁴ In this respect, at least, Potok differs in perspective from Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, focussing more closely on the survival of Judaism in the wider world than do the older writers who concentrate more on the applicability of Judaic principles to that world. Nonetheless, as Reb Saunders' advice to Danny suggests, the role that the Jewish perspective may play in shaping and defending the world is also significant to Potok's vision of the survival of Judaism and receives close consideration in his novels.

Thus it is possible to see that the outward looking and, to some extent, secularized version of Judaism offered by Bellow, Malamud and others (like Edward Lewis Wallant) has not been the product of one literary generation, has been more than an outlook nurtured by the events and concerns of a particular historical period. Rather, it can begin to be seen as an attitude central to the Jewish-American literary experience as Potok brings to bear his highly developed intellectual and philosophical powers on world problems by defining and exploring them in the context of fiction. This, in itself, has brought problems since Potok has attracted more adverse criticism than most writers for his performance as a literary artist. For example, in a review of In The Beginning Daphne Merkin claimed that "it is distressingly easy to catalogue the faults of Potok's writing, from the amateurish style to the implausible dialogue to the paper-thin characterisations,"⁵ and Sheldon Grebstein, in an article ostensibly praising The Chosen, felt bound to observe that the book's "style ranges from undistinguished to banal."⁶ These charges against Potok's artistry are not easily dismissed. Even allowing for the vituperative antipathy for Potok that Daphne Merkin clearly brought to her analysis ("distressingly easy" for instance, is obviously a euphemism designed to give the illusion of critical

objectivity where none exists) much of what she says about his writing is true. The style is often clumsy and lacking in the deftness of touch, or certitude of tone expected of a serious writer and this problem of tone has been particularly marked in Potok's use of dialogue. There is a tendency, notably in the first two books, for all the characters to sound alike, moreover they tend to lecture rather than discuss, talking at rather than to one another. Efforts to mitigate this tendency and to characterize dialogue have been uneven and on occasion close to caricature. In The Book Of Lights, for instance, Karen Levin repeatedly calls Gershon Loran a "crazy Kabbalist" in such a way as to suggest it is a term of endearment and in The Chosen Tony Savo, an ex-boxer, has his speech larded with quaint and unconvincing pugilistic argot of which the word "clop" (as in "I went four and got clopped in the head" ⁷) is both most representative and most persistent.

The problem with this sort of unintentional caricature (Savo is, after all, supposed to be a sympathetic figure) is that it promotes the suspicion that the author has failed to get a grasp on the realities of living in the twentieth century. There is, certainly on first examination, a curiously muted quality about the world Potok's characters inhabit. There is, for instance, a lack of the violence (physical, verbal or emotional) which characterizes so much of contemporary experience and such violence as is introduced, even the anti-Semitic bullying of the Kulanskis in In The Beginning, seems restrained and lacks the raw edge of fear -- at least in David Lurie's recounting of it. Moreover, the books preceding In The Beginning lack a genuine sense of the social confrontation and breakdown which marks so much of contemporary literature and this, more than once, has been adversely commented on and offered as evidence of Potok's lack of significance or ability as a Chronicler of the times. Similarly unsatisfactory has been his treatment of female characters. In part the manifest difficulty he has in portraying women convincingly has been mitigated by the fact that Potok's men and boys inhabit

an authentically all-male environment and are part of an oppressively patriarchal society. Where women have been represented, however, their treatment has been tentative and his depiction of adolescent sexual relationships has been somewhat coy. Thus, in The Chosen, Reuven's barely intimated interest in Danny Saunder's sister is obliquely ended by the revelation that her marriage is arranged and in The Promise the relationship between Reuven Malter and Rachel Gordon is hurried over with the information that "We liked each other and thought the liking might come to mean something in time,"⁸ a curiously passionless statement which seems painfully out of touch with the tenor and intensity of teenage relationships.

Nonetheless, despite these obvious failings, principally ones of literary realization, Potok remains rather more significant and interesting than his detractors allow and his books insist on being greater than the sum of their parts. Partly this is because these 'faults' are not always manifest nor are they always simple failures of perception or realization. For example, the lack of violence and the failure to depict the world in terms of impending social breakdown grows out of a genuine conviction that these are not the truths about contemporary western society: "My own personal experience was not the kind of polarization that's typical of heroes in the modern novel..."⁹ Potok has observed. Similarly the straight-forward, unadorned narrative style lends itself to the language and voice of childhood and adolescence through which the stories are related and on occasion, as in the description of David Lurie's symbolic descent of the bluff in In The Beginning, Potok has shown himself to be capable of providing powerful and dramatic literary fiction. Moreover, this artless narrative is not easily achieved, is clearly hard won and serves a quite specific purpose as Potok attempts to create a model of the world in which the issues confronting man are starkly defined rather than reproduced as part of the contemporary confusion. This is confirmed in an article Potok wrote

in response to Sheldon Grebstein's observations about the stylistic shortcomings of The Chosen:

I have other things on my mind just now than the word games of Wittgensteinian writers or Dionysian explorations of a writer's self. I want there to be no doubt what a word means when I use it in a novel.... I will work very hard to simplify complexities of style so as to arrive at the clear center of a scene or idea. 10

These ideas, overwhelmingly, have concerned the continuing role of Judaism, whether it can survive in the modern world and retain some form of belief in the significance of human values in the face of forces which seek emphatically to deny such values. Thus Potok's concerns may seem narrower than either Bellow's or Malamud's because of his more apparent and specific interest in Judaism. Nonetheless, the arguments and confrontations have wider implications and it is to Potok's credit that these shine through his tales of the struggle for a new Judaism and are given a universal relevance through the context of youthful revolt. As he has observed "that world [of Orthodox Jewry] has become my metaphor for what things are like now."¹¹ Thus, as in the example of Reb Saunders and his son, the rebellion and threatened breakdown of tradition is very real and very much reflects the perceived chaos and impending social collapse often attributed to the wider world. Seen in this way it is possible to conjecture that the apparent "mutedness" to which I referred earlier, the lack, almost, of an apocalyptic vision in Potok's fiction, conveys more than the author's inability to catch the mood of the times and suggests a different perspective on the nature, scale and consequences of the contemporary social breakdown.

Overwhelmingly, however, this sort of interpretation has been shunned by commentators who prefer to see Potok's young protagonists not as profoundly yet constructively challenging the received wisdom of their fathers but rather as a succession of 'good', conformist sons. Sheldon Grebstein, for instance, sees Reuven and Danny as acceptable and creditable

because they are 'good' students while Curt Leviant has found Reuven Malter too much of a "goody-goody" for comfort and, in her review of The Book Of Lights, Ruth Wisse damningly describes Gershon Loran as "another mild Jewish insubordinate."¹² However, such judgements are made too much on the basis of outward appearance and there is a sense in which Potok's young men can be seen as rebelling in a manner more profound than their counterparts in the work of writers like William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac or Hunter Thompson. Whereas for these the world of drugs and the counter-culture is able to win the protagonists "by default" (there being nothing in the 'straight' world to restrain or retain them), for characters like Asher Lev and David Lurie it is a very different matter. They are truly torn between following their own inclinations and bowing to the conflicting demands of their Jewish "sub-culture." For them it is hard to break free from the society of which they are a product and this is reflected in the pain they experience and cause for others.

This combination of isolation and tormenting doubt is present in all of Potok's fiction but in the more simplistic earlier works it is somewhat muted and arrives 'second hand.' The difficulties that face Danny Saunders and Michael Gordon are, for the most part, reported rather than depicted and Reuven's own experience of similar crises are only slight in comparison, being limited to a mild sense of resentment of his father and an even milder failure to fulfil paternal expectations.¹³ Nonetheless, the adolescents of The Chosen and The Promise are discernably in the same mould as their later counterparts, not least in their possession of precocious intelligence and talent.

One of Potok's most successful attempts to depict and examine a character's sense of isolation and reluctant rebellion comes in My Name Is Asher Lev which, as the title suggests, concerns the principal character's struggle to assert his personal identity over the one his family and community seek to impose upon him. Just as Asher Lev is

shunned and comes to be regarded with fear and hostility by his schoolmates (and even his father) because of his 'demonic' artistic talents so David Lurie, in In The Beginning, is isolated by his fear of the street and his ill-health. For Lurie, the situation is intensified by his precocious genius and the 'alien' reading matter (Bible criticism) which so interests him. Ultimately, he comes to feel estranged even from his immediate family and, symbolically, walks alone on his daily journey to the yeshiva until he is joined by his eventual spiritual guide, Rav Sharfman.

This theme of an almost unwelcome solitude is repeated in The Book Of Lights where both Arthur Leiden and Karen Levin suffer from being "different". Of itself this 'difference' is reminiscent of the isolation which confronts William Burroughs' adolescents, as Potok describes Karen Levin experiencing "the loneliness of growing up not physically pretty, not mentally ordinary. She had loathed most of her classmates and almost all of her teachers. She had yearned for solitude and at the same time dreaded it when it had come in drowning doses." ¹⁴ However, the most interesting aspect of The Book Of Lights is the way in which Potok breaks the mould of his protagonists with the character of Gershon Loran. Orphaned, Gershon drifts through school without enthusiasm and his progress is defined by negatives: "None of his Talmud teachers was enthusiastic about him, but none could find reason not to ordain him after he passed the required examinations." ¹⁵ Further, he inhabits a world much less amenable and sympathetic than those available to his predecessors: "...throughout the neighbourhood ran a twisting river of random events.... The world seemed a strangely terrifying place when you really thought about it." ¹⁶ In this respect Gershon Loran in particular and the book as a whole seem much closer to the bemused and uncertain temper of much of post-war American writing than any of Potok's previous novels.

Nonetheless, all Potok's heroes are outsiders, solitary characters estranged in some way from their traditions, and Potok has typically

conveyed this estrangement in terms of a father-son conflict. Danny Saunders, in The Chosen, must reject his father's wishes and incur paternal displeasure by moving outside the narrowly religious world of the Hasidim and the sense of conflict recurs for Michael Gordon in The Promise, causing Reuven Malter to wonder whether "a son [could] hate a father and not know it."¹⁷ In the later books this sense of conflict becomes stronger and the possibility of reconciliation more remote.

Asher Lev and David Lurie both feel their fathers are threatening and hostile and young David reports that "I did not truly know who he was and I remembered that in some dreams I had been having he had appeared as a darkly red apparition, gargantuan, terrifying."¹⁸ Asher similarly experiences a sense of his father's antipathy: he feels that "my father regarded me as an evil son..."¹⁹ and there is an inevitability about their conflict even though it is apparent that neither of them actively desires a confrontation.

However, for Asher Lev, as for Danny Saunders and David Lurie, the disunity between father and son is only symptomatic of a far deeper and wider disunity, the abandonment of the Jewish culture for another, alien culture. In Asher's case it is the world of art which brings him into contact with subject matter and concepts which Aryeh Lev finds incompatible with Jewish orthodoxy. In fact, to describe Asher's actions as an 'abandonment' of Jewish culture is to overstate the case, as Potok indicates that he remains an observant Jew.²⁰ Abandonment, however, is how Asher's father sees his actions and certainly Asher does move to a point in which he is held between the two cultures and traditions (of Judaism and Art) rather than within either one of them.

This sense of inter-cultural tension is at the heart of all of Potok's fictional works. In one way or another all his characters are caught between the contradictory pulls of Judaism and a wider, essentially secular, culture and he has coined a word for their situation: they are zwischenmensch, literally in-between people. This sense of "being at home

everywhere and nowhere simultaneously..."²¹ is most clearly expressed in the character of Gershon Loran but it obviously applies to Danny Saunders, Asher Lev and David Lurie as they too struggle to define their relationship with Judaism and with the umbrella culture of western civilization. Patently, the narrow and confined world of Orthodox Judaism is, in Potok's eyes, insufficient to sustain a Jew who wishes to be a part of the twentieth century and yet its claims are too powerful to allow the characters to abandon their Judaism altogether. Thus, Danny Saunders is seen to be being "torn" apart by his desire to remain a Jew and his need to embrace the forbidden world of contemporary learning and similarly David Lurie sustains a septic wound from kicking against the fence which encloses his yeshiva and which symbolically cuts him off from the world of Bible criticism and secular scholarship.²²

This motif of confinement has been used extensively by Potok to depict the stifling, stagnating effect of such attempts at self-isolation by the Jewish sub-culture. In The Promise this is conveyed by reference to closed and open windows. Reuven feels oppressed by the airlessness of the Hasidim's unventilated rooms; feels the intrusion of the outside world into his college via the noises entering through the windows and Potok signals Danny's movement into the twentieth century by noting that he has, at last, opened the windows of his apartment. Likewise, in In The Beginning, David Lurie's pursuit of new truths about religion are echoed in his flight from enclosure. The incident with the chain-link fence is just one indication. Later comes his decision to study in the park in order to keep the world visible "so you could see how your reading changed it,"²³ and the open window and fresh breeze in the apartment on the night he tells his father he wants to take "A degree in Bible..."²⁴ serves to underline David's need for the outside world.

Like David Lurie, all Potok's protagonists move steadily but regretfully away from the Jewish community that has nurtured them. Originally, David yearns "to go home to my own street and its trees,"²⁵

when he is away from it but ultimately, like Asher Lev, he must leave the "streets that had once been my world but were now cold and gone from me," ²⁶ and both Danny Saunders and Gershon Loran are forced to abandon their homes because they have gone outside the conventional and accepted boundaries of the Orthodox Jewish community.

It is for this reason that Potok's boys are genuinely rebels. Unlike Rabbit Angstrom or the recurrent Kerouac hero who, as in the final *Duluo* manifestation, collapses back into society; unlike Holden Caulfield who is in the process of being "adjusted" to society, Potok's characters 'push through' the barriers which attempt to confine them in an effort to reinterpret themselves and their culture. The fact that these rebellions are not dramatic 'performances' of the sort that have characterized post-war American literature from On The Road and Howl to Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas in no way detracts from their fundamental and far reaching qualities.

For instance, Asher Lev hears from the mashpia that "All the Jewish people are one body and one soul..."²⁷ and it is this sense of community that helps him retain his Jewishness when it is threatened by Jacob Kahn's artistic nihilism.²⁸ Whatever the reason, Potok is careful to demonstrate that his young men do stay within the spirit of Judaism even if not within the letter of it. Accordingly, Danny Saunders continues to play with an imaginary earlock long after the actual one has been cut off and uses the method of silence practised on him by his father to cure Michael Gordon. Moreover, Reuven Malter, despite his techniques of textual amendment, receives smicha from Rav Kalman thereby becoming "a part of the tradition now, as much of a guardian of the sacred Promise as Rav Kalman and the Hasidim were...."²⁹

In the later books the atmosphere between father and son is far more strained but there are, nonetheless, indications that the tradition will be upheld. In My Name Is Asher Lev father and son's silent parting handshake may be proof of their strained relationship but, as Sidney

Feshbach has pointed out, Asher clearly carries with him the rebbe's blessing and, crucially, still regards himself as a Jew: "...a Ladover Hasid who prays three times a day and believes in the Ribbono Shel Olam and loves his parents and the Rebbe."³⁰ In a similar way, although David Lurie and his father never achieve a reconciliation, the son remains a part of Judaism through his connection with Rav Sharfman and is confirmed in the tradition by the voice of his Uncle David at a mass grave in Belsen. Finally, even Gershon Loran is accepted and encouraged to hold onto his Jewishness by Professor Malkuson.

Indeed, in a crucial way and in spite of the disapprobation they receive, these later characters-- Lev, Lurie and Loran -- can be seen as seeking to strengthen and support Judaism. David Lurie, for example, feels that he is fighting the enemies of the Jews, much as his father did, and rejects the passive, insular impulse of those Jews who urge him to avoid contamination by the anti-Semitic goyim. He tells a classmate: "I think we should care, Saul, I think its wrong to ignore what they say,"³¹ and this sense of needing to care, to battle for and defend Judaism from its persecutors is central to Potok's concern. It is an idea most forcefully expressed by Abraham Gordon in The Promise. Gordon is not a wholly sympathetic character, Reuven feels he could never be "comfortable with Abraham Gordon's answers,"³² but he is nonetheless the character who most closely vocalizes the position of Potok's later protagonists. Referring to the ideas that have put him in Cherem, he tells Reuven that they were inspired by love of Judaism and not scorn for it: "I wanted American Judaism to become something an intelligent person would have to take seriously and be unable to laugh at and want to love."³³

Clearly, what Gordon is proposing is a reinterpretation of Judaism to suit the demands of the twentieth century. This reinterpretation has become necessary since the 'old ways' of the Jews like Reb Saunders and Rav Kalman are inadequate to the demands and knowledge of the 'new world' (in both its senses). American Jewry is seen as crucial to this act of

redefinition for, as David Malter recognizes, it is the spring-board to the creation of the state of Israel and is, in its own right, the only significant Jewish community left in the west. Thus, when Jacob Keter muses on what form "the mysticism of American Jewry,"³⁴ will take he is providing a curious re-emphasis of Abraham Gordon's remarks as well as the one made in the light of the Holocaust by Max Lurie: "There will not be many gentle Jews left after this war."³⁵ Of course, as becomes clear, neither should there be reductively violent and aggressive Jews like Max Lurie, who becomes virtually indistinguishable from his Polish enemies. Nonetheless, Jews, Potok suggests, must accept their position "beneath the vast umbrella civilization we call secular humanism,"³⁶ and adjust their horizons accordingly. This adjustment occurs, for example, in The Book Of Lights where, from the very beginning, the students' "need for fresh concepts to replace their crumbling fundamentalism,"³⁷ is felt. It is finally achieved by Gershon Loran against a background of fire and flood, echoing the creation myth and carrying with it the suggestion of the imposition of order on chaos.

Appropriately, this achievement of a re-definition of Judaism has been described by Potok in terms of the creation of "a third civilization."³⁸ However, such an act clearly requires that its creators go beyond what is accepted and acceptable to Jewish Orthodoxy and this is precisely what Potok's characters do. Thus David Lurie is forced, in his symbolic descent of the bluff, to move from the clearly defined paths of the parks near his home and away from the safety of the yeshiva so that he can find new paths and new ways of living as a Jew in the midst of the twentieth century experience and society. Potok himself has suggested that "if Jews can't compete in this open market place of ideas, then we should close up the store,"³⁹ and in order that Judaism may continue as a living religion (keeping the store open) Jews must be prepared, as Reuven Malter is, to go beyond what is accepted and to look "everywhere" for the answers to life.

Although he has been widely depicted as one of the more religious of

the Jewish-American writers there is clearly a strong non-religious element in this "third civilization" which is reminiscent of the "secular transformation" of religious values identified in the work of Bernard Malamud. This secular element has been openly admitted by Potok in interview ⁴⁰ but is something that he has clearly been troubled by and which remains implicit or unendorsed in much of his work. In The Chosen, for instance, David Malter rationalizes the need for the State of Israel by arguing that "we cannot wait for God. If there is an answer, we must make it ourselves," ⁴¹ and, in The Promise, Abraham Gordon's attempts at creating a theology for those who can no longer believe in God are acknowledged with some reluctance. ⁴² Once again it is with My Name Is Asher Lev that Potok signals his willingness to deal more closely with the complexities of twentieth century, as the Rebbe admits that Jakob Kahn "is not an observer of the Commandments. But he is a good person." ⁴³ However, it is in The Book Of Lights that this secularization of Judaism is most closely explored. Here, drawing on the Merkavah legends of Ezekiel's chariot, Potok carefully constructs a vision of heaven as an elevated, spiritual world divorced from the realities of life on earth and emphasizes not only man's exclusion from heaven but also the sufficiency of the earth and mortal life. Thus he claims that "no-one could really climb the transcendant heaven now... it would remain closed... there was no chariot into the chambered heaven," ⁴⁴ but does not, in the final analysis, find this an altogether distressing prospect. Instead (still using the motif of ascent and descent) Loran is able to achieve his new form of Judaism through a descent into himself and, although unable to pray, retains his contact with the Jewish religion through the reading of texts. ⁴⁵ It seems, as Professor Malkuson suggests to him that "what is of importance is not that there may be nothing. We have always acknowledged that as a possibility. What is important is that if indeed there is nothing, then we should be prepared to make something out of the only thing we have left to us -- ourselves." ⁴⁶

Ultimately Potok does not go as far as Malamud in identifying God with man's moral capacity although he has recently, in interview, offered an interpretation of the Bible which hints very strongly at a secular impulse and locates his position as being one very similar to Malamud's version of secularized Judaism. He describes the Bible as "an attempt on the part of one people to link itself with that dimension in the universe which is divine, immaterial, the goal for the best of human striving, the source of whatever wisdom and intelligence and compassion we have." 47

Nonetheless, at the close of The Book Of Lights Gershon Loran is waiting with hope if not certainty for God's return, having once, as a young boy, experienced the certainty of His touch. However, like Malamud, Potok concedes that the dynamic for society must come from man and he also shares the overwhelmingly Jewish conviction that man has the power to overcome the difficulties with which he is beset. As the father says in "Miracles For A Broken Planet": "Sometimes I think man is a greater miracle-maker than God.... God does not have to live day after day on this broken planet." 48

It is to their communal strength in Judaism that the Jews must turn to overcome these difficulties and it is partly out of this sense of Jewish communality that springs the faith in society which characterizes the work of Potok along with that of Bellow and Malamud and distinguishes it from the work of the majority of their contemporaries.

If the production of "disruptive" fictions can be usefully seen as an expression of an artistic realization that the world is irrational and closed off from meaningful interpretation then Potok's traditionally rendered, continuous and "undisruptive" approach to what is, after all, story telling might be viewed as an equally ideological stance. What is suggested by such readiness to approve certitude of meaning is a conviction that life is similarly amenable to logical interpretation, just as Potok's use of historical events to underpin the reality of his stories emphasizes a belief in the "connectedness" of the individual to his society. Chaim Potok has been unusual in the degree to which he has felt and propounded

the strength and mutuality of these relationships. Certainly no other writer considered here (including Bellow and Malamud) has found a bond equally strong or as powerfully established. Nonetheless, Potok has consistently sought to depict this relationship in precisely these terms of mutual nourishment. Just as David Lurie and the others draw from goyish culture and society to sustain themselves in Judaism so they, as Jews, can and indeed must enrich the wider, umbrella culture. In an article written in 1966 Potok argued that "those Jews who are not fearful of coping with realities still have a great deal to say from a position within Judaism to a twentieth century world that is grappling with the problems of meaning and meaningful behaviour," ⁴⁹ and in the same article he also stated that "it is as a Jew that I choose to serve the world." Some sense of the nature of this service can be gained from Potok's remarks concerning the contribution that monotheistic Judaism made to the ancient world:

Jewish civilization came into the world at war with the nature cycle to which pagan reality was bound and it broke the cyclical grip that nature had on human experience... freeing man so that he could create a new world, a new reality with a dream for the future rather than nothing but this endless cyclical trap.... ⁵⁰

Clearly, for Potok this hopefulness and purposive positivity has continued to hold good, as can be seen in My Name Is Asher Lev where two very different characters speak of having a "Jewish heart" as a way of expressing their sympathy for humanity as a whole.⁵¹ By having his characters express their innate love of humanity in this way, Potok is joining them to a contemporary literary roll of honour which includes Moses Herzog, Yakov Bok and Edward Wallant's Sammy Cahan.

In Kabbalist lore the Jews were responsible for collecting the light spilled during the "Breaking Of The Vessels." The collection of all the light would redeem the world and this, of course, corresponds closely to the belief that the Jews are God's Chosen People. In both cases it is the Jews' mediating action between God and man that is vital in defining their status and Potok has made use of this tradition of mediating action in

underlining his belief in the value and centrality of the Jews to human experience. This is particularly true of The Book Of Lights where Potok quotes extensively from the Kabbalah to underpin the actions and beliefs of Gershon Loran on his route to a new understanding of Judaism. One particularly illuminating quotation, in this context, runs: "Ravi Yosi said, 'The world was not properly settled, nor was the earth purged from the defilement of the serpent, until Israel stood before Mount Sinai, where they had laid fast hold of the Tree of Life, and so established the world firmly.'" ⁵²

In the light of all this, Potok views as wrong-headed those Jews who seek to cut themselves off from the rest of the world. Most notable amongst these are the Hasidim who enclose themselves within the narrow confines of their religious beliefs to the detriment both of themselves and the rest of society. "If he were not a tzaddik he could make a great contribution to the world," ⁵³ observes David Malter of Reb Saunders, the leader of the Hasidim in The Chosen. On the contrary it is the Jews' duty as "reconnaissance troops for the world..." ⁵⁴ to become involved in society. Thus Reb Saunders' son, Danny, is finally charged with the task of being "a tzaddik for the world," ⁵⁵ which is to say he should bring to the world the qualities of moral and spiritual leadership by example which he learned in his father's synagogue.

Potok has said of the Jews that

We have lived through a series of culture confrontations. Every time we've confronted a high culture we have always managed to borrow from it the best that it had to offer, to blend with it, to enrich our core in the process, and then to pass on to the world that blend of high culture with our own core. ⁵⁶

In Danny Saunders it is possible to see this process of mutual benefit at work. He is able to use his phenomenal talent (as a psychologist) to benefit the wider society but his Jewish heritage is firmly acknowledged through his use of a Talmudic style of learning in understanding Freud and through his recourse to 'the silence' in order to cure his first patient.

Moreover, this wider culture is able to benefit Judaism as, through psychology, Danny is able to affect a reconciliation between Abraham and Michael Gordon and avert a dislocation of the Judaic tradition.⁵⁷ This theme of mutual enrichment occurs elsewhere, as Gershon Loran works for Jews and non-Jews alike during his time as a chaplain in Korea and the father in "Miracles For A Broken Planet" offers to "give the world the special gifts of our Jewishness."⁵⁸ Above all, Asher Lev, sustained by his Jewish faith, is able to go beyond the social pessimism of Jacob Kahn in much the same way as Potok, Malamud and Bellow are able to transcend the contemporary malaise with its feeling of meaninglessness and fragmentation of society.

This mutuality of interest between the Jews and the rest of Western Culture is part of a general belief in mutuality of interest that marks Potok's enthusiasm for and belief in society. It is part of an optimism which is identifiably Jewish in its genesis and which, appropriately enough, finds its most fluent expression in the closing lines of Wanderings, Potok's history of the Jews:

Yes, the Jew is now solidly inside the affairs of the world, Yes, we are aware of the resonance of hate that lingers like a stench upon western civilisation. Yes, we will continue to be the other, to hold to our own view of things. Yes, we are a single people, capable of loving our separate lands as well as Israel -- as one is able to love a mother and a father. Yes, there will be peace one day. Yes, we will renew our people.... Yes, there are flowers to plant, seedlings to nurture, young trees to tend, old earth to nourish, and new earth to put in -- a garden of new dreams to bring forth, to add to old covenants and messianic hopes, and to offer to ourselves and to our broken and beloved world. Yes. 59

Precisely what Potok's Jews have to offer the world is a particular vision of the world backed by their Jewish heritage. It is, overwhelmingly, a response to an apparent lack of meaning in the world and constitutes a refusal to countenance the possibility of surrender to such absurdity. Equally,

Potok's protagonists reject the world as being of benign or malign intent but, starting from a point of apparent absurdity proceed to render meaning from a world conditioned by accidents. In In The Beginning there is some talk of 'making' accidents; God is seen to be "making accidents everywhere," ⁶⁰ and the anti-semitic Kulanskis "make" a series of accidents against David Lurie. However, since by its very definition an accident cannot be made in the deliberate and planned sense of the Kulanskis assaults on David or of Max Lurie's perceived attacks by God on the Jews, the idea of such malign external interference is rejected as inadequate. ⁶¹ In a world in which relationships are always potentially fruitful (given the willingness on the part of man to make them work) it is inconsistent, indeed inconceivable, to Potok that there could be such malign intent underlying the very basis of existence. He therefore seeks to establish a world which is conditioned by random events, as in In The Beginning where a series of disastrous and irrational accidents define the shape of David Lurie's childhood. Similarly, in The Chosen, Reuven Malter unsuccessfully ponders the nature and purpose of his baseball accident, an apparently silly thing ("an ordinary thing," ⁶² suggests his father) which has far-reaching consequences for the characters in the novel. Such accidents occur on all levels of human activity. From the mysterious fires and succession of plane crashes in The Book Of Lights to the unforeseen chain of events which lead to Danny Saunders treating Michael Gordon in The Promise life seems to unfold without motive, design or sense. ⁶³ The blind nature of these events is underlined by Gershon Loran's experience during his Brooklyn childhood:

For a while after his cousin's death he thought his family had somehow been singled out for a special curse. But he talked to friends and found that throughout the neighborhood ran a twisting river of random events: parents died in slow or sudden ways, children were killed, relatives slipped young from life. The world seemed a strangely terrifying place when you really thought about it. ⁶⁴

The questions remain, then, "what kind of a universe is it in which man moves?

Is it possible to explain this world which Gershon Loran, like so many protagonists in post-war fiction, finds 'strangely terrifying'?"

The key to any answers appears to lie precisely in Potok's perception of these frequently awful and unwelcome events as pure accidents. Just as they are blind (i.e. not conditioned by either benign or malign motivation), so nothing else in the universe can be considered in terms of pure goodness or evil. This element is touched upon in My Name Is Asher Lev as Asher struggles to decide whether his gift for painting is demonic or divine and is further developed through the repeated images of darkness and light, shadow and flame, in In The Beginning. Here, the young David Lurie combines his father's fight against the Poles and the Cossacks in the menacing forest of Bobrek with personal experience of anti-Semitism and patterns these, essentially dark, occurrences ⁶⁵ into a complex web of ideas bound up with images of the purity and innocence associated with the secure clean whiteness of sheets, the comforting safety of Menorah candle flames and the potentially threatening shadows beyond those flames. Through these powerfully sustained images Potok explores and explains David's growth into adulthood, describing the boy's original fear of the darkness and his preference for the plain and clear security of light while forcefully making the point that human experience is too complex to sustain such a simplistic life-view. Just as David Lurie needs both father and mother so he needs to embrace both the darkness and the light. ⁶⁶ Thus, though the young David fears the forest and wishes God would make the world clean (i.e. white and unblemished), the dark, apparently forbidding forest is the setting both of pleasant picnics and the Kulanski's anti-Semitic activities. Equally, the shadows are the home both of threatening, unfriendly presences, and the spirit of David's guiding, beneficent uncle. Eventually, David must learn to accept the necessity of the darkness and the utility of the deeds done in it (as when he learns of and re-enacts his father's heroic work for the Jewish resistance) before he can come to a mature understanding of his own role as a Jew in the twentieth century.

Such a pattern, of contrast and accommodation, is comprehensively employed in The Book Of Lights where there are a number of ambiguities and dualities, events and situations whose qualities can only be perceived in their totality by the use of two contrasting viewpoints. Gershon Loran provides an example of this as he fashions for himself an acceptable contemporary version of Judaism from the contrasting, perhaps even antagonistic, viewpoints held by the Professors Keter and Malkuson. (It is not without significance in this context that a Loran is a type of navigational aid which determines the position of an object by reference to two known fixed and separate points).

This belief in the power of Judaism to reconcile apparent opposites has been recognized in the work of both Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud but Potok seems to take this power of reconciliation one step further as he uses the Zohar to reinforce his argument that such an accommodation is essential to a balanced, workable model of the universe. Thus, Gershon Loran reads from the Zohar in order to provide a commentary and interpretation of the events in Korea and begins to perceive that "despite their separateness, the holy contains a particle of the left side...."⁶⁷ In this way, an apparently good action can have bad consequences, as when Mrs. Leiden successfully intervenes to prevent the bombing of Kyoto and indirectly causes the Atomic Bomb to be dropped on Hiroshima, and a bad action, the very dropping of the bomb, can have good consequences in terms of the vast number of American soldiers whose lives were saved by it.

Potok's underlying point is obviously that the post-war retreat into cynicism and despair over the futility and brutality of human life is misguided. Through reference to Arthur Leiden's anxiety and shame over the dropping of the Atomic Bomb (which, like the Holocaust, is for many a symbol of man's unworthiness) Potok is trying to refute this despair by placing it within the context of a world of human possibilities. If the universe is not malign, or indeed benign, then the individual recovers his significance and can act purposefully in an attempt to cope with it. Finally, even Arthur,

from the depths of his self-disgust, is able to recognise this and writes to his parents that "all the world", it seems, is a grayish sea of ambiguity and we must learn to navigate it or be drowned."⁶⁸

However, this rejection of the concept of control and manipulation of man does not force Potok (as, for example, it has forced Kurt Vonnegut) into regarding life as a totally absurd series of events in which man is a helpless piece of flotsam propelled by the motion of some cosmic sea. Nor does he come to regard life as a sort of vast black joke. On the contrary, in Potok's view a man can, and indeed must, gamble on his ability to impose his will on the conditions of his life. The gambling metaphor, which in some places is refined to the notion of making a choice (but always in the context of being unable to predict any outcome), first appears in The Promise where Potok quotes from Pascal: "Yes, but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked."⁶⁹ This wager, however, is not the blind device it may appear to be and differs sharply in essence from the blind accidents which shape the individual's life. In contrast, this gambling is an attempt to impose some degree of meaning and rationality on a world which is, until man acts, empty of meaning. In the narrative action of The Promise, the gambling metaphor springs out of the gambling game at the country fair. This, in fact, is not a fair gamble and it is its very unfairness which brings on Michael Gordon's mental breakdown. After this there are numerous gambling images in the book: Michael gambles that he will enjoy going sailing with Reuven; Abraham Gordon records how he gambled on the strength of the Jewish tradition to sustain him after he lost religious faith; Rav Kalman gambles with the sanctity of that tradition by giving Reuven smicha just as Reuven gambles on getting smicha by giving examination answers he knows will be unpopular with Rav Kalman.⁷⁰

None of these gambles or choices can be made lightly, as the possible repercussions are far too serious. Not surprisingly, then, characters often fear to make such choices. Max Lurie, rocked by the Depression and its effect on the community he brought to New York, loses faith in his judgement, becoming

"afraid of making another decision..."⁷¹ and Gershon Loran accepts The Leiden Award so as to avoid making a choice simply because, as Rav Kalman says in The Promise, "when a man has a choice to make he chooses what is most important to him, and that choice tells the world what kind of man he is...."⁷² Thus we are forced to recognize the great importance attached to this particular form of gambling and also to accept that it is through such apparently marginal activities that man is able to invest something of himself in the world, thereby investing life with meaning and purpose.

This belief is most readily understood by reference to an article Potok wrote on Martin Buber which demonstrates the novelist's intellectual debt to the philosopher. In it Potok writes that "Buber argued that the mark of man's freedom is the ability to choose and to stake his life on that choice. By risking everything through a decision of faith, man becomes a genuine person...."⁷³ This same belief obviously lies at the centre of Potok's work and the identification of the gamble with a 'decision of faith' is vital in linking the social dimension of Potok's concerns (the morality of man's dealings in society and the moral nature of society itself) to his beliefs with regard to human significance in the cosmos. The conviction that a man's actions continue to be significant, even if there is no God, provides the rational impetus for the moral concern which is absent in much of twentieth century writing and this, in turn, reflects and is reflected in the writer's Jewish background, as has been seen with Bellow and Malamud. Moreover, Potok is able to insist upon the validity of the Jewish moral precepts by emphasizing the degree to which they help his protagonists, as Jews, to gamble and make good choices. As Michael Woolf has observed: "The fact that the characters choose well is a vindication of their moral education."⁷⁴

In an attempt to express more figuratively and enact the conflict between this world of accidents and man's effort to bring meaning to the universe Potok has, in much of his writing, adopted a motif of contrasting light and dark. Whilst this was not much in evidence in The Chosen, the conflict becomes apparent in The Promise through Michael Gordon's interest

in astronomy (the dark sky punctuated by pinpricks of starlight) and through the "twilight" months during which Michael's sanity and Reuven's smicha hang in the balance.⁷⁵ For Asher Lev, light and dark are the crucial elements of painting. He expresses this as a small child, saying "I wanted to draw the light and dark..."⁷⁶ and through his recognition of the Siberian landscape "of ice and darkness..."⁷⁷ as an internalized metaphor for his feelings as his father attempts to suppress his talent. In The Beginning employs dark and light by contrasting the shadowy world of the forest with David's illusory "clean, white world,"⁷⁸ and The Book Of Lights, as the title suggests, works through the ambiguities and dualities of light and darkness.

In general terms, images of light represent man's impulse to 'goodness' and the survival of his spiritual dimension, a dimension which obviously has religious overtones. In The Chosen, for instance, the movement of Danny Saunders away from the strictures of an essentially eighteenth century Hasidism and into the hopefulness of Potok's twentieth century is symbolized by sunlight piercing the gloom of the Hasidic community. In his first visit to Danny's street, Reuven observes how the sycamores "formed a solid tangled bower that kept out the sunlight."⁷⁹ However, by the time of his final visit, when Danny has decided to give up the tzaddikate for psychology "the sycamores formed a tangled bower, through which the sun shone brightly."⁸⁰ In a similar way, this image of light is used in The Book Of Lights to express man's capacity for self-expression as Karen Levin's father asserts that "we have it in our hands to make of ourselves a burnt cinder or a star of the spirit,"⁸¹ a remark which also contains the threat of the darkness of failure. This image is repeated in Asher Lev's determination not to have the flame of his painting doused, leaving him to live a life characterized by waste and Siberian darkness. "Who dares drain the world of its light?"⁸² asks Asher's 'mythic ancestor,' encouraging him to hold on to his talent and use it for the world even if it breaks with the accepted code of Judaism. Such a break occurs when Asher violates shabbat by switching on his bedroom light to look at his paintings but it is clear that it is more important,

morally and spiritually, for Asher to have the light than obey the law.

Frequently, however, the power of light is allied to man's religious dimension, as in Potok's short piece "Miracles For A Broken Planet" where the spark of light from the candles acts as a metaphor for the Jews' impulse to goodness and will to survive the threat within the darkness. It is an image also used in The Promise where the menorah candles (symbolic of the Jewish tradition) appear as "two tiny flames that flickered against the enormous darkness of the night."⁸³ The connection of the Jews with scattered sparks of light obviously carries references to the Breaking of the Vessels and, indeed, it is usually from a recognizably Jewish viewpoint that these images of light are deployed. However, as Potok's increasing willingness to deal 'beyond the walls' of Judaism suggests, this light is not an exclusively Jewish property. Thus, in The Book Of Lights, John Meron recognizes in Gershon Loran a quality he had also seen in a Jesuit friend and concludes that religious people of all denominations are "strange carriers of an otherworldly luminosity."⁸⁴ Light, then, ultimately represents a powerful moral quality in man and Potok's use of it may best be understood by the Mashpia's remark that "the candle of God is the soul of man."⁸⁵

Darkness, by contrast, incorporates the world of doubt, fear and negative emotions like jealousy and intolerance. Reuven Malter, in The Promise, experiences "a rancid darkness"⁸⁶ as he realizes the nature of the relationship developing between Danny Saunders and Rachel Gordon; later Rav Kalman, in his dislike of what America is doing to Judaism, seems to "radiate darkness."⁸⁷ Further, Reuven experiences a sense in which the darkness contains the powers which are against life: "I turned off the light and stood very still. In the abrupt, total darkness of the night the odour of moist decay was suddenly overpowering."⁸⁸ Thus it is consistent with these images that the unpleasant and destructive thoughts and actions of In The Beginning occur within the dark precincts of the forest. The murder of the Jews at Bobrek and Max Lurie's attacks on the Poles and Cossacks as well as David's re-enactment of these events and his desire to kill the Kulanskis all take

place in the forest which is "cold" and where the leaves are "stained with death."⁸⁹ This connection between decay and darkness is enlarged upon by Gershon Loran who "did not know what death looked like, though he thought it was dark...."⁹⁰ And although the motif is somewhat overused by Potok, as in In The Beginning, where, on successive pages, David Lurie's mother is made to exude "silent darkness" and "dark silences,"⁹¹ its universal immediacy is underlined by Gershon Loran, who describes his insomniac fear of death in the following way: "No time of day or night seemed so filled with the weight of darkness as this hour before the twilight of morning."⁹²

Despite this, however, darkness is not invariably depicted as being evil of itself. Rather, as in the Old Testament, it may be seen as the province in which evil may occur. The Book Of Genesis 1: 16-18 firmly locates darkness as part of God's creation and in Proverbs 4: 19 one reads that "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." It is noteworthy that wickedness is likened to darkness rather than identified as being it. Indeed the concept of darkness as being of itself evil and separate from God's province belongs far more to the New Testament and Christianity, where, for example, thanks is given to God "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness...."⁹³

This difference in approach and interpretation is echoed in Potok's fiction where darkness is more an ambiguous presence than an evil force. Thus, in In the Beginning, Max Lurie, a figure frequently identified with darkness, is not an unsympathetic figure in his commitment to a more active and resolute Judaism. Indeed David Lurie is forced to accept the validity, necessity even, of his father's passionate, muscular approach to Judaism and to employ its combative (if not its violently destructive) element in his own understanding of Judaism. Ultimately the strength of his father, expressed in the dark images of resistance in the Bobrek forest, underpins and gives purpose to the gentler, more loving, form of belief that David learns from his mother: the one cannot survive unimpaired without the other.

Equally the dark forest, scene of the Kulanski brothers' assault on David, is the scene of pleasant family picnics. It is "stained with death" and "Pungent with the odour of decaying leaves..."⁹⁴ but later becomes the site of the boy's encounter with "the sweet gentle voice" of his Uncle David, a place where "the air was cool and clean and blue."⁹⁵ Through this use of metaphor and simile Potok, in In The Beginning, can be seen describing the kind of accommodation between man and the universe that he has been attempting to achieve through the narrative action of the first four novels,

It is an accommodation which has finally been achieved in The Book Of Lights a work which, as may be inferred from the title, is full of references to light and, moreover, in a way which recalls the Jewish religion and Kabbalistic lore. The organization of the novel into ten chapters divided into three sections recalls the sefiroth, the "non-material entities constituting... the moulds or forms into which all created things were originally cast."⁹⁶ This is reinforced by the naming of two of the most important characters Keter and Malkuson (from Malkut), the two sefiroth representing respectively the crown of learning and the power of harmonizing and unification. It is precisely these qualities that the two men display in the novel and their connection may be further emphasized by the title of the poem Kether Malkuth written by the eleventh century Sephardic philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol. In the words of Isidore Epstein Kether Malkuth is "a glorious meditation on the greatness of God and the wonders of His universe..."⁹⁷ and it is toward such a sense of affirmation that Gershon Loran gropes, with the help of his teachers, Professors Keter and Malkuson. Furthermore, the book draws on the legend of The Breaking Of The Vessels and its attendant sparks of light imagery in a way reminiscent of his previous books but on a much larger scale.

Gershon Loran feels the inadequacy of traditional Yeshiva Judaism in terms of a lack of light. The classrooms of the Yeshiva are described as being "poorly lighted rooms..."⁹⁸ and Orthodox Judaism can provide him with

"no new lights."⁹⁹ He turns to the power of light (of hope and reason) to drive out the fear of emptiness and chaos feeling that "only a light would drive it away...."¹⁰⁰ The evil of the Atomic Bomb is several times described as casting a "shadow" on the following generation and works against the power of light in turning Arthur Leiden away from its scientific study.¹⁰¹ However, in The Book Of Lights, Potok deals with the ambiguities which have only been implied elsewhere. For instance, both Loran and Leiden suffer from the brightness of artificial light at some point and the flash of light from the dropping of the Atomic Bomb is seen, unequivocally, as evil. To emphasize this duality of light as part of the province usually associated with darkness, Potok records the dark patch left on a stone by the shadow of a man killed in the Hiroshima explosion and speaks paradoxically of the flash as "a death light," "so bright a blind girl saw it."¹⁰²

So, even though the darkness Gershon experiences may be fearful and the 'silken voice' which issues from it may be reductive, there must, inevitably, be a compromise between dark and light since (as David Lurie also discovered) life does not belong to one realm or the other but is held between them. This is brought home to Gershon and Arthur "in the fused light and darkness of the Macao brothel,"¹⁰³ as they see how the degradation of prostitution also enables human beings to live on with hope and, echoing this sense of fusion and accommodation of opposites, the 'silken voice' suggests the need of such a compromise to Gershon:

There is some merit in darkness.
There are times when light is a
menacing distraction. You need the
fires of the other side dear Gershon,
if you are to move beyond the pale
of the old and the dry and the illusions
that are truly dust. There is already
so much of me in your Kabbalah. Are we
not by now well acquainted? Consider
me. Yes. Consider me with care as
you journey through your broken century. ¹⁰⁴

Indeed, the closing picture of Gershon Loran as he "sat in the light and shade..."¹⁰⁵ of Keter's garden in Jerusalem suggests that such an accommodation has been achieved and that meaning and purpose can be given to the universe.

It is, therefore, without wishing to minimise the differences which exist between the three Jewish writers in terms of style, approach and literary talent, possible to see how a similar impulse drives and conditions their very different fictions. Thus Chaim Potok has rejected, as have Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, a negative evaluation of human life, has refused to surrender the possibility of finding meaning and purpose in the universe and has continued to insist on man's ability to render it amenable to reason and understanding. Even in The Book Of Lights, which one reviewer has found to have a profound sense of "gloom at its core,"¹⁰⁶ Potok is able to insist on man's power to overcome the difficulties and seeming irrationality of existence.

Perhaps stung by the criticism of his two 'simplistic' early novels, Potok has since achieved a far more complex vision of man without abandoning his original proposition. He has insisted on western society's ability to rescue itself from its current malaise much as his characters do, moving from situations of isolation and potential alienation (situations which mirror the sense of anomie at the heart of western society) to positions of affirmation, of social and moral commitment. These virtues have been, to some extent, communicated through the use of vision, emphasizing the intangible world of the soul. Thus, Asher Lev is visited by his "mythic ancestor," David Lurie hears the voice of his dead Uncle David and Gershon Loran receives visions from God and "visits" from people who are actually thousands of miles away and whilst these visions obviously speak for the power of the Judaic tradition in influencing Potok's protagonists they also act to condition the characters' moral behaviour. It is precisely this intangible moral realm that has been identified by both Bellow and Malamud as essential to the salvation of human values and its perceived loss is lamented by Potok in The Book Of Lights where Gershon Loran as an army chaplain "sensed that [the soldiers] regarded his words as negligible abstractions from the Kingdom of the intangible over which he was thought to rule. How to make it real for them?"¹⁰⁷ This is strongly reminiscent

of Bellow's insistence on the existence of the realm of the soul and in this respect their fiction, though of vastly different character and, indeed, quality, shares the same impulse, namely to restore the moral realm to the theatre of human concerns.

At the base of this assertion of the continued availability of this temporarily lost dimension is Potok's continued belief in the power of Judaism to provide a framework of moral responsibility and human purpose. It is, however, no longer necessarily a religious Judaism. Indeed, as with Bernard Malamud, there has been a deliberate and conscious effort on Potok's part to give Jewish precepts a moral force even in a post religious world and to render them in a form acceptable to twentieth century secular society. Nonetheless, Potok continues to see the essential Jewishness of this perspective as vital to the moral recovery and mending of this 'broken world'.

Essentially, Chaim Potok's great achievement has been the incorporation into his fiction of an immense generosity of spirit and a determination, persuasively argued, that man can, despite fears of death and the facts of The Holocaust and the Atom Bomb, still say 'yes' to life. His fiction, whatever other shortcomings it may have, has convincingly described and enacted his belief that

the assertion of emptiness, blindness, essential
meaninglessness as an inherent characteristic of
the totality of things seems to me to be an inadequate
response -- for there is after all much around us that
has apparent meaning.... I would rather try to discover
some light in the patches of darkness than extend the
darkness to whatever there is now light. 108

It is a light which is not much visible in contemporary American writing and which is hardly visible at all outside those writers who, like Potok, have a Jewish background on which to draw.

NOTES

1. The Chosen, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 277.
1. Cecil Roth, ed., The Concise Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Meridian, 1980), p.524.
3. Doug Morgan, ed, "When Culture Confronts Faith: An Interview with Chaim Potok" College People October 1983, p. 9.
4. Cheryl Forbes, ed., "Judaism Under The Secular Umbrella" Christianity Today 22 (8 Sept,m 1978), pp. 14 - 21.
5. Daphne Merkin, "Why Potok Is Popular" Commentary 6, (Feb '76), p.75.
6. Sheldon Grebstein, "The Phenomenon Of The Really Jewish Best Seller: Potok's The Chosen," Studies In American-Jewish Literature Spring 1975, 23.
7. The Chosen, p. 45.
8. The Promise, p. 75.
9. Elaine Lindsay, "Interview with Chaim Potok," Literature in North Queensland 6, 1978, p. 68.
10. Chaim Potok, "Reply To A Semi-Sympathetic Critic," Studies In American Jewish Literature Spring 1976, pp. 31 - 32.
11. Pat Pfeiffer, "The World Of Chaim Potok" Inside, Winter 1981, p.54.
12. Ruth Wisse, "Jewish Dreams" Commentary 67 (March 1982), p. 47.
13. These slight problems are faint echoes of those experienced by Danny Saunders and Michael Gordon. While Danny struggles over choosing psychology or the mantle of tzaddik, Reuven opts to become a rabbi rather than a maths professor and while Michael Gordon suffers debilitating traumas over his father's "heresies," Reuven is discomfited by Rav Kalman's attacks on his father's book.
14. The Book Of Lights (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 64.
15. Ibid., p. 7.
16. Ibid., p. 5.
17. The Promise, p. 247.

18. In The Beginning (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 117.
19. My Name Is Asher Lev (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 156.
20. As ultimately, do all Potok's protagonists.
21. M.C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts, eds., Literature and the American Urban Experience (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981, p.167.
22. This, I think, is one of the more obvious occasions on which Potok's novelistic 'touch' deserts him and his "will to make art" is revealed as greater than his capacity to achieve it. The almost pathetic comparisons between tortured soul and septic foot inevitably recalls the 'Hemingwayesque' conversation between Reuven Malter and Michael Gordon and, in terms of inappropriate symbolism, anticipates Potok's use, in The Book Of Lights, of a Macao brothel as an example of the emergence of good from evil. While the point is never fully explained, the good (presumably) is the vital financial support which the brothel provides for the prostitutes' families -- an implausible argument to all but the most rabid free market economists. As with a number of Potok's plot devices, among them the chain-link fence episode and the introduction of Tony Savo into The Chosen, it is easy to appreciate the point that the writer is making while remaining unconvinced by the manner in which he tries to give his philosophical points a literary life.
23. In The Beginning, p. 402.
24. Ibid., p. 443.
25. Ibid., p. 181.
26. My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 318.
27. My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 117.
28. Jacob Kahn incredulously asks Asher: "'Why do you think you are responsible to Jews?' 'All Jews are responsible one for the other,' I said, quoting the statement from The Talmud my father had years ago quoted to me." My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 190.

29. The Promise, p. 326.
30. My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 297.
31. In The Beginning, p. 369.
32. The Promise, p. 246.
33. Ibid., p. 268.
34. The Book Of Lights, p. 91.
35. In The Beginning, p. 376.
36. Cheryl Forbes, "Judaism Under The Secular Umbrella," p. 17.
37. The Book Of Lights, p. 8.
38. Forbes, p. 16.

Potok explains this remark by saying "We've had the biblical, we've had the rabbinic. The biblical pretty much came to an end with the destruction of the first temple, and the rabbinic pretty much came to an end with the destruction of European Jewry."

39. Ibid., p. 21.
40. Ibid., p. 16. He explains that "Jews today are engaged in an effort to create a third civilisation. Secular Jews are very much part of that effort."
41. The Chosen, p. 191.
42. The Promise, p. 92.
43. My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 248.
44. The Book Of Lights pp. 123 - 124.
45. The motif of ascent and descent is central to The Book Of Lights, so much so that even the irregular functioning of the elevator in the seminary assumes an obscure symbolic significance. This again serves to emphasize how, on occasion, Potok's writing becomes pedestrianly schematic and lacks genuine literary merit.
46. Ibid., pp. 364 - 365.

Interestingly, Loran's dilemma is described in terms similar to Potok's own in his 1966 contribution to Commentary's "The State Of Jewish Belief: A Symposium". This emphasizes the sense of qualified

optimism which informs the closing pages of The Book Of Lights.

47. "When Culture Confronts Faith," College People 3, 7, (October 1983), pp. 11 - 12.
48. Chaim Potok, "Miracles For A Broken Planet," Mc'Calls 100, 3, 36.
49. Chaim Potok, "The State Of Jewish Belief: A Symposium" Commentary, 42, pp. 126 - 127.
50. Elaine Lindsay, "An Interview with Chaim Potok." Literature In North Queensland 6, 1978, pp. 68 - 70.
51. My Name Is Asher Lev, pp. 64, 235.
52. The Book Of Lights, p. 11.
53. The Chosen, p. 148.
54. The Book Of Lights, p. 200.
55. The Chosen, p. 277.
56. Forbes, "Judaism Under The Secular Umbrella," p. 20.
57. That is to say it averts a dislocation of the father - son continuity of faith which forms a significant motif in Potok's writing. This continuity is underlined in The Promise by Danny's ability to bridge the worlds of Rav Kalman and Reuven Malter, lifting the threat of cherem from Reuven and enabling him to receive smicha and continue the tradition.
58. "Miracles For A Broken Planet," p.36.
59. Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History Of The Jews (London : Hutchinson, 1978), p. 398.
60. In The Beginning, p. 220.
61. Twice Max talks about accidents as being acts of malign intent initiated by God. His first outburst takes place early in the novel:

"What isn't an accident?" he asked suddenly in a raging voice. "When is there ever a time without accidents? The stinking war was an accident, the train robbery was an accident, what happened in the forest was an accident, the pogrom was an accident, your mother catching pneumonia was an accident. Being

born a Jew is the biggest accident
of all. A man plans and God laughs.
God in heaven, if there is a God
in this world, how He must laugh!
He is not doing His job, Ruth! "

In The Beginning pp. 65 - 66.

Later he calls the Wall Street Crash "a catastrophe" and tells David that "a catastrophe is a big accident. A terrible accident. It is a way God has of laughing at us." Ibid., p. 208.

62. The Chosen, p. 114.

63. In The Promise Reuven muses on the apparently slight and coincidental nature of the events that binds together the novel's characters:
"So the coming of Rav Kalman to Hirsch University had led me to the books of Abraham Gordon. And the books of Abraham Gordon had led me to Rachel and Michael. And because of Rachel and Michael, the Gordons wanted to meet Danny Saunders."

The Promise p. 76.

64. The Book Of Lights, p. 5.

65. The occurrences are "dark" in the sense that Potok loads them with images of darkness. The darkness of the forest is stressed repeatedly, emphasizing the shadows' usefulness as cover for shameful or wicked deeds and for events unclearly seen or imperfectly understood. Equally, David's father's deeds are shrouded in mystery, the shadows of both the forest and the past falling over David's perception of them and reinforcing his sense of fear.

66. In contrast to the darkness associated with the father, David's mother is frequently defined by her love for light, particularly the flame of the religious candle, and is part of David's "clean, white world" safe from the uncertainties of life beyond the enclosing Jewish family and community.

67. Ibid., p. 316.

68. Ibid., p. 369.

69. The Promise, p. 15.

70. A comparison of Abraham Gordon's loss of faith, as related in The Promise, with that described by Potok as undergone by himself, is telling. Both choose, as indeed does Gershon Loran, to continue observing the rituals in the hope of establishing for themselves an understanding of a new Judaic culture and religion. "I gambled that there was enough strength and depth in the tradition for me to be able to make it into more than Sunday-School Bible stories," says Abraham Gordon (The Promise) p.268). Potok similarly relates how "I chose to retain my Jewish pattern of behaviour... so as to understand the dynamics of Judaism.... I gambled that once I had achieved that understanding I would be able to construct another model. There was no guarantee of success." ("The State Of Jewish Belief: A Symposium," p. 125).
71. In The Beginning, p. 261.
72. The Promise, p. 146.
73. Chaim Potok, "Martin Buber and The Jews," Commentary, March 1966, p.47.
74. M.P. Woolf, "A Complex Fate: Jewish-American Experience in the Fiction of Leslie Fiedler, Edward Wallant, Chaim Potok and Jerome Charyn." (Unpublished doctoral thesis: Hull University, 1981), p.202.
75. The Promise, pp. 253, 303.
76. My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 36.
77. Ibid., p. 39.
78. In The Beginning, p. 103.
79. The Chosen, p. 121.
80. Ibid., p. 270.
81. The Book Of Lights, p. 102.
82. My Name Is Asher Lev, p. 298.
83. The Promise, p. 217.
84. The Book Of Lights, p. 187.
85. My Name Is Asher Lev, pp. 164 - 165.

86. The Promise, p. 244.
87. Ibid., p. 108.
88. Ibid., p. 45.
89. In The Beginning, p. 170.
90. The Book Of Lights, p. 46.
91. In The Beginning, p. 345 - 346.
92. The Book Of Lights, p. 304.
93. The Holy Bible (King James Version) Colossians 1:13.
94. In The Beginning, p. 170.
95. Ibid., p. 332.
96. Isidore Epstein, Judaism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), p.227.
97. Ibid., p. 203.
98. The Book Of Lights, p.7.
99. Ibid., p. 146.
100. Ibid., p. 304.
101. Arthur had shown great promise in physics but had turned away from it in disgust after learning of the effects of the Atomic Bomb.

"My father thought that I might be the one who would unify the wave and particle theories of light. That would have made me another Albert Einstein. God, he put together everything -- matter, energy, space time. Someone now needs to put together quantum theory and relativity. Uncle Albert once told me he thought I might do it. I used to make strange jumps in my thinking. But I thought we were going to destroy everything with all that knowledge. In my second year at Harvard I began to hate it. All I could see were dead bodies over the surface of the whole planet. And birds with burned-out eyes."

(The Book Of Lights, p. 290.)

Note the recurrence of the theme of aiming to unify disparate parts of elements.

102. Ibid., p. 325.
103. Ibid., p. 306. This, as I have suggested, seems a somewhat inappropriate choice of symbol. From the prosaic viewpoint of social and economic necessity it would seem to equate the

financial crumbs from prostitution with the emergence of good from evil. Rather, it seems that the repressive nature of intense poverty, which creates the "supply side" of prostitution, is no more than a facet of an evil, exploitative and unequal economic system and it serves to perpetuate and entrench such inequalities.

104. Ibid., p. 308.

105. Ibid., p. 370.

106. Johanna Kaplan, "Two Ways Of Life," New York Times Book Review

11th October 1981. p. 14.

107. The Book Of Lights, p. 175.

108. "The State Of Jewish Belief: A Symposium," p. 127.

CHAPTER TENCONCLUSION

In one respect the preceding chapters have been an attempt to determine what, in contemporary fiction, remains of the belief in American exceptionalism, that powerful expression of purposive nationalism fuelled by moral aspiration and an apparently boundless optimism. It was a belief much in evidence in the USA's early history and culture and the historian Carl Degler has argued that, for the average American at least, much of this moral optimism survives. In Out Of Our Past he suggests that

In the twentieth century American faith in progress and the perfectibility of man has been tempered by realistic psychology and unpleasant economics. But deep inside himself, the modern American still feels the optimism which animated the nineteenth-century reformer. His self-confidence may be reduced but there are still very few Americans in the mid-twentieth century who are not convinced that the United States is the model for the world. There may be almost continuous crises in the perilous world of today, but the old optimism, the familiar belief in a better tomorrow, Americans have not lost. 1

However, it is impossible to pretend that Degler's confidence is widespread. Another, frequently expressed, vision of modern America may be summarized by the following description, a depiction of the individual stranded at a sort of spiritual crossroads, adrift

in a world where most of the old certainties have been removed, Western man in the last quarter of the twentieth century finds himself confronted by crucial alternatives. Will he, bereft of his old religious beliefs, shaken in his sense of values, hounded by fanatically ideological enemies, cursed by economics and seemingly betrayed by even his beloved science, give way once and for all to a spiritual inertia that will lose him all he has gained? Or will he, remembering that past discoveries of new horizons have always been interpreted as presaging the end of mankind, realign his cosmic sights, adjust his ego to the individually dwarfing conception of an expanding universe, and regain the integrity required to carry him forward to a new era? 2

In any consideration of the spiritual or psychological state of the nation the evidence and testimony of its authors is bound to be significant and

the writers of this second, less comforting, view of America make special reference to the potential importance of the literary artist in helping 'Western man' to shape his future. They argue that "if he is to arrive at this new adjustment, it is perhaps his authors who will have to light him on his way...." ³

It is easy to envisage how varied would be the literary practitioners' response to this suggestion. By no means every one would be ready to concede that this sort of "socialization" is a proper part of the novelist's duty or intent even should such power lie within his gift. Some might suggest a very different set of imperatives for the fiction of the latter part of the twentieth century, like Raymond Federman arguing that

the primary purpose of fiction will be to unmask its own fictionality, to expose the metaphor of its own fraudulence, and not pretend any longer to pass for reality, for truth, or for beauty. Consequently, fiction will no longer be regarded as a mirror of life, as a pseudorealistic document that informs us about life, nor will it be judged on the basis of its social, moral, psychological, metaphysical, commercial value, or whatever, but on the basis of what it is and what it does as an autonomous art form in its own right. ⁴

Indeed, many writers, far from being committed to reconciling twentieth century man to the accepted realities of his situation, have sought new vistas, alternative formulations and new forms for describing the human condition. They have siezed upon the existential absurdity of life, the innate isolation of the individual, as a reason to go beyond the accepted limits of reality offering, in the very structure of their work, a critique of conventional social values and a challenge to normative perceptions of artistic function. Among these "revolutionaries" William Burroughs has been much in evidence. Refusing to attempt to square individualism, humanism and man's social dimension in conventional novelistic terms he has, instead, produced what David Punter calls "paranoiac fiction," a version of gothic fiction in which psychological and social processes are dramatically rendered in an explicitly anti-realist manner. Transcending mere reality in their

imaginative projections, Burroughs' fictions, like those of Barthelme, Vonnegut and Pynchon, attempt to arrive at something greater and more significant, something self-apparent.⁵

Obviously the very concept which promotes and propels Burroughs' writing -- "a mode of fiction about bureaucratization, institutionalization, the alienation of the individual from power and control of his own life..."⁶ -- militates against the sort of 'adjustment' envisaged by Horton and Edwards. Clearly what they visualize, a kind of philosophical acceptance of humanity's cosmic insignificance accompanied by a Camusian assertion of purpose conjured from the very abyss of absurdity,⁷ has no place in Burroughs' iconoclastic world view. Nonetheless, the question of adjustment -- to a world where man's status is manifestly reduced, where significance is withheld by the absence of God, where the individual's relationship with society remains stubbornly problematic -- is central to the work of the other novelists considered here and the knotty problem of bringing the culture's most cherished versions of human worth into line with contemporary experience is as much a factor in the books of Cheever and Updike as it is in those of Bellow, Malamud and Potok.⁸

In essence each has attempted to interpret post-war experience in terms not of its separation from the past but very much in the light of that past, has chosen to try and stress the continuity of human experience in the face of the radical, apocalyptic temper of post-modernism. Thus they have not shared in the constantly reiterated belief⁹ that literary realism is an outmoded form, inadequate, perhaps even obstructive, to our understanding of modern life. On the contrary they have continued to affirm its validity by their use of it and in doing so have affirmed a lingering if, at times, critical attachment to a battery of moral and intellectual assumptions about the universality of the human condition. They have continued to explore and describe that tension between individual freedom and social perfectibility which is at the heart of the American enterprise and basic to a body of liberal thinking born in the nineteenth century.

Such explorations have not been uniformly fruitful and even within the work of a single writer the tension is resolved with varying degrees of success. But if the exploration has proved troublesome, if the resolution has often been problematic, it is because, as Ortega y Gasset and others have shown, there is an element of contradiction implicit in the ideal of individual liberty secured by a submission to "Government" (either with or without 'the consent of the Governed'). As Wylie Sypher has observed:

The nineteenth-century liberals were devoted to both individualism and institutions; they had faith in both freedom and necessity, and never satisfactorily adjusted the two. They inherited from the romantics the conviction that freedom is a good in itself. The romantics never asked whether freedom is good for the individual; and the liberals, as Ortega says, were convinced that freedom is good for society. To bring freedom to society, they relied upon institutions; so romantic individualism became liberal collectivism. The liberal program for society finally negated the significance of the person. Freedom became an organization, and a middle-class organization at that.

10

Confronted with such a basic paradox it is perhaps not surprising that much of the fiction of the period has tended to end by offering a redefinition of humanity which fails to achieve the hoped-for adjustment. Ultimately disarmed by the bitter evidence of contemporary disaffection, by the weight of disillusionment which has attached itself to a culture of material abundance, the explorations have all too often ended in a headlong rush to admit to humanity's intrinsic moral and spiritual worthlessness. As with the Wall Street Crash, when shares (in this case in human stock) began to fall they kept right on falling; they did not find a more realistic value but simply, of their own momentum, lost value altogether. For many

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contemporary American writers the recognition of human absurdity has not been the precursor of an attempt to impose a human meaning on life (the kind of imposed meaning Camus has Rieux and Tarrou achieve in La Peste). Rather it is the preface to a recognition of innumerable other hostile circumstances which affect all levels of existence and which preclude efforts to achieve meaningfulness.

Post-war fiction has demonstrated a new belief about the human condition, a belief owing more to pathos than tragedy and one equally evident in realist and non-realist or anti-realist writing. James E. Miller, for instance, has described how it is

that for the first time in our literature, after World War II, the world that dominated our fiction was sick, hostile, or treacherous, and that the recurring stance of the modern fictional hero reflected some mixture of horror, bewilderment, and sardonic humor -- or, to use the popular term, alienation. The common pattern of action which recurred was the pattern of the quest, the quest absurd in a world gone insane or turned opaque and inexplicable, or become meaningless.

12

Equally William Trevor, in reviewing Rabbit Redux, could observe how "what dominates the novel -- as it does Rabbit, Run and indeed America itself -- is a sense of emptiness, of death without God, and loneliness in hostile space...." ¹³ Their specific complaints may differ in particulars, yet both have the same genesis. Both argue a debasement of the individual, a sense of moral degeneracy, both detect in American fiction an implicit belief in the impossibility of answering Horton and Edwards' plea for adjustment, observe a defection from the didactic moral optimism so characteristic of American letters of earlier times. Whether couched in the terms of the anti-novel, with its belief in the obsolescence of character and all that implies for the culture of individualism, or in the closely rendered description of social and psychological breakdown offered by the literary 'descendents' of John O'Hara, what clearly emerges from reading contemporary fiction is a widespread conviction that man exists in an irremediably displaced relationship to the world beyond himself. Having lost the moral (social and religious) certitudes that held him in place, indeed gave him a place, he is left floundering and contingent, displaced by the burden of being forced to create his own meaning. As John Updike said when commenting upon "a perceptible loss of the sense of righteousness" in contemporary society: "I wonder if twentieth century man's problem isn't

one of encouragement, because of the failure of nerve, the sense that we've gone to the end of the corridor and found it blank." ¹⁴

In such circumstances hereoism, the belief that a brave or noble action might have any wider significance, becomes impossible and is replaced by its very opposite, in the shape of the anti-hero. This mutely inglorious figure, very much a product of our times, is usually defined by his lack of positive qualities; an absence of creative dynamism; the degree to which he is acted upon, moulded, by forces so much greater than himself. He symbolizes incapacity, inertia, the inability to assert human significance and in place of meaningful action has tended to assert the primacy of the self in simple defiance of the threatening void; has stressed the irrational act as a gesture of existential self-awareness. He is, if not exactly a cypher, then certainly a figure redolent with futility and perfectly suited to the absurd times he is so often perceived as enduring.

Indeed, what is chiefly remarkable about the anti-hero is the extent to which he has assumed, in the work of writers as disparate as Pynchon, Kesey, Stone, Coover and Kosinski the role of spokesperson, representative of the post-war generation. In this respect Cheever and Updike are no exceptions: their heroes are essentially small men, limited by and unable to transcend circumstance, their fictions display an awareness of human diminution that reinforces a sense of disappointment rather than occasioning an outburst of tragic recognition. No longer able to conform to Bernard Bergonzi's description of "the way in which the heroes of American novels are defiant solitaries, preserving their precious burden of innocence and freedom, establishing, however precariously, their own world around them like the early pioneers..." ¹⁵ characters like Rabbit Angstrom and Ezekiel Farragut are condemned to live in an age which is, in any case, devoid of all respect for that burden. Thus, although very different in manner and outlook, the characters of John Cheever and John Updike are joined with those of William Burroughs ¹⁶ in facing similar fates, are either forced into exile by their refusal to make accommodations, submitting themselves to the depersonalizing tendencies of society, or are rendered impotent by a decision

to operate within it.

Of course this dilemma has a very American context. The tension between town and wilderness in The Scarlet Letter, the Leatherstocking tales of James Fenimore Cooper, the decision by Huck Finn "to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest,"¹⁷ these are only the most famous examples of American fiction's well documented unease over the relationship between individualism and the demands of a democratic society. However, what has occurred in post-war writing is a hardening of attitudes, a form of cultural extremism which has rendered impossible any reconciliation between the two ideas. In film as well as fiction there has been a widespread refusal to see society in any but the most destructive and confining of terms -- the madhouse, the poorhouse and the prison being perhaps the most striking examples¹⁸ -- offering images not only pervasive but frequently persuasive. It is against this background that the anti-heroic type has sought to define himself, to discover a way simply of saying "I am". In the words of Saul Bellow's Artur Sammler, "Perhaps when people are so desperately impotent they play that instrument, the personality, louder and wilder."¹⁹

To a very great extent the vision of diminished human expectation, the underlying sense of the absurdity of existence implicit in the anti-heroic stance, is present in the work and characters of the Jewish-American novelists of the period. Indeed it could hardly be otherwise given the uniformity of culture and experience in post-war America. In the work of both Jew and non-Jew it is possible to identify a similar tendency toward black comedy and the picaresque (with its undertones of sexual adventure and 'immorality'); a growing recognition of the acceptability of socially deviant behaviour. Above all, it is possible to observe²⁰ in the protagonists a growing recognition of their own marginality, a tendency to accept the role of the urban outcast, the hero as victim, a state of affairs at least as evident in the books of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Edward Lewis Wallant and Bruce Jay Friedman as in any of their non-Jewish contemporaries. Furthermore, as Bernard Sherman has observed, much post-war fiction has tended

toward the episodic structure of the bildungsroman thereby exhibiting an outward, essentially structural, communality which conceals a considerable divergence of purpose.²¹ Nonetheless, such a divergence exists: beyond an apparent proximity lies a very real difference between Jewish and non-Jewish fiction of the period. Sherman locates its essence by identifying the differences between the adolescent novel and the Jewish education novel²² and I would suggest that the distinction can be carried over into an inspection of the differences between the anti-hero and the schlemiel. The schlemiel is, as Ruth Wisse has argued,²³ more than just a variety of the anti-hero and he is a character on whom a number of Jewish-American writers, including Malamud and Bellow, have drawn in formulating a response to the age. I have already discussed this at some length in the chapters on the particular authors but it is worth reiterating that in Yiddish folk lore the value of the schlemiel lay in his ability to reconcile individual aspiration with social imperatives, to absorb and transform the hardships experienced by the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. In this way, at least a century before the fact, the schlemiel was able to offer an example of David Galloway's formulation for the modern hero. In their refusal to see "man's plight... as some uniquely soured modern pottage [they] can express despair without succumbing to it, and they can question and deny the validity of traditional consolations without denying the traditions of the human spirit."²⁴ Ultimately the schlemiel offers an ethic of social and human involvement and thus operates on a level subtly yet profoundly different from the anti-hero who so frequently displays a desire to avoid involvements.²⁵

Clearly, not all Jewish American writers draw on the schlemiel in the same way. It is, for instance, less explicitly present (though no less felt) in Bellow's work than that of Singer, Wallant and Malamud and is in no way a feature of Potok's writing -- his characters' overwhelming earnestness offering no place for the schlemiel's more comic dimensions. Nonetheless the moral burden which motivates the character is still present in Potok's work and the significance of the schlemiel remains the way in which it has been able

to embody ideals central to Judaism as a culture while avoiding matters of religious dogma. Thus it has become accessible to Jew and non-Jew, believer and non-believer.

In this respect, then, the Jewish contribution to American letters can be seen as primarily humanistic, drawing on its own cultural heritage in order to reinforce the importance of holding on to human values, to the sense of purpose which characterizes the growth and process of civilization. This fact is recognized in the assertion that

Since Yiddish literature was largely a ghetto literature, it concentrated on demonstrating values that men could live by and remain human under the dehumanizing forces of poverty, isolation and fear. One need only glance at the fiction of Malamud, the poetry of Karl Shapiro, the criticism of Trilling or the dramas of Arthur Miller to see how this tough, realistic inspection of values has carried over. And to the extent that American-Jewish writing touches the American imagination, it does so mainly in this way, and especially at the points where the New England-Puritan strain abides. 26

This observation surely gestures to the reason for the emergence of so many Jewish-American novelists in the post war years. It perceptively points up not only the similarities between Jewish ideals and some of the more conventional values of the American Dream -- essentially middle-class values of thrift, hard work and personal improvement -- allied to an expectation of moral exceptionalism in both Jews and Americans but also identifies the very real importance of the Jewish cultural heritage to contemporary Jewish-Americans. As Philip Roth remarked, in answer to a question about the influence of the Yiddish language on his writing:

What reached down to me wasn't the Yiddish language but the values and the cultural style that had been associated with the Yiddish world of the Jewish immigrants who'd come to America around the turn of the century.... It isn't Yiddish that influenced the way I write, but rather this turn of mind that influenced how I came to see the Americans I eventually began to write about, both the Jews and the non-Jews. 27

Central in the formulation of this cultural style has been the experience of the Jew as marginal man, man unable to assert himself in the wider society. It is fair to say that in comparison with that of American and Western European society the Jewish experience has been much harsher, primarily because of the Jews' precarious struggle for survival against the irrational forces of prejudice and persecution. It is a struggle dating back to pre-Christian times and one which has taught the Jews, in Saul Bellow's words, to live "on the brink of an abyss..."²⁸ whereas, in America, "Since the struggle for existence 'ceased to be a problem, one's existence in itself became the problem!'"²⁹ Thus, no Jew could have asked, with regard to Nazi Germany, Archibald MacLeish's cosily naive question: "Against what but the Western respect for the dignity of the individual was aimed the long series of outrages against the Jews?"³⁰ because no Jew (in touch with his heritage) could present "A merely aesthetic critique of modern history! After the wars and mass killings."³¹ Over two thousand years communal experience of brutal reality would have prevented him from indulging in such fancifulness.

This argument, regarding the Jews' powerful knowledge of life's realities, is one that has been vocalized most persuasively and repeatedly by Saul Bellow (for instance in To Jerusalem and Back and Herzog) but it is clearly a view to which Malamud and Potok would subscribe as both, in their different ways, seek to express the centrality of the Jewish experience to the Western World. It is surely this belief that lies behind Malamud's often-quoted remark that "all men are Jews," that motivates Frank Alpine to assume the mantle of Morris Bober and it is clearly what persuades Potok that the Jews can offer "Miracles For A Broken Planet" or "a tzaddik for the world."³²

What lies at the centre of this argument about Jewish special knowledge, surely, is a belief in, and a concern for, our mutual and precious humanity and what emerges most powerfully from this study is that this concern manifests itself consistently in three particular respects. First, the protagonists in

the fiction of Bellow, Malamud and Potok -- men like Moses Herzog, Yakov Bok and David Lurie -- all insist on the continuing existence and validity of humanity's moral dimension with a vehemence absent from the work of their non-Jewish counterparts.³³ In each case this vehemence can be seen as part of a Jewish legacy, its lessons learned in childhood and consisting of moral beliefs which have frequently outlasted the religious framework in which they were originally expressed. Assuredly, these beliefs are not exclusively Jewish (indeed they would be irrelevant to the non-Jewish world were this the case) but they form part of the writers' Jewish experience, gaining particular force from the cultural imperative which informs the collective moral vision. Thus, Bernard Malamud's experience may be held to be typical, summarizing the experience of both authors and protagonists in respect of the interrelationship between morality and humanity. In an interview Malamud described how "his parents were Yiddish-speaking Russian immigrants who had a small grocery store in Brooklyn. Malamud says he was the beneficiary 'not of having happy parents, but of having good parents,' who instilled in him the necessity of 'doing well by others'"³⁴ It is a remark which finds echoes in Bellow's reminiscences of his childhood in Montreal and one which seems equally applicable to the experience of, for example, Moses Herzog, Calvin Cohn or Reuven Malter. Manifestly, good parents and the concept of doing well by others are not the exclusive preserve of the Jews but, for Malamud as for Bellow and Potok, these lessons derive their power from having an explicitly Jewish content and context.³⁵

Second (and clearly arising from the question of man's moral dimension), the three Jewish writers place much greater emphasis on man's role within the community and the individual's responsibilities to society than do their non-Jewish contemporaries who, as I have demonstrated, have tended to depict society as restrictive, imprisoning and antithetical to the needs of the individual. Once again it is clearly the experience of their Jewish heritage that enables Bellow, Malamud and Potok to take such an open view of the individual's relationship with society, not only through the moral requirements to do

"well by others," but through the historical experience of a persecuted people, forced to turn in upon itself in a search for the strength to survive its trials.

Finally, and perhaps most tellingly in an age beset by concern with life's absurdity and the meaning of existence, this special knowledge has revealed itself in the way it has helped shape the characters' speculations and confrontations with death. For the non-Jews, death, as I have tried to show, "is the cutting thread, the wire of loneliness..." ³⁶ which runs through and engulfs all life's strivings: it is the single and singular fact which invalidates the concept of morality and the possibility of moral behaviour. It is the truth which undermines the carefully constructed defences of suburban plenty in the fictions of both Cheever and Updike; the inevitability that renders absurd and foolish the hopes and expectations of their protagonists even as they attempt to cocoon themselves from recognizing it. ³⁷ It is the fear of death which undoes Piet Hanema, Rabbit Angstrom, Gee-Gee in "The Scarlet Moving Van," the narrator in "The Death Of Justina," just as surely as it is what causes William Burroughs to rage splenetically against the vulnerability of the body to disease and decay.

Manifestly this truth is nothing like as devastating and debilitating in the books of those Jewish writers I have considered. This is not to say that death, for them, lacks significance. Indeed, it is achingly central to the work of all three, a fact to be encountered and considered in almost every book. Nor is it easily conjured away: few books can have contemplated or conveyed mortal dread more closely than does Humboldt's Gift. Characteristically, however, it is confronted and acknowledged and that acknowledgement is central to the subsequent decision in favour of man's moral significance: meaning is created in spite of absurdity.

In Camus' Le Peste Jean Tarrrou tells Dr. Rieux that he is interested in "learning how to become a saint," if indeed "one can be a saint without God." Rieux replies that he cares more about "being a man" to which Tarrrou responds "Yes, we're both after the same thing but I'm less ambitious." ³⁸

It is down precisely the same existential road that Bellow, Malamud and Potok travel in attempting to locate ultimate moral values in humanity and perhaps they succeed to the extent they do because Judaism, unlike Christianity, makes no special appeal to life after death, has always located moral virtue entirely within the realm of the living. The consequences of this difference are difficult to determine precisely but there is, undoubtedly, a greater willingness on the part of the three Jewish-American writers I have discussed to challenge the belief that Death disables a moral, rational interpretation of the human condition. Moreover the challenge is repeatedly issued by recourse to the wealth of cultural and religious wisdom on which their characters are able to draw.

A comparison of two passages, one by Updike, the other by Potok will serve to illustrate the point, although admittedly in a somewhat extreme form. Both deal with a boy's first speculation on death. In the first, from John Updike's story "Pigeon Feathers," David Kern is confronted by H.G. Wells' refutation of Christianity in The Outline of History and is unable to find adequate spiritual sustenance to combat Well's intellectual and logical onslaught. Unable to receive a sign from God the boy turns to his parents and the Vicar in search of comfort and support, only to find them 'fudging the issue' and incapable of offering him spiritual guidance or comfort. The Reverend Dobson tells him:

"David, you might think of Heaven this way: as the way the goodness Abraham Lincoln did lives after him."
 "But is Lincoln conscious of it living on?" He blushed no longer with embarrassment but in anger; he had walked here in good faith and was being made a fool.
 "Is he conscious now? I would have to say no; but I don't think it matters."
 His voice had a coward's firmness; he was hostile now. 39

This inadequacy of such answers serve to undermine the boy's belief in moral significance and encourage a feeling of futility that reverberates throughout Updike's writing and, indeed, throughout much of contemporary American fiction.

In the second piece, from Chaim Potok's The Chosen, David Malter, by drawing upon Judaism, is convincingly able to argue in favour of living a good (i.e. humane and socially responsible) life without recourse to the promise of eternal life.

'Human beings do not live forever, Reuven. We live less than the time it takes to blink an eye, if we measure our lives against eternity. So it may be asked what value there is to a human life. There is so much pain in the world. What does it mean to have to suffer so much if our lives are nothing more than the blink of an eye...? I learned a long time ago, Reuven that a blink of an eye in itself is nothing. But the eye that blinks, that is something. A span of life is nothing. But the man who lives that span, he is something. He can fill that tiny span with meaning, so its quality is immeasurable though its quantity may be insignificant.... A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life. It is hard work to fill one's life with meaning.... A life filled with meaning is worthy of rest. 40

This is a pattern which can be seen repeating itself, albeit less spectacularly, throughout the work of all the writers in question. Out of this one difference in attitude grow all the other difference. For Updike's character death renders life valueless and unworthy of moral regard whereas for Potok's it makes life supremely worthy of that same regard. This may not lessen the pain of death but it certainly acts to reinforce the value of life and the meaning of humanity, making life on earth what Malamud has called "a tragedy full of joy,"⁴¹ rather than the "annex of hell"⁴² described by William Burroughs.

Ultimately, it is through reference to their cultural heritage that these Jewish-American writers have become central figures in contemporary literature, shoring up ideals about the significance of the individual in mass society at a time when humanity in general has seemed ready to give way before the agonies of explaining its own significance. Accustomed to marginality, familiar with the difficulties of spiritual, moral and even

physical survival the Jews have been better prepared to offer the "survival kits" described by Alfred Kazin,⁴³ have been better able to become tzaddiks, leaders, in a confused and lost society.

I began this conclusion by quoting Carl Degler. If, in any sense, what he says is true and American optimism persists, then in the realm of literature it is most manifest in the work of Jewish-American authors like Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Chaim Potok, writers who, refusing the nihilism and despair of the age, have succeeded in enunciating a message of hope concerning man's capacity for good and the survival of his moral dimension.

NOTES

1. Carl N. Degler, Out Of Our Past (New York: Harper and Row, 1970)
p. 155.
2. Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall, 1974,
p. 515.
3. Ibid., p. 515.
4. Raymond Federman, Surfiction, (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975),
pp. 8 - 9.
5. I borrow from Jerome Klinkowitz' The Self-Apparent Word
(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).
6. David Punter, The Literature Of Terror (London: Longman, 1980),
p. 374.
7. The kind of assertion sought in his Le Mythe de Sisyphe and
achieved in his masterpiece, La Peste.
8. This is not to say that each or any of these writers necessarily
produce books advocating "adjustment", merely that all explore
the tensions, implications, for characters engaged in discovering
the validity of possibility of such adjustment for themselves.
9. Reiterated, that is, by the likes of Raymond Federman, Ronald
Suckenic, Jerome Klinkowitz and Richard Kostelanetz.
10. Wylie Sypher, The Loss Of The Self In Modern Literature And Art
(Reprinted: Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 26.
11. I am not thinking specifically of those studied here but am
seeking to make a point of general validity.
12. James E. Miller, Quests Surd and Absurd (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 5.
13. William Trevor, "All Right, Sort Of," New Statesman 7 April 1972
p.462.

14. Eric Rhode, "John Updike Talks... About The Shapes and Subject Of His Fiction," The Listener, 19 June 1969, p.863.
15. Bernard Bergonzi, The Situation Of The Novel (London:MacMillan, 1970), p. 81.
16. If, indeed, the term 'characters' may be properly applied to the figures, like Audrey Carsons and Dr. Benway, who people Burroughs' fiction.
17. Mark Twain, The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.400.
18. The madhouse is in Kesey's One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, the prison in Cheever's Falconer and the poorhouse in Updike's The Poorhouse Fair.
19. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p.187.
20. Indeed, some would argue that it would be impossible to avoid such a recognition.
21. Bernard Sherman, The Invention Of The Jew (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969)
22. Ibid., pp. 21 - 22. Sherman identifies a far greater element of social concern and awareness in Jewish fiction, a determination to locate the character fully within his social context.
23. Wisse argues that

The schlemiel differs from most anti-heroes who are characterized - as the term accurately implies - by means of negative definition. The schlemiel is not a hero manqué, but a challenge to the whole accepted notion of heroism. He responds not to the question of whether classical heroism is still possible, but of whether it was ever desirable.
- Ruth Wisse, The Schlemiel As Modern Hero (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 39.
24. David Galloway The Absurd Hero In American Fiction (Austin: University Of Texas Press, 1970), p. x.

25. This is true not only of Burroughs' characters but those rebellious figures like Rabbit, Skeeter or Ezekiel Farragut in Cheever's and Updike's fiction. Indeed, the reason why one of the genre's great anti-heroes, Randall MacMurphy, is finally beaten by Big Nurse and the Combine is that he relinquishes his cherished and protective isolation and comes to care for his fellow inmates.
26. Anonymous "A Vocal Group: The Jewish Part In American Letters," Times Literary Supplement, 6 Nov. 1959, pxxxv.
27. "Hebrew and Yiddish Legacies: A Symposium," Times Literary Supplement, 3rd May 1955, p. 500.
28. Saul Bellow, To Jerusalem And Back (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p. 160.
29. Ibid., p. 83.
30. Chester E. Eisinger, ed., The Nineteen Forties: Profile Of A Nation In Crisis (New York: Anchor, 1969), p. 219.
31. Saul Bellow, Herzog (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 81.
32. Chaim Potok, The Chosen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 277.
33. In Burroughs' case, as is clearly shown in "Roosevelt after Inauguration," the concept of morality is never treated as anything but a hollow and cynical sham. In the case of Updike and Cheever, characters like Rabbit Angstrom and Lemuel Sears may begin with the desire to assert such a dimension but invariably end by asserting or demonstrating its utter invalidity.
34. Curt Suplee, "The Prophet In Malamud," The Boston Globe, 24 September, 1982, p. 12.
35. In Malamud's case, the inclusion of information pointing up his parents' participation in Yiddish culture, in response to a question about his New York childhood, reinforces the belief that he detects in that culture a repository of exemplary moral values.

36. John Cheever, The Wapshot Chronicle (London: Abacus, 1981), p. 235.
37. The results of this forced and unpleasant recognition is the subject of a number of Cheever's stories and several of Updike's novels. It is for both a significant, not to say major, theme.
38. Albert Camus La Peste translated by Stuart Gilbert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), pp. 208 - 209.
39. John Updike, Pigeon Feathers (London: André Deutsch, 1963), p. 133.
40. Chaim Potok, The Chosen, p. 214.
41. Thomas Lask, "Malamud's Lives," New York Times Book Review 21 January 1979, p. 243.
42. Daniel Odier, The Job (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 71.
43. Alfred Kazin, Bright Book Of Life (London: Secker and Warbur, 1974), p. 130.

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